

Poverty Alliance Strategic Plan 2009-12



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1. Introduction

1.1 Scotland is part of one of the wealthiest countries in the world, but despite our great wealth, around one fifth of our population lives in poverty. This is neither an inevitable or necessary situation. The Poverty Alliance exists to combat poverty in Scotland by working with people and communities to affect change. This Strategic Plan sets out how we intend to do this over the next three years.

Who we are

1.2 We are a national voluntary organisation with charitable status and a company limited by guarantee. Formally established in 1992 the Alliance is a membership organisation which has extensive experience in addressing issues related to poverty and social exclusion, and in working alongside grassroots community groups, individuals facing poverty, voluntary organisations, trade unions, faith based organisations and researchers, as well as statutory organisations, policy makers and politicians. Growing from a regionally based anti-poverty grouping we now act as the national anti-poverty network in Scotland, engaging with voluntary organisations, policy makers and politicians at the Scottish, UK and European levels.

1.3 This new Strategic Plan sets out key priorities for the period 2009-2012. There have been significant changes in the context in which the Alliance operates; changes in relation to the social, economic and political environment. In this context it is vital that the Poverty Alliance ensures that it is using its limited resources effectively, that we are assured that the objectives we are pursuing are the right ones and that, above all, our efforts are making a

greater impact on combating poverty in Scotland. Essential to getting this right is ensuring that we are reflecting the concerns of our members. We are grateful to all of those who have helped influence the development of this new plan. A number of activities have helped contribute to the development of this work. This has included externally facilitated development sessions with the staff, board and members of the Poverty Alliance. We have also drawn on the findings of an independent evaluation of the core funding received from the Scottish Government¹. The lessons from some of the project work we have been involved in over the last three years have also influenced this work. This has included our *Moving On* project with young people, the *Bridging the Policy Gap* project, *Get Heard* and the development of the Agenda for Action on Poverty that was published in 2007. All of these projects have allowed us to engage with people experiencing poverty, and with the community and voluntary sector across Scotland, and to have a clearer indication of the priorities the Alliance needs to adopt.

1.4 In this section of the plan we give an overview to the changed context that the Alliance is operating in, drawing on the various sources of intelligence identified above.

The Changing Context

1.5 As stated above, this new Strategic Plan is being produced at a crucial point in the development of anti-poverty activity in Scotland. Over the last five years there has been significant change in the social, economic and political environment in which the Poverty Alliance operates. Below we briefly outline some of the most significant trends and changes, drawing out some of the

¹ Evaluation of Scottish Government Funding to the Poverty Alliance, Peter Taylor & Ann Flint, December 2007

implications for our work. We have identified six broad areas that will affect the work of the Poverty Alliance.

- Changing trends in poverty and inequality;
- The impact of the recession;
- Continuing impact of Scottish devolution (Political change in Scotland (structural issues, Single Outcome Agreements, greater emphasis on localism));
- Increased support for greater participation and empowerment of people in poverty;
- Greater understanding and need for sustainable development; and
- Changes in the voluntary and community sector context.

1.6 We believe that there is now greater political consensus on the need to address poverty than at any time in the past. The Scottish Government has recently produced its new framework that will guide its approach to tackling poverty, an approach which will put greater emphasis and responsibility on local authorities². However, at the same time the economy is now in recession which will put further pressure on faltering strategies for tackling all aspects of poverty in Scotland. After campaigning to secure clear commitments to tackle poverty, and working to achieve a strong degree of political consensus, it would be a significant set back for the fight against poverty if commitments were abandoned when the economy is in trouble.

1.7 **Changing trends in poverty and inequality:** Over the last 10 years much has been achieved in the fight against poverty. In the period between 1997 to around 2003 there was real progress in addressing some aspects of poverty, particularly child poverty and

² 'Achieving Our Potential: A Framework for Tackling Poverty and Income Inequality, Scottish Government, November 2008

pensioner poverty³. These changes were in part a result of a booming economy and labour market, but were also brought about by targeted policy interventions. However, the progress that was seen during this period has begun to falter. Child poverty in the UK is rising and there has been no decline in Scotland over the last three years.

