

# **Measuring child poverty: A new approach**

## **About the Children's Society**

The Children's Society supports nearly 48,000 children and young people every year through our specialist services and children's centres. We believe in achieving a better childhood for every child but have a particular focus on children who have nowhere else to turn, such as children living in poverty, young carers, young refugees, children at risk on the streets, disabled children and children in trouble with the law. We seek to give a voice to children and young people and influence policy and practice so they have a better chance in life.

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## **1. Introduction**

The government urgently needs to take action to reduce child poverty in the UK. The number of children living in poverty in our country is unacceptably high, and The Children's Society is extremely concerned that it is predicted to grow substantially over the coming years, and that this would remain true on any robust measure.

However, deciding how we measure child poverty is important, in order to understand fully the experiences of poverty of children and families, and also measure the effectiveness of actions taken by government and to effectively target future interventions.

The government has decided that a new approach to understanding child poverty is needed, arguing that the current measures are overly reliant on low income as a proxy for understanding child poverty. We appreciate the government's arguments for this, and welcome the opportunity to comment on a more progressive and nuanced approach to understanding child poverty.

However, we believe the following principles must be central to the government's revised approach:

- **Income must continue to be central to any approach to understanding child poverty.**
- **Any approach must recognise that child poverty in itself is a lack of material resource, and that this should be distinguished from the drivers of child poverty.**
- **Any new approach to child poverty measurement should not be used as an opportunity to significantly reduce the number of children considered to be living in poverty in the UK.**
- **The Child Poverty Act should not be amended or replaced. This would be an unnecessary distraction from the job of ending child poverty.**
- **The new measure should be supplementary to the measures already established in the Child Poverty Act.**
- **Once the approach is established, ongoing measurement should be independent of government.**

## **2. Summary of Recommendations**

### **Part 1: Measuring child poverty "in itself"**

#### **Income:**

1. *A relative low income measure must remain core to child poverty measurement.*
2. *This measure should be revised to take account of the multidimensional approach being taken to measuring child poverty. We therefore recommend that a child should be considered to be income poor, if they are in a household that lives on less than 60% median income, as measured after housing costs.*
3. *It should also include additional equivalisation to take account of the additional costs of disability.*

#### **Debt:**

4. *A question on unmanageable debt should be incorporated into Understanding Society and used in the multidimensional measure.*

#### **Housing and local environment:**

5. *An inadequate housing indicator should be incorporated into the multidimensional child poverty measure. This could be based on whether the family home meets the decent home standard, combined with a measure of whether the home is overcrowded.*
6. *A new housing quality measure must be accompanied by a shift from understanding poverty on a before to an after housing costs basis.*
7. *A composite "quality of the local area" measure should be used to supplement the poor housing quality measure.*
8. *This measure could be based on cross referencing of household location with relevant indicators from the Indices of Multiple Deprivation.*

#### **Weighting of different measures:**

9. *Weighting of the different indicators should be done on the basis of their contribution to overall household resources.*
10. *Some key elements of child poverty will be difficult to weight effectively. We recommend that further consultation and exploration of the weighting of different components of the indicator should be undertaken after the set of indicators is decided.*

## **Part 2: Measuring Drivers of child poverty**

### **Worklessness:**

11. *We recommend that an indicator of household worklessness is incorporated into a measure of the drivers of child poverty.*
12. *This could be measured on the basis of whether or not a child lives in a household with no adult in paid work.*

### **Education:**

13. *We agree that the value of a quality education should be included into a measure of the drivers of child poverty.*
14. *One way of measuring this would be to cross reference household location against value added scores for local schools – but more work is needed to assess the extent to which this would be an effective indicator.*

### **Parental education and skills:**

15. *We recommend that a measure of parental qualification is integrated into the drivers of child poverty indicator.*

### **Family stability:**

16. *We do not recommend that a measure of family stability is incorporated into child poverty measurement.*

