Championing Children and Young People in England

Office of the Children's Commissioner's response to

Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of child poverty

February 2013

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1. About the Office of the Children's Commissioner

The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) is a national organisation led by the Children's Commissioner for England, Dr Maggie Atkinson. The post of Children's Commissioner for England was established by the Children Act 2004. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) underpins and frames all of our work.

The Children's Commissioner has a duty to promote the views and interests of all children in England, in particular those whose voices are least likely to be heard, to the people who make decisions about their lives. She also has a duty to speak on behalf of all children in the UK on non-devolved issues which include immigration, for the whole of the UK, and youth justice, for England and Wales. One of the Children's Commissioner's key functions is encouraging organisations that provide services for children always to operate from the child's perspective.

Under the Children Act 2004 the Children's Commissioner is required both to publish what she finds from talking and listening to children and young people, and to draw national policymakers' and agencies' attention to the particular circumstances of a child or small group of children which should inform both policy and practice.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner has a statutory duty to highlight where we believe vulnerable children are not being treated appropriately in accordance with duties established under international and domestic legislation.

Our Vision

A society where children and young people's rights are realised, where their views shape decisions made about their lives and they respect the rights of others.

Our Mission

We will promote and protect the rights of children in England. We will do this by involving children and young people in our work and ensuring their voices are heard. We will use our statutory powers to undertake inquiries, and our position to engage, advise and influence those making decisions that affect children and young people.

2. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UK Government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991.[1] This is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty, setting out what all children and young people need to be happy and healthy. While the Convention is not incorporated into national law, it still has the status of a binding international treaty. By agreeing to the UNCRC, the Government has committed itself to promoting and protecting children's rights by all means available to it.

The legislation governing the operation of the Office of the Children's Commissioner requires us to have regard to the Convention in all our activities. Following an independent review of our office in 2010, we are working to promote and protect children's rights in the spirit of the recommendations made in the Dunford report and accepted by the Secretary of State for Education.

In relation to the current consultation, the articles of the Convention which are most relevant to this area of policy are:

- Article 26: every child has the right to benefit from social security

- Article 27: every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development

Additional core child rights include:

- Article 2: non discrimination

- Article 3: best interest of the child

- Article 6: every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure children survive and grow up healthy

- Article 12: every child in accordance with their age and stage of development has the right both to give their views on all matters affecting them, and have their views taken seriously

In addition, Article 4 states that the Government must take "*all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures*" to ensure the realisation of rights protected under the UNCRC. Therefore it is the state's that is accountable for the living standards, well-being and welfare of the children living within its jurisdiction.

The response below has therefore been drafted with these articles in mind.

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[1] You can view the full text of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights website at: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm. A summary version, produced by UNICEF, is available at: http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf

3. Background

3.1 OCC's policy position

Since its establishment, the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) has been unequivocal in its position that child poverty is a significant and serious blight on children and young people's lives. Tackling and eradicating child poverty must be a priority for the Government. This position is based on the views and experiences of children and young people we have worked with. Through their stories and experiences, poverty can be seen as both the cause and outcome of deprived lives and wasted potential.

Poverty is multidimensional, but can be most easily measured and understood in terms of a lack of money and low income. The *OCC has welcomed the current consultation as an opportunity to engage children and young people in order to deepen our understanding of the current experience of poverty in the UK. However, the pre-eminence of income measures in assessing poverty must not be lost nor downgraded*. This position is supported by academic research as well as the views and interests of children and young people.

> II. OCC believes that the Government must support and continue to use *the current child poverty measures set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010*

Child poverty is a children's rights issue. Children living in poverty are denied the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27 UNCRC). Furthermore, a lack of money and resources undermines the realisation of many other rights outlined in the UNCRC, including rights to: a full and rounded education (Articles 18 and 29); to accessing good healthcare and growing up healthy (Articles 6, 23, 24, 25); and, in some cases, the right to be kept safe from harm (Article 19).

> III. OCC recommends that the Government adopts a Child Rights Based Approach (CRBA) in the development of any new multi-dimensional measure of poverty and as part of its child poverty strategy.[2]
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> IV. OCC recommends that the Government should undertake Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA) of proposed policies and changes in legislation. These should involve the participation of children and young people.

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[2] See section seven below for further details.

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3.2 OCC's work to date on child poverty

The OCC has worked on both the direct and indirect impact of child poverty since 2009. Much of the project work we have done, including two current Inquiries into school exclusions and child sexual exploitation, and reports we have published on issues such as youth justice, asylum and immigration, physical and mental health, and child protection have uncovered relationships with poverty and deprivation.

The OCC undertakes Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) of key policies and legislation. The CRIA model used by OCC was consulted on in April 2012. In it, we stated that child poverty and Article 27 (the right to an adequate standard of living) would be an integral part of our evaluation of policy and legislation.[3] The model was based on a CRIA of the Welfare Reform Bill published earlier the same year. It showed a potential significant rise in the number of children living in poverty that would result from reforms being introduced from April 2013.[4] Following on from this work, OCC intends to undertake a CRIA of the Budget in 2013 and to use this analysis to contribute to the Government's next Comprehensive Spending Review.

We have also undertaken work that looks directly at the issue of child poverty in England. Our latest programme of work on child poverty began with the publication of *Trying to Get By: Consulting with children and young people on child poverty,* and some of the words in this response attributed to young people are taken from this report.[5] The findings of *Trying to Get By* have led to three subsequent areas of work:

- We have commissioned the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) to research the impact of low income on disabled children's rights. The purpose of this work is twofold. We are keen to explore the benefits of taking a child rights based approach to child poverty, and UCLAN's work will produce a framework for this approach and assess the benefits of addressing poverty through a child rights structure. The work will also highlight the impact of low income on disabled children's lives. This group of children and young people is particularly vulnerable and this work will uncover the role income plays in the quality of their lives. We expect this research to be published in spring 2013.

- Our young people's advisory group, Amplify, have developed their own project to examine the impact of poverty on the opportunities children and young people have, and their aspirations for the future. Their final report will draw on results of a national survey that they have developed. This will be published and presented to the Government and the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission later this year.

- Additional work, the details of which are set out below, has been done to contribute to this consultation response. We have undertaken this work because it

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[3] The CRIA model is set out in an OCC consultation document accessed on February 20, 2013 at
http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_567
[4] CRIA publication accessed on February 20, 2013 at
http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_555
[5] Report accessed on February 20, 2013 at
http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_480

is important that children and young people have the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Few issues can be as important to them as addressing poverty. To do so effectively, it is crucial that policy makers understand their experiences, perspectives and views on the impact of the proposed changes.