1.8 There is also a growing concern about in-work poverty and about poverty amongst adults without children. Low levels of out of work benefits for those without children have all but guaranteed poverty for those who have to rely on them. And whilst the National Minimum Wage has undoubtedly helped many thousands of workers, there remain thousands more who attempt to survive on pay that does not lift them or their families above the poverty line.

1.9 There is a real danger that the progress that was made in addressing some aspects of poverty is proving to be only temporary and that the fundamental causes have not been addressed. The lack of progress made in addressing levels of income inequality in the UK would tend to support the view that fundamental structures of inequality and disadvantage remain unchanged.

1.10 **The impact of recession:** The notion that the progress made in tackling poverty over the last 10 years has been only temporary will be tested as the UK enters recession. At the beginning of 2009 the economy was officially in recession, but the scale of job losses had become apparent some time ago. Unemployment in the UK is widely predicted to reach 3 million by the end of 2009. This will inevitably have an impact of a wide range of issues and areas that are of concern to the Poverty Alliance.

³ P. Kenway et al (2008) Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland 2008, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

1.11 As the recession begins to take hold we will begin to see an increase in the number of repossessions, and a likely increase in homelessness. It is also likely that problems associated with debt and over-indebtedness will be exacerbated over the next few years. The recession also has implications for the UK Government's approach to the welfare system. Successive waves of reform of the welfare system have been predicated on the belief that plenty of jobs were available. With many of the service sector jobs that have provided the basis for welfare to work programmes now disappearing, there are real questions over the viability of the UK Government's ambitions with respect to the reform of welfare.

1.12 The recession will also have an impact on those who remain in employment, particularly those in low paid employment. Although the minimum wage sets a legal floor which no worker should be paid less than, the recession will undoubtedly act as a downward pressure on wages. Less powerful groups of workers such as migrants, young people and temporary and contract workers may find themselves under greater pressure to accept pay below the minimum wage. Employers will also put greater pressure on Government to restrict increases in the minimum wage, increasing the hardship already experienced by many workers. The impact of the recession is likely to be the key factor that determines the work of the Poverty Alliance over the next three year period.

1.13 **Impact of devolution:** It is now 10 years since the Scottish Parliament was set up. This has had a significant and continuing impact on the work of the Poverty Alliance and all those who are attempting to influence anti-poverty policy. On the one hand the existence of the Parliament has opened up new opportunities for influence and dialogue with policy makers and politicians. It has

also allowed the development of approaches to tackling poverty that differ from elsewhere in the UK, for example through the *Working for Families* programme.

1.14 On the other hand the existence of the Parliament has served to remind us that the key policy levers remain at Westminster and that in some ways these powers can seem as remote as they ever were. The ability of organisations like the Poverty Alliance to influence welfare, social security, and employment policy remains limited. This requires the Alliance to develop strong coalitions with organisations in Scotland, and with those in the rest of the UK.

1.15 The election of the SNP Government in Scotland in 2007 has changed the nature of the relationship not only between Scotland and Westminster, but also between local and national Government in Scotland. The new relationship set out in the concordat between the two will now have a crucial influence on how resources are spent at the local level to tackle poverty. It is yet to be seen whether this will have a beneficial impact on the fight against poverty.

1.16 Greater support for participation and empowerment: Alongside the greater devolution of power to Scotland has come greater recognition of the need to involve people in the decisions that affect their lives. Over the last 10 years there has been increasing expressions of support for greater 'involvement', 'participation', 'engagement', 'empowerment'. The recent White Paper 'Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power' restated some of these themes. Similar statements have emerged from the Scottish Government over the last 10 years, with the latest statement on community empowerment expected in early 2009.

1.17 Despite this welcome commitment to greater involvement, many people living on low incomes do not feel that their voices have been heard, or that their views are acted upon. Whilst there is clearly a desire to have more participation in policy development, the structure and processes to support this have so far not been adequate.