### **Other issues of data collection and reporting**

17. *Regardless of the new child poverty measure or measures developed, the number of children in households that have been in poverty for three of the last four years should be measured.*
18. *Data on progress towards the child poverty target should continue to be collated and reported on annually.*
19. *Collection and reporting of data on the new child poverty measure should be independent of government.*
20. *Regardless of the measurement criteria used for the new child poverty measures, it should be ensured that all migrant and asylum seeking children living in poverty are included within the statistics.*

### **3. About Child poverty**

Child poverty is about children living in households suffering from a **lack of material resources**. Townsend<sup>1</sup> defined this as lacking "*the resources to obtain the types of diets, participate in the activities, and have the living conditions and amenities that are customary... in the societies to which they belong*".

Such resources may include money in itself, but they may also include other forms of material resources – such as access to healthcare, a decent home and a high-quality free education.

#### **How is child poverty currently measured?**

The Child Poverty Act sets a duty on the government to work towards the eradication of child poverty in the UK by 2020. The Act measures child poverty according to four measures:

1. Relative low income: relating to children living in households that have an income below the "relative" poverty line (60% of median household income).
2. Combined low income and material deprivation
3. Absolute low income
4. Persistent poverty

The government's progress towards eradicating child poverty in the UK is assessed according to progress on these four measures.

The relative low income target is frequently used as the headline indicator for assessing levels of child poverty in the UK as this measure assesses the extent to which the lowest income families are keeping pace with growth in the economy in general. This recognises the importance not only of absolute low income, but also of low income relative to others in society. This is crucial because if children fall behind on this measure, then they will be unable to afford to take part in the kind of "normal" activities which enable social inclusion with their peers.

Currently in certain circumstances, resources other than income can be included as contributing to household resources for the relative low income child poverty target (for example, the value of free school meals are included<sup>2</sup>). However, in general non-income forms of material resource do not contribute towards household resources for the purposes of determining whether or not they are in poverty.

In understanding child poverty, the value of resources should to be understood **relative to need**. For example, larger families need a higher level of support than an equivalent smaller family since the same amount of resources are spread across more people. This is currently addressed in the headline child poverty statistic by "equivalising" household income dependent on the composition of the household.

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<sup>1</sup> Townsend, P (1979) "*Poverty in the United Kingdom*"

<sup>2</sup> See DWP (2010) "*Households Below Average Income*" p254

Similarly, households with members who are disabled are likely to face a higher level of cost than households without a disabled member. However, for the headline child poverty rate, household resources are not currently equalised to take account of incidence of disability within the family. The Children's Society report "*4 in 10: Disabled children living in poverty*"<sup>3</sup>, addresses poverty rates amongst disabled children once additional costs are accounted for, by removing from household income any Disability Living Allowance (DLA) paid on account of the additional costs of living with a disability.

Finally, household resources for the purposes of understanding child poverty need to be understood in terms of useful resource. For example, income which is used to service the interest on consumer debts may not be considered useful income, and would reasonably be ignored for the purposes of understanding household resources. This is not currently attempted within the headline child poverty indicator.

### **A multidimensional approach to child poverty**

Rather than separating out different child poverty indicators, the government's consultation on better measures of child poverty proposes a multidimensional measure.

We support a multidimensional approach which enables the breadth of social disadvantage to be understood, as often it is not one factor in isolation which leads to the experience of poverty, but a combination of different factors.

We believe that an effective multidimensional measure must draw together appropriate indicators. Some of the factors identified in the government's consultation should be separately captured as drivers of child poverty rather than child poverty in-and-of-itself, and some not included. This is discussed in more detail below.

Crucially, we believe this measure should only be used to supplement – not replace – the existing measures in the Child Poverty Act.