The work outlined above is included in our 2012-2014 Strategic Plan[6]. More detailed proposals are outlined in our annual business plans published in April each year.

3.3 The methodology behind this consultation response

OCC has regular meetings with its sponsor Department, the Department for Education (DfE). In the summer of 2012, the Child Poverty Unit (CPU) in DfE approached OCC to discuss the participation of children and young people in a review of the measurement of child poverty.

Given the potential impact of the Government's review and the intention that this work should inform the Government's subsequent consultation document, OCC set up three participation sessions with groups of children and young people. These were held between September and October 2012. Table 1 sets out who took part in these events.

The groups of children and young people that took part were: Amplify, the Children's Commissioners young advisors; Barking and Dagenham's children and young people's advisory group; and a group of young people advising Voice[7] on their work.

Table 1 Numbers of children who took part in OCC participation events between September and October 2012 by characteristics

Break down by characteristics	Numbers of children by characteristics	
Gender	Male:	4
	Female:	15
Age	12-16 years old:	16
	21-23 years old:	3
Ethnic background	White British:	12
	White and Black Caribbean:	1
	Any other Mixed/multiple ethnic background:	1
	Any other White Background:	1
	Pakistani:	1
	Black African:	3

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[6] Plan accessed on February 20, 2013 at
http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_565
[7] http://www.voiceyp.org/

Religion	Christian:	5
	Muslim:	1
	Other religion:	1
	No religion:	3
	Prefer not to say:	9
Disability	Yes:	4
	No:	15
Care/Care leaver	Yes:	13
	No:	6
Young carer	Yes:	1
	No:	18
Total number		**19**

These meetings were followed by a larger event with children and young people from across England in February 2013.

Table 2 Characteristics of those who participated in OCC Child Poverty Event in February 2013[8]

Break down by characteristics	Numbers of children by characteristics	
Gender	Male:	17
	Female:	20
Age	8-11 years old:	7
	12-16 years old:	16
	17-20 years old:	13
	21-23 years old:	1

We have some further demographic information for 31 of the children and young people who attended. These are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 Additional characteristics of 31 out of the 37 who participated in OCC Child Poverty Event in February 2013

Ethnic background	White British:	19
	White and Black Caribbean:	1
	Any other Mixed/multiple ethnic background:	1

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[8] 37 children and young people took part in the event. At present we have demographic information about 31 of them. A report of the event will be published in March containing the fill demographic breakdown.

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	Any other White Background:	3
	Pakistani:	2
	Bangladeshi:	1
	Asian other:	4
	Black African:	1
Religion	Christian:	7
	Muslim:	6
	Other religion:	1
	No religion:	15
	Prefer not to say:	3
Disability	Yes:	7
	No:	24
Care/Care leaver	Yes:	5
	No:	26
Young carer	Yes:	8
	18:	23
Total number	**31 young people (who filled out demographic monitoring form)**	

Working with the Child Poverty Unit

The participation sessions were set-up with, and supported by, the Child Poverty Unit (CPU), whose staff attended each meeting. The events were ***independently planned and delivered by OCC*** with the aim of supporting our own work in this area. They provided the CPU with an opportunity to listen directly to, and learn from, the experiences and views of children and young people. We welcome CPU's approach and commitment to Article 12: *respect for the views and interests of the children and young people*. We hope that their engagement with children and young people is reflected in how this work is taken forward by Ministers and officials.

3.4 Structure of this document

This consultation response does not follow the structure suggested by the questions asked by the Government. Instead, it is guided by the outcomes of our participation work and evidence collected from children and young people. Where these relate to questions set out in the government's consultation we have referenced them.

We have also included further evidence from other projects undertaken within the OCC, and referenced many of the findings against Articles in the UNCRC.

4. Key messages from children and young people

4.1 A summary of what children and young people told us

As noted above, this document does not follow the structure of the questions set out in the Government's consultation, but cross references these questions at appropriate points. Instead, it highlights the major themes that can be discerned from the information shared with us by children and young people. These themes cover the factors that matter from a child and young person's perspective and what it means to a child to live in poverty. These are:

- Income and money

- Community and home life

- Education and employment

- Expert support and services

- Physical mobility and network access

The themes of *participation* and *children's voices* cut across all these themes. Children and young people wanted to be listened to, taken seriously and treated with respect. This should be viewed as an underlying principle that was held by all the groups and individual children and young people we worked with.

4.2 Income and money: relative and absolute poverty[9]

Children and young people tell us that income is important. It is not the only factor that explains their poverty but it is a vital component that cannot be underestimated. Many of the young people we spoke to said, that the amount of money a child, young person and family has access to is really important. Throughout this document you will see quotes from children and young people outlining how a lack of money limits choice, freedom to participate in education, leisure and additional learning opportunities. Therefore, ***OCC supports the current measures set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010 as the primary way of measuring child poverty.***

The Act uses four measurements and definitions. Importantly, all rely on household income as the basis of measuring child poverty because income is an important, and widely recognised, way of defining and measuring poverty. OCC does not believe that these measures should be downgraded.

Why are both income and money important?

Children and young people see income and money, or the lack of them, as an important issue. They see clearly how money enables children and those who support them to buy basic goods, access services and benefit from opportunities that

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[9] This section can be cross referenced to questions 2, 3, and 5 of the government's consultation document *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of child poverty* (DfE/ DWP, 2012).

those with less money do not have.

Money enables people to buy the basic goods they need to survive (Article 6, UNCRC).

A low income can result in a family not being able to afford healthy ingredients, or to buy enough food for all its members. While hunger and malnutrition is often dismissed in the UK, a number of studies have highlighted how families living in poverty do not have enough money to buy enough food to feed all the family, and the numbers using foodbanks have risen dramatically in the last four years.[10]

This was the experience of some of the children and young people we met through the participation events. One young person said of those living in poverty:

> "*they can't afford healthy foods, so they just won't eat healthily*"[11]

while another stated:

> '*If you don't have enough money you might be malnourished*' [12]

Children and young people believed that the Government has a responsibility to help people in poverty access fundamentals like food. One young person suggested the following solution:

> '*Food's expensive so poor families could get a food budget*'.[13]

Money enables children and young people to enjoy their other rights

Money is not an end in itself but the means by which children and young people can realise their rights by purchasing the goods and services they require, or pursuing the opportunities that enable them to be lifted out of poverty.