1.18 Greater understanding and need for sustainable development: Compared to 10 years ago, there is now a much more wide ranging scientific, political and public consensus about the need for sustainable economic development (although obviously quite a lot of disagreement about what this might actually entail). There is also much greater awareness of the many ways in which poverty, inequality and unsustainable development are linked. For example, the growing body of analysis which demonstrates that climate change is not just about the impact on the environment - which effects everyone equally -but that it is the poorest who are most likely to suffer the worst impacts.

1.19 It is likely that the challenges of developing an economy based on genuinely sustainable economic will become event more challenging in the years ahead. The Poverty Alliance can play an important role in bringing together individuals and organizations from the diverse communities working on these issues; and by working together, develop new ways to understand and challenge poverty in 21st century.

1.20 Changing community and voluntary sector: Finally, the organisations and the sector that the Poverty Alliance works most closely with have undergone dramatic change over the last 15 years. There are two main developments that will have an impact on the work of the Poverty Alliance. The first is the development of

the contract culture in the voluntary sector. Many more voluntary organisations are receiving large parts of their income from the delivery of services for local and central Government. Some argue that this has an impact of the willingness or the ability of some organisations to engage in activity that may be seen as critical of those who fund them. It is by no means clear that this is the case, but it may be the case that some organisations may feel more inhibited that they would have done in the past.

1.21 In many ways the voluntary sector is stronger than it has ever been, with more resources, staff and volunteers involved in activity. However, there is strong evidence to suggest that many smaller community based organisations have ceased operation.

Summary

1.22 These five areas, the changing trends in poverty and inequality; the recession; devolution and localism, participation and empowerment and the changing nature of the community and voluntary sector, set the context in which the Poverty Alliance will operate over the coming years. It is perhaps the economic downturn that will have the most significant impact on what we will do over the next three years. It provides the most challenging set of circumstances that the Alliance has faced since it was set up. To meet those challenges it is essential that we are clear in our direction, that we are sure in what we seek to change and what our contribution will be to making that change. Above all, it is essential that we bring the sense of urgency needed to make a real and lasting contribution to a more socially just Scotland.

2. Where We Stand: Vision, Values and Change

Vision

Our vision is of a sustainable Scotland based on social and economic justice, with dignity for all, where poverty and inequalities are not tolerated and are challenged.

Aim

Our aim is to combat poverty by working with others to empower individuals and communities to affect change in the distribution of power and resources

What we believe

2.1 **Poverty in Scotland:** Our understanding of what poverty is and what poverty means is based on the experiences of those we work with, those who live with the effects of social injustice. For the Alliance poverty is a relative concept and should be defined in relation to the standards of living in a society at a particular time. Poverty then is fundamentally about a lack of income, but is also about what that lack of income implies: the inability to access a diet that provides for good health, to secure decent housing, to be able to take full advantages of the opportunities of education, to have a shorter life. And whilst poverty is about living with the effects of material disadvantage, it is also relates to aspects which are non-material – the inability to participate fully in society, to being treated as less or second class, to experiencing discrimination

and stigma. *We believe that the fundamental drivers of poverty are structural rather than individual, and that in seeking solutions to poverty we must focus on addressing structural causes rather than perceived personal failings.*

2.2 Fundamental Rights: The need to address poverty is necessary not simply because of the inefficiency and waste that its existence represents. We believe that the existence of poverty represents a breach of fundamental human rights and as such we place our concerns within the wider framework of human rights, equality of opportunity and health, social, economic and environmental justice. In advocating solutions to poverty we will always attempt to advance a rights based approach.

2.3 Empowerment: We are committed to the empowerment of people living in poverty and seek to promote this in our own practice as well as encouraging others to build this into their own work. Empowerment is a process whereby people can have more control and influence over the decisions that affect their lives. For the Alliance it means individuals in communities working together to take action to address social injustice.

2.4 Equality: Despite some progress in reducing inequalities between different groups, poverty remains a phenomenon that some people are more likely to experience than others. In carrying out our work to address poverty we always recognise that some groups, for example disabled people, women, people from black and ethnic minority communities, are more at risk of living in poverty. We seek to bring an understanding of the impact of inequality to our work in addressing poverty, ensuring that the work we do reflects the differing experiences that people have of poverty.