### **Child poverty in-itself and drivers of child poverty**

As discussed above, child poverty is a lack of the material resources necessary for a decent standard of living, such material resources do not need to be in the form of income, and may include such things as housing quality. However, some of the factors identified within the government's consultation on "better measures of child poverty" (such as worklessness and parental health) are not forms of material resource, and as a result are not suitable measures of child poverty in itself, but are better understood as *drivers* or causes of child poverty.

This is not to undermine the importance of these measures. It is crucial to both measure and act on those factors which are underlying drivers of child poverty. This is consistent with the Prime Minister's arguments that not enough has been done to tackle these *underlying causes* of poverty:

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<sup>3</sup> Royston, S and Hounsell, D (2011) "*4 in 10: Disabled children living in poverty*" The Children's Society: London

*"We have to think about the causes of poverty. We have to disaggregate the problem – to look at the various types of poverty that exist, and the factors that contribute to them. Because for most people, material poverty is a consequence of other factors."*<sup>4</sup>

We therefore believe that there should be two multidimensional measures. The first should capture the essence of child poverty in itself; the second should identify children at risk of growing up to be poor by identifying the "drivers" of child poverty.

**Child poverty indicators:**

1. Low income and material deprivation
2. Unmanageable debt
3. Housing quality

**Indicators of drivers of child poverty:**

1. Parental health
2. Worklessness
3. Access to quality education
4. Parental skills

This approach would not only avoid the conflation of child poverty in itself with the drivers of child poverty, but it would also ensure that the success of policy in combating these drivers are measured and understood.

**4. The indicators in detail: child poverty indicators**

As outlined previously, we believe that four of the measures outlined in the "*Better measures of child poverty*" consultation should be integrated into a multidimensional child poverty measure. Other measures (such as parental skills, worklessness and parental health) are better understood as *causes or drivers* of child poverty, and should be included in a separate measure identifying drivers of child poverty.

This first section considers the three indicators which we believe should contribute to an effective child poverty indicator.

**i. Income and material deprivation**

As addressed above, child poverty is currently measured in the Child Poverty Act according to four different measures which each make reference to different forms of low income or material deprivation. The headline measure in the Child Poverty Act considers a child to be living in poverty if they live in a household living on less than 60% of median income before housing costs are deducted.

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<sup>4</sup>://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2006/11/David\_Cameron\_Tackling\_poverty\_is\_a\_social\_responsibility.aspx

## **Relative measures of child poverty**

The headline measure for understanding low income must continue to be a relative measure. We welcome that the Prime Minister has recognised the importance of this:

*"In the past, we used to think of poverty only in absolute terms – meaning straightforward material deprivation. That's not enough.*

*We need to think of poverty in relative terms – the fact that some people lack those things which others in society take for granted. So I want this message to go out loud and clear: the Conservative Party recognises, will measure and will act on relative poverty."*<sup>5</sup>

It is imperative that we continue to understand child poverty in terms of children lacking things that others take for granted, and so we must maintain a relative income measure at the heart of child poverty measurement.

When we spoke to parents, they agreed, noting the significance of children feeling excluded from what their peers have and are able to access. Parents raised concerns that this can, for example, lead to bullying at school. Parents spoke about children missing out on school trips, not having the same basic material goods other children have and the impact this has on a child's sense of self worth.

## **An After Housing Costs (AHC) measure**

Income for the headline child poverty measure is currently measured before housing costs are paid for. This means that any money in the household (such as Housing Benefit) paid towards the costs of housing is included in household income, but does not deduct the costs of housing from this.

This is problematic since some households pay considerably more than other households for an equivalent standard of housing. In part, this is caused by regional variation in housing costs, but the biggest factor that contributes to this is whether or not the family are in social housing.

### **The importance of an AHC child poverty measure – an example**

One Lone Parent family with two children may have a benefit income of around £218, plus help with their rent (for social housing) of an additional £60 per week. In total their income before housing costs, is £278.