For example, a lack of money limits children and young people's right to a full and rounded education because they are unable to participate in after school or curriculum enrichment activities. A lack of money can even lead to children and young people not being able to afford some basic equipment for their education:

> "'*In our school you have to buy your own pens, otherwise they say you're not 'ready to learn' ... if we haven't got a pen and pencil, we'd just sit there, 'cause our teacher won't lend us a pen to do our work ... they say 'Buy a pen for 10p; it's only 10p!'*" Girl, Birmingham[14]

The children and young people who participated in our events saw money as

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[10] The Trussell Trust fed 128,687 people nationwide through their foodbanks in 2011-12. They estimate that this number will rise to over 230,000 in 2012-13. In 2008-09 they fed 26,000 people. Figures quoted on http://www.trusselltrust.org/foodbank-projects accessed on February 20, 2013.
[11] Taken from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] *Ibid.*
[14] Taken from Hart, R, and Martin Kerry (both nfer for OCC) *Trying to Get By: Consulting with children and young people on child poverty* (OCC, 2011).

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essential in enabling them to socialise and enjoy leisure and cultural activities. This was often linked to their mobility and access to affordable transport, and this topic is outlined in more detail below.

Low income or a lack of money can also prove a barrier to future achievement. It not only determines current opportunities but often – and certainly in the eyes of the children and young people who spoke to us - determines future success. As one young person said to us:

> *'You need money even to get a job'.*[15]

When asked to explain this comment, the young person gave the example of a friend who had to get a good suit for an interview. This example exemplified the link between low income, current opportunities and future life chances.

Relative and absolute poverty

In discussing the importance of money, children and young people were able to differentiate between absolute and relative poverty. Some saw poverty in absolute terms:

> *"... to me poverty's when you have nothing, you've got no money to go anywhere, do anything, and you're surviving on the bare minimum... but I've always seen people get by, with a little."* Boy, Birmingham[16]

Others were worried that some children were going without clothes, shoes, fuel and heated homes. However, more children and young people viewed poverty in relative terms, judging their situation against their peers. For example, one girl said:

> *"There is a difference between people poor with money, and people poor with nothing. But like both mean poverty isn't it, as it compares to people you are around"*

> *"Realising others around you have more than you do"*[17]

Children and young people's participation in our work – both in relation to this consultation and more widely – is increasingly suggesting that changes to the benefits and welfare system are a major concern.

Young people are aware of the current welfare reforms. In the participation event in February 2013 they were asked to invent fictional characters who were growing up in poverty and describe their lives and a crisis that may have long term consequences.

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[15] Taken from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.
[16] Hart, R, and Martin Kerry (both nfer for OCC) *Trying to Get By: Consulting with children and young people on child poverty* (OCC, 2011). Report accessed at
http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_480
[17] Taken from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.

In a number of the crises imagined elements of welfare reform featured and had a negative impact on the fictional children and their families. For example, one group described how changes to housing benefit meant that a family had to move home and leave their local community and work to find cheaper accommodation. This led to a number of negative outcomes for the child who was at the centre of the story.[18]

The stigma of low income

Children and young people also expressed feelings of vulnerability when living in poverty. They talked about discrimination, bullying, stereotyping and stigma. One young person told us:

> *"If you're in poverty, or you don't have much money and you're just trying to get by, you suffer mentally, because you get bullied, unless you're strong enough to shrug it off."*

Another boy talking about school related bullying said:

> *"If there's a non-uniform day and you're wearing the cheapest clothes, you get criticised for it. Whereas if you wear [name of clothing brand] or something like that, you're the coolest person on the planet. Or it's what phone you have, or it's what bag you have."[19]*

Poverty related bullying was an issue that was repeatedly raised by groups from different geographical location and backgrounds. It is clear from their accounts that those growing up in poverty feel increasingly stigmatised and marginalised by society. This was linked in the examples provided to us with both current discrimination and poorer life chances. Of more concern, g, poverty is sometimes being used to make judgements about the kind of person someone is. As one young person told us:

> *"(Poverty) Says what people can and can't do because of who they are."[20]*

The role of social networks came up as important to children young people. They talked about the way things like Facebook highlighted differences between what they have (in terms of material goods) and can and can't do (in relation to social activities). Social media emphasised the feelings of inequality and made some people feel like opting out of using it. As Facebook is described by children and young as an important way of communicating with friends and participating in social life, opting out of it exaggerated feelings of social exclusion.

V. Given the high levels of poverty related bullying reported to the OCC during our participation events, we recommend that the Government considers the impact of

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[18] Example in forthcoming report on OCC Participation event facilitated by Breslin.
[19] Both from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.
[20] *Ibid.*

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policy measures on both the true levels, and wider public perception of child poverty in the UK. The Government should avoid using measures that further stigmatise both those who are poor, and by blanket implication in some public statements, the characters, morals, or abilities of all those families who are living in poverty.

Money and income are still key explanatory factors and measures

VI.   Given the importance children and young people place on income, the Government should continue to ensure that the measures set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010 regarding money and income remain paramount in measuring child poverty.

The combination of a relative poverty measure (After Housing Costs) and a deprivation measure are both important. The measure of poverty based on relative income is important both because it resonates with children and young people's understanding of poverty and because it is internationally recognised and can be updated regularly and systematically, so as to preserve the relationship with contemporary living standards.[21]

We also believe that it is important to use the After Housing Costs (AHC) measures because children and young people were concerned about the high cost of housing on family income. One young person said:

> *"Poor people can't afford a decent standard home with heating and they will be overcrowding with like two or three children in one room."*

One young person suggested that the Government could help by:

> *'stopping us spending so much money on things like housing and make more houses available for cheaper'.[22]*

4.3   Community and home life

A good house to live in[23]

Housing is one of the major themes that children and young people talk about. Where it is a positive influence, it provides them with a safe place where they can take refuge, receive support, and where they can build resilience.

While the foundation of a positive home-life is the emotional support children and

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[21] UNCIEF UK (2012) Report Card 10: Measuring Child Poverty
[22] Both taken from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.
[23]   This section can be cross referenced to questions 10 and 11 of the government's consultation document *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of child poverty* (DfE/ DWP, 2012).

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young people receive, their physical environment is a key factor that affects their quality of life. Many of the groups we worked with **identified poverty with low quality housing**.

There was some difference of opinion on the relationship between poverty and housing:

> *"Housing doesn't show poverty. Your house can be clean and nice but doesn't really mean you have money. Parents may be starving themselves to feed their children and still keep their house clean"*[24]

However, the majority of children and young people who commented on housing saw poor quality homes as a prominent feature of what it meant to be poor.

