

Aberlour Manifesto General Election 2024

Scotland has a poverty and debt crisis. These crises are hugely impacting Scotland's children and young people.



1 in 4 children in Scotland are growing up in poverty - across the rest of the UK that figure is nearly 1 in 3.

Tackling child poverty is the first and most important thing any government can do to create a fairer and more equal society.

Reducing poverty cannot be done without investment. This means tackling the root causes of poverty and disadvantage, such as inadequate income, lack of affordable housing, and limited access to education and employment opportunities. In doing so it will also reduce the levels of debt that people find themselves in. Increasing family incomes helps families to thrive. Ultimately, investment in social security and tackling child poverty is an investment in our communities, in our citizens, in our children and our shared future.

Poverty is a political choice, but children do not choose to grow up in poverty. We are calling on the next UK Government to make the political choice to end child poverty and invest in our children and young people. Tackling poverty will help reduce debt. For those in debt the next government must make the recovery of debt much less punitive. This is especially true of debt owed to public bodies.

Public debt, such as council tax payments, rent arrears and school meal debt, is a key factor in entrenching and increasing child poverty. Families in public debt need support, not punishment.

Aberlour believes that all children should receive support, empathy and understanding. There are varying standards of support and a lack of consistent decision making when it comes to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

We deliver Guardianship Scotland, the national independent child trafficking support service, in partnership with Scottish Refugee Council. We are clear that much more must be done by the UK Government to protect the rights and make things better for unaccompanied children.

Here are our immediate priorities and what we want to see the next UK Government do:

1. Eradicate Child Poverty
2. Tackle the debt crisis
3. End school meal debt
4. Reform Welfare and scrap the two-child limit and five-week wait
5. Improve support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

Eradicate Child Poverty

The next UK Government must recognise the scale of child poverty, with many families struggling to meet their basic needs. Children are living in cold homes, experiencing food insecurity and denied the basics and comforts in life that allow them to fulfil the potential that every child has.

The next UK Government must:

- Reform welfare, increase basic pay, invest in housing and the wider welfare state to ensure equal opportunities for all children to realise their full potential.

Tackle the debt crisis

Scotland and the UK are facing a debt crisis that needs urgent and radical action. Public debt pulls families deeper into poverty and traps them there. Public debt, such as council tax payments, rent arrears and school meal debts are a key factor in entrenching and increasing child poverty. Families in public debt need support, not punishment.

The state should be there to help people get out of debt, not entrench it.

The next UK Government must

- Implement a comprehensive debt amnesty programme for low-income families prioritising public debt, such as council tax, housing arrears and Universal Credit advance payments
- End public debt recovery practices that push families into poverty
- Develop a centralised debt collection system, that ensures public debt deductions taken from families are taken from one source and not from multiple public bodies

End School meal debt

Aberlour has campaigned to see an end to school meal debt in Scotland, we want to see this happen across the UK. No child should be punished by debt and no child should ever go hungry in a country as rich as ours.

The next UK Government must not only cancel school meal debt but also put in place measures to prevent it in the first place.

The next UK Government must

- Write off all existing school meal debt
- Increase eligibility for free school meals to all families in receipt of Universal Credit as an automatic entitlement

Scrap the two-child limit and five-week wait

Aberlour has consistently campaigned to end the UK Government's two-child limit and the five-week wait, and the inadequacy of Universal Credit to meet the basic needs of families. Evidence shows that the two-child limit has directly contributed to rising child

poverty over the last decade and the five-week wait has entrenched poverty by contributing to rising levels of public debt. These policies have pushed families deeper into poverty.

The next UK Government must

- Urgently reform Universal Credit by ending the two-child limit and five-week wait
- Increase the value of Universal Credit to a level that guarantees that families can afford the essentials and help lift families out of poverty

Improve decision-making and support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

Aberlour delivers Guardianship Scotland, the national independent child trafficking support service, in partnership with Scottish Refugee Council. We see that too many asylum-seeking children, many of whom have been trafficked, that don't have adequate, safe or secure places to live and are left in legal limbo by the Home Office. Children continue to live in hotels, often sharing accommodation with adults. Around 600 children are currently waiting on a decision on their asylum claim.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are distributed across Scotland and the UK through the National Transfer Scheme but there is no consideration of the varying standards by which children are treated. We see and hear from them that they are frustrated that children living in different areas have different experiences with access to education, accommodation and financial support. Many experience financial hardship and face barriers to supporting their wellbeing.

The next UK Government must

- Revoke the Illegal Migration Act and reinstate the right to asylum and trafficking support
- Rapidly resolve the backlog of children's asylum claims and claims for protection as victims of trafficking
- End the use of hotels for accommodating children, including young people whose age is disputed
- Reform and resource the National Transfer Scheme and work with the Scottish Government to ensure unaccompanied children's rights as looked after children are fully respected no matter where they are sent in Scotland by the Home Office.

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