Another equivalent family may be living in private rental housing, of lower quality but with a rent of £200 per week, to which they get a contribution from Housing Benefit of £180 (because of strict limits on help with rent for people in private rental housing.) In total they would be considered to have a benefit income (before housing costs) of £398 per week - £120 more than the family in social housing and potentially enough to lift them well above the poverty line. Despite this, they have both a poorer quality home, and a significantly lower income after they have paid their housing costs (£198 compared to £218) than the family in social housing. In terms of overall resources (a combination of housing and disposable income) they are considerably worse off.

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2006/11/David\\_Cameron\\_Tackling\\_poverty\\_is\\_a\\_social\\_responsibility.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2006/11/David_Cameron_Tackling_poverty_is_a_social_responsibility.aspx)

Parents we talked to spoke of people being forced into debt to cover deposits and fees for housing in the private rented sector.

Moving to a multidimensional measure gives the opportunity to address the large variations in housing costs for housing of equivalent quality, by combining a poor quality housing indicator with a measure of disposable income left after housing costs have been paid.

### **Recommendations:**

***1. A relative low income measure must remain core to child poverty measurement.***

***2. This measure should be revised to take account of the multidimensional approach being taken to measuring child poverty. We therefore recommend that a child should be considered to be income poor, in they are in a household that has less than 60% median household income, and that this should be measured after housing costs.***

### **Equivalisation**

As discussed previously, current poverty measures “equivalise” (adjust) household poverty thresholds to take account of household size and composition. It can be seen how the relative low income poverty line varies for different family types using The Children’s Society’s child poverty calculator<sup>6</sup>.

However, despite evidence that disability generates substantial additional costs<sup>7</sup> there is no equivalisation to take account of these additional costs. In fact, it is both the case that there is no equivalisation for the costs of disability, and in addition, no deductions are made from household income to take account of benefits paid on account of disability.

We recommend that poverty thresholds should be adjusted to take account of the additional costs of disability, or alternatively, benefits paid on account of the additional costs of disability are deducted from household income.

### **Recommendation:**

***3. The relative low income measure should have additional equivalisation to take account of the additional costs of disability.***

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<sup>6</sup> Available at <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/news-views/our-blog/use-our-new-calculator-track-shifting-poverty-line>

<sup>7</sup> For example, see the evidence on the costs of disability in The Children’s Society, Citizens Advice and Disability Rights UK (2012) “Holes in the Safety Net: The impact of Universal Credit on disabled people and their families”



## **Recommendation:**

### **4. A question on unmanageable debt should be incorporated into Understanding Society and used in the multidimensional measure.**

#### **iv. Poor Housing**

Housing is a crucial family resource which has a fundamental impact on children's standard of living. Children living in poor housing have been found to have a 25% higher chance of severe ill-health during childhood and early adulthood – including an increased chance of meningitis, asthma and mental health problems. It is also associated with lower levels of educational attainment.<sup>9</sup>

Parents and practitioners we talked to about the consultation agreed and raised grave concerns about the impact that poor housing can have on children's health. Issues of insufficient housing supply were raised:

*"just not enough housing out there".*

However, the current child poverty measures do not take account of poor housing as an indicator of child poverty. In fact, as discussed previously, because of the use of a Before Housing Costs (BHC) measure of child poverty, families in high cost but low quality private rental housing may be found to be *less likely* to be in poverty than equivalent families in low cost but high quality, social housing. Despite high rental prices, 37% of private rented homes fail to meet the decent homes standard compared to 20% of homes in the social rented sector.<sup>10</sup>

Current child poverty statistics are skewed towards under-representation of households in poor quality housing in the private rental sector, by the use of a child poverty measure which both (1) uses a Before Housing Costs measure, and (2) takes no account of housing quality. Integration of some measure of housing quality into the multidimensional child poverty measure would be very important.

However, if a housing quality measure is incorporated into the child poverty statistics, then the low income measure *must* move from a before to an after housing costs measure. Without such a change, housing would effectively be *double counted* as a resource (once in terms of money which goes towards housing costs, and a second time in terms of the quality of housing achieved by the household,) making the statistics effectively meaningless.