A good decent home is basic human right. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment 4 defines what this right means.[25] Children and young people echo many elements of the Committee's definition and understanding of adequate housing. They told us that an adequate home:

- is heated
- is furnished
- has white goods like a cooker and washing machine
- is in a place that feels safe and is close to outdoor green space.

To them, going without some of the items listed above meant being in poverty. One young person said:

> *"If someone is really struggling in the house, has no heating, and can't afford anything else, then they are poverty stricken. Poor people on a certain scale can afford home heating and warm water so they are not as bad off as what child poverty is."*[26]

Another young person said:

> *"You should be able to have a washing machine, if you don't you might be dirty".*[27]

Home life

A good standard of housing can have a positive effect on a child's or family's home life. Conversely poor housing often leads to difficulties and pressures within the home. This link has already been noted in the section above.

The groups and individuals who worked with us described how poor housing impacts

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[24] Taken from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.
[25] http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/469f4d91a9378221c12563ed0053547e?Opendocument
[26] Taken from Hart, R, and Martin *Trying to Get By* (OCC, 2011)
[27] Taken from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.

on their lives. For example, children growing up in poverty are less likely to have access to their own room and to a space of their own in which they can study. Children working with us on child poverty mentioned the question of 'a room of my own' on a number of occasions.

If there are multiple siblings sharing a bedroom it is likely that there is a quiet place to allow children to study. This in turn often impacts on school performance, attainment, and future employment, further compounding the effects of poverty and locking children into its negative effects on future life chances.

The lack of space inside a home also means that poorer children and young people do not have a place to spend time with friends. This can then push them into the streets, and into potential conflict with other groups either of children and young people into their area, or with some members of older generations whose tolerance of their "hanging around" may be low.

One young person said:

> "Houses are tending to get smaller in size ... I'm the eldest of three [children and]... it [the lack of space] has a social effect, with not having any space really you tend to go out more, you just go out and do nothing on the streets."[28]

But home life is not only affected by the immediate physical environment. Poverty places a general strain on family life.

One young person in 2011 stated:

> "It (having no money) may cause arguments between the parents over how they are going to pay for everything, which might affect the children (who) are hearing this".

One young person who took part in the same research and who was a parent themself explained how having a child of their own raised their awareness of the difficulties their parents had faced:

> "You want to give your child everything that you can, but then when you try and live like that you find that you can't ... it stresses you out ... and then you realise how hard it was for your parents and then you don't feel so angry, you think, 'Well, they did the best that they could'."[29]

Community[30]

The physical characteristics of an area are known to affect children and young people's quality of life, their development and their wellbeing. Young people have told

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[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Both taken from Hart, R, and Martin *Trying to Get By* (OCC, 2011)

[30] This section can be cross referenced to questions 12 of the government's consultation document *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of child poverty* (DfE/ DWP, 2012).

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us they want to feel safe in their communities. Feelings of insecurity and fear in their local community can come from negative peer group pressures (for instance, involvement in criminal activity) and low levels of trust in the police. This is especially because young people, especially when congregated in friendship groups, may stereotypically be viewed primarily as 'suspects' or because the police are seen by them in turn as either unapproachable, or unresponsive when approached for assistance in dealing with criminality and anti-social behaviour.

This combination of factors meant some children and young people working with us said there were no safe places to go in their neighbourhood:

> *"Ten years ago, you could walk round the streets and that was not a problem but now, even my little brother – he's ten and he'll go anywhere in the daytime – as soon as it hits night-time, he won't go anywhere on his own. It isn't safe for the kids."[31]*

Poverty made it more likely that children and young people lived in 'unsafe' communities. In these poorer neighbourhoods the issue that emerged was one of

> "traditional *environmental* poverty - a lack of facilities for young people specifically (open spaces, sports fields, youth clubs) and for the wider community (good quality housing, desirable shops, demonstrably 'safer' streets, lower crime rates)."[32]

One young person suggested the solution could be:

> *'integrating social housing into nice areas would help'.[33]*

However, the groups involved in the participation event in February also noted that:

> *"in wealthier neighbourhoods the issue was one of relative poverty – that is not being able to participate on an equal footing with other people living locally. The comparative qualitative experience of children and young people who grow up in different contextual circumstances requires further investigation: poor/ affluent; urban/ rural; diverse/ mono-cultural."[34]*

4.4 Education and employment

Education – a system that is potentially inherently unfair[35]

Most of the children and young people that have participated in projects with the OCC value and see the benefits of gaining a good education. However, realising academic potential and attainment is not always easy for those living in poverty. As

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[31] Taken from Hart, R, and Martin *Trying to Get By* (OCC, 2011)
[32] Preliminary report produced for OCC by Breslin. Unpublished.
[33] Taken from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.
[34] Preliminary report produced for OCC by Breslin. Unpublished.
[35] This section can be cross referenced to questions 17 of the government's consultation document *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of child poverty* (DfE/ DWP, 2012).

our report on child poverty in 2011 stated:

> The type of school children end up going to has consequences for their experience of education, with one young person, for example, describing how:

> *"A lot of teachers just can't be bothered ... a lot of* [students] *are violent and don't care about working ... it's linked to poverty, and people not caring ... if something bad's happening, everyone just turns a blind eye."[36]*

Even in schools providing a positive environment for learning, poverty may still affect young people's relationships with their teachers. Some young people, for example, perceived teachers as favoring children from more affluent families. Young people's comments also suggest a tendency, amongst some teachers, to stereotype and associate poverty with bad behaviour.

Other young people drew attention to the variation in teachers' attitudes, with one young man commenting:

> *"I suppose it's different in different schools – some teachers are posh, whereas in my school the teachers know what it's like to be on the road, and what it's like nowadays moneywise."[37]*

These experiences are consistent with findings from the OCC's Inquiry into school exclusions. The most commonly used proxy for family poverty, acknowledged as partial but the best available proxy measure, is eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM.) The report from year one of the Inquiry noted that:

> "the DfE's published data show that children eligible for free school meals are around four times more likely to be permanently excluded, and around three times more likely to be excluded for a fixed term, than children in their cohort who are not eligible for free school meals."[38]

While the quality of schools and teaching was an issue that young people talked about in 2011, the issue of 'failing schools' was not raised in the groups run between September 2012 and February 2013. Instead, the children involved in these participation events drew our attention to how the education system could compound children and young people's experience of poverty, and how it was perceived to be 'unfair'.