2.5 **Partnership:** We are committed to the principle that poverty is not simply a problem for those who experience it but is the responsibility of our whole society. We believe in a collaborative approach to tackling poverty which encourages the representatives of agencies, authorities and communities to work together through advocacy, campaigning and joint development, to achieve social justice. The Poverty Alliance is part of Scottish civil society and as such will seek to work with a broad range of organisations including community and voluntary organisations, trade unions, faith-based organisations, political parties, public sector bodies, the private sector. We also believe that the solutions to poverty do not solely lie within Scotland. We therefore work in partnership with our sister networks across the UK, with other organisations and campaigns operating at the UK level and with networks across Europe through the European Anti-Poverty Network.

2.6 **Participation:** The voices of those with experience of poverty are too rarely heard in debates about solutions to poverty and inequality. We believe that people who experience poverty and social exclusion should be able to contribute to finding the solutions to the problems that affect their lives. In addition, we believe that people with experience of poverty should be involved in all aspects of our work: the policy positions the Alliance promotes and the campaigns we are involved in are all based on our direct work with those experiencing poverty. We aim to put this principle of participation into practice in our own work by ensuring that time and resources are available to allow meaningful engagement in our activities. In order to ensure this we will identify resources to allow participation, and that the structures of the Alliance are open to all.

2.7 **Organisational Independence:** The Poverty Alliance receives financial support from a variety sources: Scottish

Government, Scottish local authorities, UK Government, our members, other charitable trusts and foundations. Regardless of funding, we retain our right to act as an independent charitable organisation. We are non-party political, and will work with all organisations that support our aims and our values.

3. Strategic Objectives & Outcomes

What We Seek to Change

3.1 Poverty is a complex and dynamic phenomenon. It affects people and groups in different ways at different times of their lives, has a greater impact on some places than on others and is intimately linked to broader questions of environmental, economic and social justice. In order to focus our activities the Poverty Alliance has identified key areas that must be addressed in order to make progress in the fight against poverty:

- Low Incomes
- Services
- Participation
- Attitudes

3.2 **Incomes:** Low income is at the heart of our analysis of poverty, and access to an adequate income is essential to addressing poverty. Much of our work over the next three years will be focused on supporting policies and actions that increase the incomes of those currently living in poverty. Whilst working in partnership with other anti-poverty organisations, we will prioritise work to address low incomes amongst working age adults, who receive less attention in current policy. This focus will include both incomes in and out of work.

3.3 **Services:** People living on low incomes are more likely to rely on public services. A key policy focus over the next three years will be to ensure that people living on low incomes have access to high quality public services. Over the coming three years we will work to

ensure that services used by and targeted at people experiencing poverty are defended and improved.

3.4 **Participation:** We believe that the participation of people experiencing poverty is central to developing better policy solutions to poverty. We will therefore work to ensure that more participatory forms of policy development are created over the coming years. Our primary focus will be on the *national* level (in Scotland), but will also seek policy change that ensures that people are able to have their voices heard at the local level. We will also continue to work to embed more participatory approaches at both the UK and European levels.

3.5 **Attitudes:** Public attitudes set the context in which we attempt to change anti-poverty policy. Increasingly, it has become clear that efforts to introduce more effective anti-poverty policies can be hindered by negative or discriminatory attitudes to people experiencing poverty. For example, if it is widely believed that poverty is inevitable, or that poverty is a result of 'personal failure', then it will be more difficult to create support greater public investment for policies to address poverty. We will therefore be involved in a range of activities to highlight where progress is being made to address poverty and to challenge negative and stereotypical views of people experiencing poverty.