## **Recommendations:**

### **5. An inadequate housing indicator should be incorporated into the multidimensional child poverty measure. This could be based on**

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<sup>9</sup> Shelter (2006) "A chance in a lifetime: The impact of bad housing on children's lives"

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/36998/2173775.xls](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/36998/2173775.xls)

***whether the family home meets the decent home standard, combined with a measure of whether the home is overcrowded.***

***6. A new housing quality measure must be accompanied by a shift from understanding poverty on a before to an after housing costs basis.***

### **Poor local environment**

In addition to the poor housing costs measure, a measure of the quality of the local area should be included. This could include such things as local employment rates, crime rates, road accidents, access to green space and access to local services.

The deprivation domains contained within the English/UK Indices of Deprivation (EID/UKID) contain much of the data that would be needed in order to produce a measure of deprivation of the local environment on this basis – for example, this includes domains on “housing and services”, “crime”, and “employment” deprivation<sup>11</sup>.

### **Recommendation:**

***7. A composite “quality of the local area” measure should be used to supplement the poor housing quality measure.***

***8. This measure could be based on cross referencing of household location with relevant indicators from the Indices of Multiple Deprivation.***

### **Weighting of different measures**

A simple multidimensional indicator approach would weight all different measures equally. An alternative approach would be to set one indicator as a gateway, and then give the remaining indicators equal weighting.

A third, and more sophisticated, approach is to weight each variable separately on the basis of its individual significance. This is the approach taken for the Indices of English Deprivation (a multi dimensional indicator of local area based deprivation levels,) where it is noted that, amongst the seven domains in the index:

*“Certain domains are, however, considered to make a greater contribution to the experience of multiple deprivation and for this reason the domains are each weighted according to their perceived importance.”<sup>12</sup>*

So for example, as poverty is a lack of material resources, we may choose to weight the measure according to the typical contribution each of the different

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6871/1871208.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6871/1871208.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6320/1870718.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6320/1870718.pdf)

categories (housing, education, income, debt) make to the overall household resource allocation.

So for example, if on average 25% of household resources are typically expended on housing costs, the weighting for housing costs would be 0.25. Similarly, the value of schooling as a proportion of household may be 20% (dependent on the number of school children in the household), and so the weighting would be 0.2. This would effectively impute a cash value for different services. The factors would then be summed against a given threshold.

The weighting for unmanageable debt would be particularly difficult. When we consulted with parents and practitioners on this, it was generally agreed that whilst important this would be very difficult to measure effectively.

Given the complexity involved in weighting different measures in a multidimensional index, we would recommend that should the government chose to pursue a multidimensional child poverty indicator, they should consult separately on the weighting of different measures within this depending on the final set of measures that are chosen.

### **Recommendations:**

***9. Weighting of the different indicators should be done on the basis of their contribution to overall household resources.***

***10. Some key elements of child poverty will be difficult to weight effectively. We recommend that further consultation and exploration of the weighting of different components of the indicator should be undertaken after the set of indicators is decided.***

## **5. Drivers of child poverty**

As discussed previously, we do not believe that some of the factors specified in the government's consultation are measures of child poverty in itself. Instead, these factors are drivers or causes of child poverty.

Whilst we welcome the government's decision to measure some of these factors, we believe these should form a separate indicator of child poverty drivers, rather than child poverty in itself.

The four factors from the "Better measures of child poverty" consultation that we think should be included within this are worklessness, parental skill level, parental health and access to quality education.

Notably some of these factors are *consequences* of child poverty as well as drivers of it. Taking action on child poverty itself may help to address some of these drivers too.

### **i. Worklessness (and access to employment)**

Although it may be a significant driver of child poverty, worklessness should not be considered as being a facet of child poverty in itself since it is not a form of material resource. Many families not in paid work are not in poverty because they have material resources other than earnings - for example, people living from pensions or savings.