Echoing the earlier research young people described how:

- if you are poorer, your school is often worse than those in richer areas

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[36] Taken from Hart, R, and Martin *Trying to Get By* (OCC, 2011)

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *They never give up on you" Office of the Children's Commissioner School Exclusions Inquiry* (OCC, 2012). Report accessed on February 20, 2013 at http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_561

- if you have a disability, you are not supported enough by the services around you which are meant to help you

- if you live in a rural area with few schools, you do not have a choice where to go to school, or – because of distances and transport issues - the same access as other children to go on trips and take up other opportunities

- if you are in care (poor children being over-represented in this population), one of the most important times in your education is disturbed and disrupted as you are designated an adult at the age of 18 and lose the support previously given to you as a looked after child, and if you came from poor circumstances in the first place there is likely to be nobody to whom to turn for help and support.

Education – a system that needs to be accessible

Some young people called for a curriculum that was more accessible, relevant and practical, expressing the concern that the on-going schools current curriculum reform agenda, with its focus on more traditional styles of syllabi and examinations, would confirm their potential or actual social and economic exclusion and failure, rather than build on their potential for greater inclusion and higher achievement.

In terms of curriculum content the young people wanted:

- some access to vocational and work related learning

- a focus on personal safety, wellbeing and building resilience

- a more attentive approach to special educational needs including tailored and personalised education.

In addition, young people asked for stronger enrichment and extra-curricular provision in their schools and communities. Young people in poverty are often less able, or at least often feel less able, to access pay-to-participate school trips or after-school activities and clubs. They told us they miss out on the experiences and that any impact this might have on their educational attainment or on the discovery of new interests and the development of new skills. They consider they also miss out on the opportunity to mix socially with other pupils or students in a less formal learning environment.

Without the ability to participate in these opportunities children and young people feel a lack of confidence and purpose. It made education feel "a bit pointless" and that others in more fortunate settings would be able to achieve more. This was the context for one girl telling us that:

"Poverty is about realising others around you have more than you do"

Children and young people also talked about the importance of having access to a computer at home and well as access to the internet.

"Schools are becoming computer-oriented, and it can be a problem if

you haven't got that access, or you've got very limited access."[39]

This is an example of how access to technology and information is now seen as a fundamental part of education, and those without it are at a significant disadvantage compared to their 'better-off' peers. That schools and many other services are moving into an online-only environment and way of doing business, yet some poorer families do not have, and have little or no scope for gaining, access to the equipment or subscription based services concerned, seemed to these children to have been overlooked.

Employment[40]

Children and young people talked to us a lot about access to jobs and were acutely aware that poverty made accessing work more difficult. The majority of young people wanted more apprenticeship and employment opportunities , high quality jobs and fair wages. Some cited the 'living' wage over the Minimum Wage. One young person said:

> *'We don't even get the same wages as adults and I don't think it's fair if your doing the same job'.[41]*

Poverty is more than worklessness

The OCC does not agree that worklessness should form part of a child poverty measure. Although being a child in a workless household is associated with child poverty, a majority of children in poverty live in a household where at least one adult is in work. Six out of 10 children and young people living in low income households are in families where one – and in many cases both – parent(s) are in work. This figure has been rising steadily over the past 10 years. The issue is that many of the jobs concerned bring in a sufficiently low wage that the affected families remain poor.

Children and young people are aware of the reality of in-work poverty and speak a lot about access to 'decent' and 'good' jobs that pay a fair and living wage.

Worklessness came through as an issue some of the story work in participation events that focused on barriers and opportunities. Some of the young people were growing up in neighbourhoods with high levels of unemployment, and acknowledged that this experience could impact on aspirations and had done so among some of their peers.

> *"There are going to be people [around you] who'll say 'Oh well, you're poor, you're never going to get this or that, why are you bothering*

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[39] Both taken from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.
[40] This section can be cross referenced to questions 5 and 13 of the government's consultation document *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of child poverty* (DfE/ DWP, 2012).
[41] Taken from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.

Office of the Children's Commissioner's response to the *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of Child Poverty* (February 2013)

trying?"

"Growing up in poverty you might not aspire to be anything more than your parents, and think 'If they couldn't do it, why should I be able to?"[42]

However, a sense of optimism was far more apparent amongst those participating than might have been expected. **Children and young people felt that with the right support and opportunities, and in spite of their levels of poverty and challenge, they would nevertheless be able to get and keep a good job.**

Helping parents get into work

Supporting parents who do not work into work is important. However, some children who live in poverty have parents who work long hours which has a negative affect on them. One young person told us:

"I remember when I was little, my mum always worked. She worked through Christmas and New Year – she'd always be working ... If you're from a low-income family, your parents are always going to make the most, are always going to work to provide, to get you a future. So I do think that yeah, it does affect family time, but at the same time, me not spending that much time with my mum, it made me appreciate her more, because it makes me feel 'Yes, she is trying to work to get money so that she can provide us with something'. I think physically our time [together] was restricted, but emotionally, I have an attachment with my mum."[43]

Some children and young people mentioned access to affordable child care as a means of enabling their parents to return to work. The sense of these children coming from families where parents wanted to work, was palpable in our discussions with them.

The lack of opportunities

In *Trying to get by* young people were concerned about the lack of opportunities for employment available, and the additional difficulties those in poverty faced in accessing jobs. On the one hand there were

"people on benefits who are trying so hard to get jobs and they genuinely can't."[44]

On the other they were aware that in the current climate university graduates were struggling to find jobs and felt there were good grounds for pessimism with regard to their chances of finding work."

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[42] Both taken from Hart, R, and Martin *Trying to Get By* (OCC, 2011)
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] *Ibid.*

"There just isn't enough positions – that's the problem, that's why people have such a problem making that transition from school to work, because they have to fight against 50 other applicants for one position ... our chances are very slim."

Our earlier report noted that:

"In such a competitive labour market young people from poor backgrounds felt they faced additional challenges, citing the stereotypes held by some adults of young people (particularly boys) associated with violence and drugs. In addition to having to combat these negative perceptions, young people's lack of certified skills and experience made it hard for them to compete against older workers."

The lack of opportunities also extended to the availability of training and apprenticeships:

"With apprenticeships, they give you a trial and if they feel you're good enough they will take you on, but there's not enough of them around. Most companies now, they won't insure you, they haven't got the money to insure you."

"There's not many apprenticeships, where people take you on an apprenticeship that can lead to them taking you on a job. You can get on a college course, but you can't get fully qualified."[45]

Fair wages, work that pays

The poor financial return on low-skilled work and the increasingly insecure nature of employment (with young people noting the widespread use of temporary contracts and "zero hours" arrangements with no guarantee of regular work, coupled with very short notice periods) were seen as another barrier to young people in poverty accessing work.