3.6 In order to make these changes we will organise our work across four broad areas. Over the next three years:

(1) We will....work with people and communities experiencing poverty to empower them to address poverty

Context

3.5 Over the last 10 years there has been an increased emphasis placed on the participation and engagement of communities in the development of policies that affect their lives. This desire for increased participation has taken many forms: more consultation on policies, to direct engagement in decision-making forums. Such developments have been largely welcomed by the Poverty Alliance. Members of the Alliance have always supported opportunities for greater involvement of people with direct experience of poverty in policy development at the local, national and European levels. We believe it is a fundamental right for people who are affected by decisions to be involved, and that more open and transparent processes are central to creating a more participative democracy.

3.6 However the terms on which these processes are developed rarely suit people who are experiencing poverty, or who are active at the local level. We do not believe that simply being involved in consultation processes leads to empowerment. In order to participate in policy developments that effect their lives people must have the knowledge and skills to be able to engage. Capacity building for individuals and communities is therefore essential. People and communities need to be able to work through existing structures, but should also have the support to act together independently of any structures to influence policy and make

change on their own behalf. *Some indicative activities over the coming three years will include:*

- An annual, large scale, participatory event to allow direct engagement between people in communities and policy makers at the Scottish level
- The active engagement of people in communities in responding to consultations at the Scottish and UK levels
- Work with communities to engage with the European Year Against Poverty in 2010
- Opportunities to engage directly with key campaigns that the Poverty Alliance is involved in including the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform, the Scottish Living Wage Campaign and Get Fair.

Key Outcomes:

- CBOs and people with experience of poverty are better informed about anti-poverty policies
- People and communities will be better able to participate in policy processes at local and national level
- People and communities will be better able to take action to campaign against poverty at the local and national level

(2) We will.... work with organisations to build a strong anti-poverty network in Scotland

Context

3.7 The Poverty Alliance is founded on a belief that all members of society have a role in combating poverty. It is only by working together, in organisations and with individuals experiencing poverty that we will be able to develop the solutions needed to address poverty. There are a wide range of organisations in the voluntary

and public sectors that are taking action and delivering services every day to help address the immediate needs of people experiencing poverty. In addition there are thousands of individuals that are actively engaged in the fight against poverty in their own communities. In order to have a bigger impact on poverty is essential that the Poverty Alliance is able to draw more of their individuals and organisations into our membership. Strengthening the network is now especially important as the economy goes further into recession. *Some indicative activities over the coming three years will include:*

- The creation of an Advisory Forum made up of community activists the will advise on the development of Poverty Alliance activities
- An improved suite of Poverty Alliance publications and information materials
- Improved follow up with participants at Poverty Alliance events and activities
- An annual membership drive focused on key sectors including trade unions, health, housing

Key Outcomes

- Membership of the Poverty Alliance will have increased by 50% from March 2009 level
- Participation in Poverty Alliance activities will have increased
- Awareness of the Poverty Alliance amongst voluntary sector organisations will have increased

(3) We will.... support the development of policies which promote social justice and combat poverty

Context:

3.8 There are a wide range of policies that effect poverty. The Poverty Alliance has been active in a wide range of policy areas in recent years where we have sought to have an influence on policies that are related to poverty. These have included health, welfare reform, fuel poverty, low pay amongst others. We have sought to raise key concerns through a variety of forums and in a number of ways. This has included working with other voluntary sector organisations through advisory forums, networks and board membership, through participation in a range of campaigning activities, consultation responses, and direct engagement in policy making. *Some indicative activities over the coming three years will include:*

- Consultation responses to key policy developments
- Development of a new Stakeholder Forum for dialogue with the Scottish Government on anti-poverty policy development
- Participation in key forums with the UK Government (DWP Stakeholder Forum)
- Participation at main Scottish party policy conferences

Key Outcomes

- Clear articulation of Poverty Alliance policy change positions/approach for key policy areas (income adequacy, participation, services to tackle poverty, attitudes)
- Increased opportunities for participation in policy development at national level and local level in pursuit of key policy change agenda
- Improved engagement with politicians at all levels

(4) We will.... raise awareness of and encourage debate about the nature, extent and solutions to poverty

Context:

