

# Poverty advisor report issues council tax and childcare calls <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

The Scottish Government should consider ending the council-tax freeze and providing some free childcare for primary-school pupils, a new report looking at how to tackle poverty has said.

Naomi Eisenstadt, the independent adviser on poverty and inequality, made the suggestions as she produced her first report for Nicola Sturgeon, who appointed her to the role last summer.

Her report makes 15 recommendations aimed at "shifting the curve" and over time moving a large number of Scots out of poverty.

The First Minister responded by pledging £1 million for up to six different early learning and childcare trials.

The Scottish Government will work with parents and organisations to finalise the approaches that will be tested and the results will be considered as part of plans to expand free childcare from 600 hours to 1,140 hours a year.

Ms Sturgeon said: "This report from the Poverty Adviser highlights the importance that access to quality early learning and childcare has for both children and adults in tackling poverty.

"It helps improve educational outcomes while it allows parents and carers to return to work, education or training.

"By trialling different methods with local authorities and childcare providers, we will be better able to understand what parents and children need and want, and what is actually working."

A national summit next month will look at how best to "deliver an expanded childcare service that plays its part in tackling poverty and improving lives", the First Minister added.

She also pledged the Scottish Government would respond formally to the report before the end of March

Ms Sturgeon said: "I thank Naomi for the work she has carried out and welcome the report that she has published today."

The report makes a series of recommendations on how to tackle the problems of in-work poverty and housing affordability, as well as how to improve life chances for young people.

Ms Eisenstadt said: "In the coming year, there's a real opportunity to think not just about the recommendations I've made, but more broadly - about how the Scottish Government spends its money, whether it could direct spend more effectively and whether it could take decisions to shift and group together investment so it has maximum benefit for those on low incomes."

With 50% of adults and 56% of children classed as being in relative poverty in families where at least one person works, she said in-work poverty is a "serious problem".

Solving this "is not straightforward" but the report suggested more should be done to encourage medium and large companies to pay the living wage as just 11 of the 439 accredited living wage employers fall into this category.

Childcare should "focus on quality to improve outcomes for children", the report said, adding the Scottish Government should also "consider providing a limited number of free hours of childcare for primary-school aged children".

Holyrood should make "effective use" of new welfare powers being devolved from Westminster as part of the Scotland Bill but must also "proceed with caution" in this area.

UK Government proposals to cut £12 billion from welfare over the course of this parliament are "obviously worrying" but the report said that plugging Scotland's share will "probably not be possible".

It called for the Scottish Government to "be bold on local tax reform", arguing changing the way council services are funded provides a "real opportunity to protect the incomes of both the working poor and those at risk of in-work poverty".

As any reform of the current council tax system is "likely to take some time", the report suggested "in the meantime, the Scottish Government should consider ending the council-tax freeze from 2017/18 onwards".

-reprinted from The Courier

**Region:** Europe <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** poverty <sup>[4]</sup>

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