Fair pay concerned many of the children and young people we met. As our earlier report noted:

"Where young people were living independently of their parents, in some cases with children of their own, they questioned how they could support themselves without access to benefits. One young man who professed himself keen to work said that unless he could find employment offering considerably more than the minimum wage, he simply could not afford to take it up. Summing up his situation, he told us: "I'm trapped."[46]

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[45] *Ibid.*
[46] *Ibid.*

Office of the Children's Commissioner's response to the *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of Child Poverty* (February 2013)

4.5 Expert Support and services

A number of groups we met with had particular and sometimes unique vulnerabilities and needs. These children and young people were particularly concerned that support services were being cut and made more difficult to access. Their concerns are described in more detail in section 6.4.

One group not covered in the section below are children in care. Those who had experience of the care system told us that there is not enough support for looked after children. A young boy talking about his time in care said:

> "*When I was 14 I got some support. They used to come and ask me how I was doing. Now I'm 18 I'm like a ball that is kicked out of a field." Now 18 I'm on my own. In a house with others. No one comes to help.*"[47]

Another said:

> "*When you are 18 you get treated differently. It makes everything difficult being over 18. I'm the same person*", and

> "*If you are in care when you leave you cannot afford to look after yourself.*"[48]

It is worth noting that the majority of children and young people who participated in our events talked about different types of support that they need and found helpful. Those living in poverty were seen to need and rely on these services more than others.

Support is needed at key times of transition such as between primary and secondary school, and secondary school and further or higher education, employment or training.

Children and young people also need support when they face a crisis in their lives. Bereavement featured heavily in the stories told to us by children and young people with an experience of living in poverty, and is a good example of this need.

As already mentioned, there is also a clear need for more support for children living in poverty experiencing bullying because they are palpably poorer than their peers (see section 4.1: stigma and bullying).

Children and young people also talked about wanting more places to go and things to do. One young person said:

> '*They are closing all the things like youth clubs*'[49]

The fear that cuts in funding would lead to the loss of these support services was a theme common to all the events and groups.

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[47] Taken from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.
[48] *Ibid.*
[49] *Ibid.*

4.6 Physical mobility and network access

'Transporting' young people out of poverty

Access to transport was a significant and recurring theme in the discussions. There was extensive reflection on the cost of public transport and its availability, especially in rural areas. There was also comment about the age of adulthood and, in this context, the point at which adult fares have to be paid.

Clearly, poor service provision and high fares restrict young people not just in terms of maintaining friendships with those who live further away but limit their school and college options and take part in recreational activities.

> *"I used to know someone who was in our football team and he couldn't play the football match due to transport and it was a big shame because we really needed him, but he didn't have the money or the car to get from the place where we were playing the match back home."[50]*

For young people living in poorer areas, on isolated estates and particularly in ill-served in rural settings, their location and its poor access transport are likely to compound the sense of isolation that poverty brings, and to contribute to their perception, and their real experiences, of entrapment in social settings that offer "*no way out*".

One young person said:

> *"…if you grow up in an area where all your friends just stay in bed, you're more likely to do the same".[51]*

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[50] Taken from Hart, R, and Martin *Trying to Get By* (OCC, 2011)
[51] *Ibid.*

5.   What children and young people did not tell us

5.1 Family Structure

While some children and young people discussed some aspects home life and its relationship to poverty with us, none of them suggested that family structure should be used as a measure of poverty.

It seems important to children and young people that they have a safe and secure environment. ***Family structure is not the key factor in determining their well-being. It is the relationship between parent, or parents and child that is key***. This ties in with the views expressed in our participation events about the benefits that can come from a supported and loving home life and the amount of family support received. This can be as different within families as it is between different types and structures of family. For example, parental support and approval may well be distributed differently between siblings, whether in a single parent or more traditional nuclear family.

A number of groups that participated in this project talked about it making no difference if you lived with a single parent or carer or with two or had no or lots of siblings; whether you had a step-family, or whether you were in care. The importance was the quality of the relationships, not who those you had relationships with.

Any use of a measure based on family structure risks stigmatising children and young people who do not live in a traditional family unit. From the perspective of the UNCRC all children have a right to family life, and there is an obligation upon the government to provide all families with adequate support and benefits that do not relate to or discriminate against certain family structures (article 27, UNCRC).

The importance of family and home life is about how children and young people are supported. Generalisations and stereotypes are therefore dangerous and unhelpful.

> VII.   Family structures as a measure of poverty are inappropriate and should not be used.[52]

5.2 Difficulties in their parents' lives detracts from child focused measures

OCC is concerned that many of the questions listed in the government's consultation confuse correlation with causation. For example, parental health should not be used as if it equates to an accurate, or even a proxy, measure of child poverty. There is no evidence that poor health *leads* to family poverty. Rather the causal link is that living in poverty all too often leads to poor health outcomes. Where people's health needs are robustly addressed and supported with high quality services and resources, there is no reason why poor health should lead to poverty.

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[52] This section can be cross referenced to questions 18, 19, 20 and 21 of the government's consultation document *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of child poverty* (DfE/ DWP, 2012).

Parental substance misuse and mental health problems[53]

Children did talk to us about barriers to accessing things like doctors and hospital because of fear or stigma and discrimination of because long working hours would get in the way. However, children and young people did talk about wanting more support services such as drug and alcohol interventions, for both adults and children and young people, within their local communities. Their comments are not made because these services are not required or important, but because children and young people did not link them to directly causing, or contributing as a major cause, to a family's poverty.

Similarly parental mental health should not be used as a measure of child poverty. There is no evidence that poor mental health *leads* to family poverty, or that people with mental health difficulties are always poor. Mental and emotional health difficulties are found in all social and economic groups.

OCC therefore recommends that the government reconsiders how many of its proposed measures and domains relate to a list of parental characteristics whose proven and validated impact on child poverty is neither clear, nor causal.

VII.   Any new measures should not be based on factors where there is no demonstrable and proven causal link to poverty.

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[53] This section can be cross referenced to questions 23 and 24 of the government's consultation document *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of child poverty* (DfE/ DWP, 2012).

Office of the Children's Commissioner's response to the *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of Child Poverty* (February 2013)

6. Messages to the Government

6.1 Do not lose children and young people's hope and optimism

Many of the case studies, stories and experiences shared with us during the course of the consultation period highlighted the barriers and challenges faced by children, young people and their families. Living in poverty is not easy, it has a significant and often lasting negative impact on people's lives, and people – including children - often feel trapped in their situation. These are factors outside the control of children and young people that can nevertheless have profound impacts on their well-being and welfare. Too often they feel helpless because the issues are not of their making, as well as excluded or isolated from the support that could lift them out of poverty.