3.9 Despite an overwhelming amount of evidence regarding the nature, scale and impact of poverty, there remains surprisingly little debate about its causes or solutions. This lack of debate and discussion, and lack of recognition, is a serious impediment to making further progress in addressing poverty and social exclusion in Scotland. There are a number of reasons for this lack of debate and discussion – the media has a limited understanding of poverty in Scotland or elsewhere, Governments (both in Scotland and UK) do little to discuss the achievements that have been made in addressing poverty or the challenges that remain, people living in poverty often do not identify as such. In addition common perceptions regarding poverty are often related to notions of personal failure, laziness, irresponsibility etc. As such it is essential that the Poverty Alliance attempts to intervene in public debates about the nature of poverty. *Some indicative activities over the coming three years will include:*

- Development of a clear publications strategy covering all Poverty Alliance outputs
- Regular press releases and media work
- Improved engagement in election campaigns (European, UK and Scottish)
- High profile public events during the European Year Against poverty in 2010

Key Outcomes

- Increased engagement by individuals and organisations in Poverty Alliance campaign activities
- Improved recognition of the Poverty Alliance in local and national media
- Improved awareness of Poverty Alliance policy positions

4. Organisational Development

4.1 Delivery of the strategy requires an approach to a series of programmes and projects each of which is make contributions to achieving the outcomes of the next three year period. In order to deliver these programmes and projects effectively the Alliance must ensure that it has the appropriate structures, policies and resources in place. The section outlines the key organisation development processes required over the coming period.

Governance

4.2 An elected Board with additional co-optees is responsible for providing strategic direction, approving budgets and work plans, for employing staff and for supervising the work of the Director. A programme of Board development will be put in place to ensure that these roles are adequately implemented. In addition, a new Advisory Forum will be established to ensure that the experiences of people living in poverty are better integrated into the planning and development structures of the Poverty Alliance

Management team

4.3 Delivery of this strategy is the responsibility of the Director. The management of the organisation is the responsibility of Director and the Fieldwork Manager, assisted by the Administrator. This arrangement currently works well for the existing range of core and project activities. However, we will review the management of the organisation during 2009-10 to assess that it is fit for purpose.

Staff

4.4 The current staffing complement of is a highly effective and committed team. They are the organisation's most valuable asset

and we must ensure that they are supported effectively. Over the coming period we will review and build on the current support and supervision process and introduce a new annual appraisal process. In addition we will continue the process of reviewing all staffing policies and produce an updated staff handbook.

Accommodation

4.5 The accommodation at 162 Buchanan Street while meeting the current needs, as regards space, is not ideal as it has no disabled access and is a warren of rooms on two floors. Alternative accessible premises will be found during the course of the next three years, depending on adequate resources being available to allow a move to take place.

Finance

4.6 The Alliance currently has strong core financial support from the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council. A key element of financial strategy is to ensure that this position remains constant.

4.7 The Poverty Alliance also has a good track record of funding from some local authorities in west central Scotland. It is necessary, even in difficult financial times, to increase the resources that can come to the Alliance through local authorities. We will develop a Local Government funding strategy which will secure existing key relationships and develop new ones.

5. The Planning Process

5.1 The main responsibility for ensuring that this Strategic Plan is implemented rests with the Board of the Poverty Alliance. At each Board meeting updates on activities will be presented to the Board for approval and discussion. This will ensure that any move away from current strategic objectives will be identified and can be corrected.

5.2 The staff of the Poverty Alliance will meet monthly and will report to the Director on progress made under each of the strategic objectives.

5.3 These regular meetings will be supplemented with other organisational planning processes and inputs. These will include the annual budget process (including accounts), individual reports to funders, the Annual General Meeting of the Poverty Alliance, along with the development of additional strategic planning documents as required (e.g. Communications Strategy, Funding Strategy, etc)

5.4 A mid-term review of the Strategic Plan will be carried out in 2011. This will involve the Board, the Advisory Forum and the staff team. The outcome of this review will lay the basis for the full revision of this plan in 2012.

Feedback

If you have comments or views on the work of the Poverty Alliance or on the approach we have outlined in this strategic plan then please get in touch.

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