In addition, the inclusion of a worklessness measure in a multidimensional child poverty indicator could lead to an under-representation of in-work poverty. Around six in ten children in low income poverty are in working families - both a significant social concern and a major challenge to public policy. Anything which led to an under representation of this issue would be unwelcome.

When we consulted with parents and practitioners, they also expressed universal agreement that in-work poverty exists, as well as concern about any measure which would risk under-representing children in working families living in poverty.

Indeed, they expressed concern that in-work poverty may be under represented as a result of failure to incorporate the costs of working into child poverty measurement.

However, worklessness and lack of access to employment is unquestionably a key driver of child poverty. Where one or more parents are out of work as a result of illness or unemployment, households are considerably more likely to be in poverty - 68% of children in workless families are living in relative low income poverty, compared to 19% of children where at least one adult in the family is in work.

It is therefore valuable to measure household worklessness as a driver of child poverty rates, in order to assess the effectiveness of action to address this.

### **Recommendations:**

***11. We recommend that an indicator of household worklessness is incorporated into a measure of the "causes" of child poverty.***

***12. This could be measured on the basis of whether or not a child lives in a household with no adult in paid work***

### **ii. Parental skill level**

As with worklessness, parental skill levels are an important factor contributing to the likelihood of a child living in poverty. Low levels of parental skills are particularly associated with high levels of worklessness: less than half of people with no qualifications are in work, and unemployment rates of 18% for people with no qualifications, compared to 4.2% for people with degrees or equivalent.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/410872/web-poverty-report.pdf>

When we spoke to practitioners working with families, they similarly emphasised the importance of parental skill levels as a driver of child poverty. They noted concerns about low pay and short term employment and instability for low skill workers, and the significance of this for child poverty rates.

However, as with worklessness, parental skill levels should not be conflated with child poverty in itself. Parental skills are not a form of material resource, and whilst low levels of skills may be a cause (and consequence) of child poverty, they are not integral to it.

## **Recommendation:**

***13. We recommend that a measure of parental qualification is integrated into the "drivers of child poverty" indicator.***

### **iii. Access to quality education**

Children growing up poor too often have access to poor quality schooling and achieve poor results. The recent report by Ofsted noted that "*Outstanding schools are concentrated in more affluent areas and the highest achieving schools which serve high proportions of pupils from low-income families are concentrated in London.*"<sup>14</sup>

Parents and practitioners we spoke to also emphasised the value of a good education to child poverty. They talked about the importance of education as a route out of poverty, and raised concerns about school catchment areas.

Education is an important form of material resource for a household. Although quality schooling has an economic value to a family, because it is not a cash benefit (because of access to a free education) this does not contribute to household resources for the purposes of measuring child poverty. At the moment, improving the quality of the school which a child from a low income family attends (through measures such as the pupil premium,) will have no impact on assessing whether or not they are in poverty. For this reason we believe that education can be understood as either an aspect of child poverty in itself, or as a child poverty driver. However, because of its fundamental importance of education as a driver of child poverty, we believe it fits better in this category.

However, measuring access to a quality education is likely to be complex. For example, practitioners were concerned about measuring school performance through Ofsted inspection results for State Maintained schools within a local area. A preference was expressed for using "*value added*"<sup>15</sup> scores to measure the quality of schooling, but we believe that more work is needed to identify a suitable variable. If such a variable were used, a question would remain about

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<sup>14</sup><http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/ar201112/The%20report%20of%20Her%20Majesty%27s%20Chief%20Inspector%20of%20Education%2C%20Children%27s%20Services%20and%20Skills%20Schools.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> [http://education.gov.uk/schools/performance/archive/schools\\_04/sec3b.shtml](http://education.gov.uk/schools/performance/archive/schools_04/sec3b.shtml)

how it could be weighted in a multi-dimensional indicator against other factors such as income (see below for further discussion on this).