When asked children and young to imagine potential crises that could happen to children living in poverty the examples they shared with us were significant, serious and sometimes extreme. They included deaths in the family, loss of housing, imprisonment due to committing a crime, and exclusion from education. The short-term impacts of these traumatic events were often very negative.

What was striking in this discussion *was the hope and optimism children and young people had in the midst of what adults might judge to be these hopeless circumstances*.

Out of the seven groups that developed a 'story', six ended their account with a positive and optimistic long term-outcome. In each case, the message children and young people were communicating was that *with the 'right help at the right time' children and young people want to, and can, be supported to achieve and succeed.*

> *"Dream, believe, achieve"*[54]

Being heard, being supported, working with adults who refuse to stereotype them, being given opportunities and challenges in education, training and jobs means, they considered, that children and young people have open horizons.

Their optimism in the face of great odds clearly means that measuring poverty in and of itself mattered less to them than being valued as equal members of their group, their school, their community and wider society. It means they see themselves as agents in their own narratives, who - with the right support - can help themselves and therefore eventually their own children out of poverty.

In circumstances where these children have access to the right resources, adversity could be overcome. Losing parents, drugs, crime, ill-health, or a poor education is a part of their lives. But overwhelmingly, the children and young people who participated in our events wanted more than life had given them so far, and believed they could succeed if their individual needs were understood and supported.

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[54] Taken from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.

Office of the Children's Commissioner's response to the *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of Child Poverty* (February 2013)

6.2 Being listened to and valued is as important as material well-being

All the children and young people we have spoken to about what it is like live in poverty talked about wanting to be treated with respect. They want negative stereotypes to be challenged, so that they can be seen as citizens with a right to have their views heard.

The children express a clear expectations that they will be protected, by adults in society, from discrimination, stigmatisation and abuse based on their poverty and that of their families. Many of the children and young people who participated in our events talked about the stigma of being poor and the bullying they had experienced.

6.3 Priorities for change

In both our earlier research and the latest set of participation events we asked children and young people to share messages they want the Government to hear.

The full lists of points made by the children and young people in February are listed in Appendix A. They broadly reflect the themes covered in section 2 above. What emerges from this list is that each group's recommendations reflect their different circumstances. Some of these issues and different groups are picked up in section 3.4 below.

It also demonstrates the importance children and young people place on education and employment, and the vital role support plays in enabling them to achieve. This support includes public services, but is not limited to the support provided by professionals or adults.

VIII. Peer support should be seen as an important source of assistance for children and young people and OCC recommends that this should be recognised and supported by government outside the context of this consultation.

6.4 Regard for groups who are particularly vulnerable or marginalised by policy or services

The different participation events conducted between September 2012 and February 2013 helped identify the themes that have been covered in this document. It is also important to note that there were particular groups of children and young people who had distinct issues they wanted to discuss.

Young offenders

The event in February 2013 included a group of ex-youth offenders who talked about the links between being poor, feeling social excluded, the lack of hope in their lives and their recourse to offending behaviours, which they wanted to avoid in future. They also commented on the compounding negative effects that having a criminal record has on their life chances and their ability to gain either meaningful or well-paid employment. One young person said:

"you are being judged by your past and not your future".. and that *"the punishment you get is after you get out of prison, it happens when you want a job"*.[55]

These young people accepted responsibility for their actions and the fact that they had been punished for the harm they had done and the crimes they had committed. However, it was also clear that their punishment was experienced by them as both on-going and long-lasting, well beyond the term of their sentence.

Therefore, some young people thought that removing a young person's criminal record – except for the most serious offences carrying long sentences – would help young people with an offending history to make a fresh start, as policy makers have long argued is what is required so as to break the cycles of offending and reoffending in some young people's lives.

Jobs and access to jobs were a key concern for this group. They also thought support services should employ people who have a better understanding of the drivers of criminal behaviour.

Asylum and immigration

The February participation event included a group of young people who had been, or still were, subject to immigration controls. It included young people whose asylum claim had been accepted, and others who were waiting to hear the result of their case, including those whose ages were contested. They all raised concerns relating to discrimination, lack of good specialist support, and barriers to accessing jobs and education.

As looked after children, asylum seeking young people lose financial and service support when they turn 18. This is when they need support the most, both to navigate the immigration process and help transition into independent living. Yet their accounts consisted of assistance being withdrawn without notice and little consideration given to the impact this may have on their lives.

There was also a clear sense of frustration that 'rules' or 'the law' worked against them and their desire to improving themselves. The young people shared examples of how the lack of 'official papers' or delays in the Home Office processing their documentation meant they could not continue in education or get a job. As a result of the lack of support and 'rules' working against them these young people saw little opportunity to be able to transform their own lives.

Disabled children and young people

There were parallels between disabled children and young people and other groups regarding the transition from children's services to adult services.

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[55] Taken from one of the OCC participation events held between September 2012 and February 2013 designed around this consultation.

This is echoed in the early research findings from UCLAN colleagues who are studying the impact of low income on disabled children and young people's rights. The research also draws attention to disabled children and young people's desire to be independent, and for their capacity to make decisions recognised. Disabled children and young people seek the support to enable this to happen effectively and are concerned about the impact of cuts to local services that restrict access to such support.

Children and young people with and without disabilities were clear that they wanted more personalised support to help disabled children and young people achieve at school, enjoy and full and health social life and access meaningful paid employment.

Particular issues raised by disabled children and young people included the need for more teachers who are trained to understand disabilities and the support disabled children and young people require. The young people spoke about difficulties and frustrations with SEN status. They wanted to be able to make a choice between access to specialist support within mainstream education and schools that specialised in educating SEN children.

Disabled children also talked about the police and their failure to 'understand disabilities and assume all behaviour is the same.'[56] Poverty exacerbates disabled children's problems and frustrations with education and the police.

Young carers[57]

The issue of young careers did not come up in any of our sessions with children and young people. However, it is important to identify young carers and ensure they access additional support. Young carers are likely to be caring for a non-working adult and face additional barriers to accessing social activities and even education.

Since the events closed, the Commissioner has had direct contact with large groups of young carers, and representative and advocacy organisations, for this group of many thousands of children and young people in England. The IFS, the JRF and others have begun to present researched material that indicates families whose main source of care is their children, will be worst affected of any group in society by the on-going and forthcoming changes to the welfare and benefits systems. We urge that government takes this research seriously and acts to avoid negative effects on an already conflicted and complex group

IX.   Measures should not be linked to groups of children and young people that are defined by their needs (like those listed above). These children young people should not be counted as children in poverty, but viewed as children and young people who require specialist and expert support.

