

Child poverty target at risk says report [UK] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Government is at risk of failing to fulfil Chancellor Gordon Brown's promise to half child poverty by the end of the decade.

An all-party group of MPs said unless major changes are made to policies to help working parents pay for child care, poor families will not be able to get off welfare and into jobs.

Prime Minister Tony Blair and Mr Brown have made cutting child poverty a priority of Government policy and want to get more poor parents and single parents into work. But the House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee said unless more help is given towards the cost of child care, their target of halving child poverty by 2010 will be missed.

The national average cost of child care for one child is £128 a week or about £7000 a year. But in some places like London it can be much more expensive.

The MPs' report was critical of child care tax credits designed to help parents on low incomes pay for child care. Just 178,000 people claim the benefit and the report says too few are eligible.

It says that it is too complex and says the Government needs to reduce the hours the second earner in a couple needs to work to qualify and calls for changes to the working tax credit.

It calls for the maximum which can be claimed by families with two or more children to be raised and urges action to be taken to tackle regional variations in the cost of child care.

However, the committee is cautious about proposals by welfare organisations to allow informal child care to be covered by the credit. It said this would increase the cost from £195 million to £236m a year - with the prospects of the cost rising to £3.9 billion.

The report is also critical of the Government's proposals to target extra cash for special children centres providing child care, education and health service in the most deprived areas.

The report concludes: "The lack of good quality, affordable child care is widely viewed as one of the main barriers to work for parents particularly for mothers and for parents who are bringing up children alone.

Cathy Ashton, the minister responsible for child care, promised: "We will consider the report carefully to see what we can learn from it."

She said the government had widened free nursery places and provided substantial financial help towards the cost of child care through tax credits paid direct to parents amounting to at least £1m a day.

-Reprinted from Edinburgh News

Region: Europe ^[2]

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