**Recommendations:**

***14. We agree that the value of a quality education should be included in a measure of child poverty drivers.***

***15. One way of measuring this would be to cross reference household location against value added scores for local schools – but more work is needed to assess the extent to which this would be an effective indicator.***

**iv. Family stability**

We know that some family structures are more likely than others to live in relative income poverty. For example, 41% of children in single parent families live in poverty, compared to 23% of children with parents who are a couple. Similarly, it is clear that at the point of changes to family structure, such as separation or death of a parent, families can face significant changes to their income levels.

We believe that no child should be forced to live in poverty. It is therefore key that support for families is targeted at ensuring that no child lives in poverty, regardless of the structure or stability of the family. This may include both better targeting of state support, and ensuring that non-resident parents are adequately contributing to the upbringing of their child.

**Recommendation:**

***16. We do not recommend that a measure of family stability is incorporated into child poverty measurement.***

**6. Other issues of data collection and reporting**

**i. Persistence of poverty**

The impact of poverty on a child may become more severe if it persists over time. As with the measures in the Child Poverty Act, the new measures of child poverty, and drivers of child poverty, should be supplemented with a persistent poverty indicator.

The persistent poverty target in the Child Poverty Act understands a child to be in “persistent” poverty, if they have been in poverty for three out of the last four years. Regardless of the detail, we believe that a persistent poverty measure should be integrated on the same basis.

**Recommendation:**

***17. Regardless of the new child poverty measure or measures developed, the number of children in households that have been in poverty for three of the last four years should be measured.***

## **ii. Frequency of data collection and reporting**

Child poverty statistics are currently collated and reported annually. We believe that any new measure should similarly be collected on this basis. This would help to ensure that progress can be measured and debated.

### **Recommendation:**

***18. Data on progress towards the child poverty target should be collated and reported annually.***

## **iii. Responsibilities for data collection and reporting**

We believe that once a new measure has been established, the role of collection and reporting of data should be made independent of government so far as this is possible. One possibility would be to give this role to the Child Poverty and Social Mobility Commission.

### **Recommendation:**

***19. Collection and reporting of data on the new child poverty measure should be independent of government.***

## **iv. Counting every child**

Every child living in poverty in the UK should be captured within the child poverty statistics. In particular we are concerned that many migrant and asylum seeking children are not currently captured within the statistics. On this basis, we believe that:

***20. Regardless of the measurement criteria used for the new child poverty measures, all migrant and asylum seeking children living in poverty should be included within the statistics.***

## **7. Conclusion**

The Children's Society welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on finding better ways to measure child poverty in the UK. We believe that the low income and material deprivation measures currently recorded in the Child Poverty Act are fundamental to understanding child poverty in the UK, and must remain central to any measure.

However, the government has an opportunity to make a number of improvements to how we measure child poverty and its underlying causes, in order to better reflect the experiences of children growing up in poverty.

As highlighted in the introduction, we believe that it is important that the government recognises the difference between child poverty “in itself”, and the “drivers” or causes of child poverty. Doing so recognises that different kinds of intervention are required to address the issue in itself and its underlying causes. Some of the factors highlighted in the “Better measures of child poverty” consultation, are important drivers of child poverty, but should not be mistaken for child poverty in itself.

Also, as highlighted in the introduction, we also believe that the government needs to ensure that the child poverty measures are not used as an opportunity to reduce the numbers of children in poverty simply through a change in measurement. Any revised measure would be unacceptable if it led to a substantial reduction in children said to be in poverty as a result of a change in measurement.

Most importantly, the government must act now to reduce child poverty. We are deeply concerned that child poverty (as it is currently measured) is set to grow substantially over the coming years, and that this would remain true on any robust set of measurement criteria.

**For more information about this briefing, please contact Sam Royston, Poverty and Early Years Policy Adviser to The Children’s Society on [sam.royston@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:sam.royston@childrenssociety.org.uk) or on 07969 291251.**