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[56] Examples taken from OCC participation event in February 2013.
[57] This section can be cross referenced to questions 22 of the government's consultation document *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of child poverty* (DfE/ DWP, 2012).

Office of the Children's Commissioner's response to the *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of Child Poverty* (February 2013)

7. A Child Rights Based Approach (CRBA) to child poverty

OCC understands the Government's desire to develop a multi-dimensional measure of poverty related to children and young people's experience of poverty. This desire should not distract from the current income-based measures.

This consultation response has described how children and young people experience poverty. In doing so our aim has been to communicate the messages children and young people want the Government to hear. This document has also highlighted the dangers of focusing on measures that are contentious, stigmatising and whose link to poverty is complex and requires further research.

Therefore, if the Government is to develop a multidimensional measure, OCC recommends that it adopt a Child Rights Based Approach (CRBA).

> X.   Child poverty should, wherever possible, be measured using child focused –not parent/ adult focused – measures.

7.1   What does a Child Rights Based Approach to child poverty mean?

A Child Rights Based Approach (CRBA) to any policy or piece of legislation starts from the premise that change must lead to the increased realisation of children's rights and their capacity as right holders. This objective is often measured against the UNCRC and examines whether or not the rights outlined in the Convention are being met.A CRBA to child poverty has two dimensions. The first builds on the the well-known and widely accepted definition of child poverty by Peter Townsend. Townsend's work states that all children should have the necessary resource to obtain the type of diet, participate in activities and have conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and appropriate in the societies in which the belong.[58] Townsend clearly saw income as key in understanding and defining poverty, but also saw money as the means by which individuals and families could purchase or access goods and services essential to their welfare. Similarly, a CRBA places income and money at the heart of the child poverty debate because it is one of the primary means by which children and young people can realise their rights.

However, a CRBA does not define poverty by household income. This is because money is not the (only) outcome that is important. A CRBA would define child poverty as a rights violation, or a child or young person's failure to realise all of their rights. Money therefore becomes a link and an explanation to why some are able or not able to realise all of their rights.

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[58] Townsend, P. (1979) Poverty in the UK: a survey of household resources and standards of living

In *Child poverty – family poverty: are they one and the same? A rights-based approach to fighting child poverty* Euro Child set out a framework for a CRBA to tackling child poverty based on three domains.[59] These are:

- access to adequate resources and support to households
- access to quality services and opportunities
- children's participation.

Each policy or piece of legislation can be tested against each of these domains. If legislation is found to worsen or prohibit access or participation rights, a policy can be said to increase children's poverty. If a policy improves access and levels of participation, it can be seen as diminishing child poverty.[60]

7.2   What would a CRBA to child poverty look like?

It has already been noted that a CRBA defines child poverty as the inability of children and young people to realise their rights. Linking poverty to the realisation of rights means that adopting a CRBA has a number of implications, and would change the nature and content of the Government's child poverty strategy.

Content of a child-rights-based poverty reduction strategy

As the focus of tackling poverty moves to the realisation of rights, a child poverty strategy must be underpinned by the UNCRC's general principles:

Article 2: non discrimination

Article 3: best interest of the child

Article 6: right to survival and maximum development and

Article 12: right to be heard have views taken seriously.

It would also address key rights associated with living in poverty including the right to adequate food; rights to adequate housing; right to health; rights education; right to play and leisure facilities; and the right to personal security.[61]

Further guidance on what the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expect the state to provide children and young people is outlined in their recommendations' to the UK Government set out in reports published in 2008.[62] This report made specific proposals. These included the adoption and implementation of the Child Poverty Act and its targets, and the need to follow this up by prioritising the needs of families in

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[59] Euro Child (2021) Child poverty – family poverty: are they one and the same? A rights-based approach to fighting child poverty
http://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/ThematicPriorities/FPS/Eurochild/Position_paper_ch_pov_vs_family_pov_designed_FINAL.pdf
[60] This framework is set out in more detail in appendix B.
[61] This is not a full list of the children's rights that should be addressed but is based on finding from children and young people about the impact of poverty on their lives.
[62] UN Concluding Observations to the UK accessed on February 20, 2013 at:
http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC.C.GBR.CO.4.pdf

poverty. The Committee were clear that this included, but was not limited to, intensified efforts to provide material assistance and support programmes that addressed the nutritional, clothing and housing needs of children and young people in poverty.

A CRBA to child poverty should lead to the development of Child Rights Based Poverty Measures

To measure child poverty based on this understanding, indicators need to be developed that reflect the achievement of children's rights. This would allow for the direct observation of children rather than basing conclusions about child poverty on levels of household income.

As we have stated above, this does not mean replacing the current income based measures. Child rights measures must be used within and alongside income based measures.

Adequate measures to improve understanding, monitoring and policy effectiveness should take place across all the different dimensions of poverty. This includes a multiplicity of dimensions affecting a child's right including a right to adequate standard of living, health, education, housing and leisure.

A useful starting point in the development of rights based child poverty indicators is the latest version of the UNICEFs official Implementation handbook[63]. The handbook provides a useful checklist relating to the implementation of article 27.

In addition, the work carried out by the London School of Economics for the Equality and Human Rights Commission on the Human and Children's Rights Measurement Framework[64],[65] is helpful in developing specific rights based measurement indicators.[66]

7.3 What are the benefits of the CRBA to tackling child poverty?

1. Children's Participation – active citizens and effective interventions

Traditional views of poverty often see children and young people as passive agents who experience poverty as a state that they are in, but that other people must deal with. A child rights-based approach views children and young people as active

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[63] http://origin-www.unicef.org/publications/files/Implementation_Handbook_for_the_Convention_on_the_Rights_of_the_Child.pdf

[64] http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/human-rights/our-human-rights-work/human-rights-measurement-framework/

[65] http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/rr76.pdf

[66] The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) is also developing indicators to measure progress in the implementation of rights. The FRA draws on the conceptual framework proposed by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which identifies three types of indicators to measure progress in the implementation of rights: structural indicators, process indicators and outcome indicators.

citizens and agents who have a role to play in realising their rights.

Assuming that any child rights based strategy would also seek to realise Article 12 of the UNCRC (right to be heard have views taken seriously), this would mean children and young people have an active part to play in the development, implementation and review of poverty reduction measures.

The benefits of this are clear. Firstly, policy makers' decisions will be rooted in real life experience and understanding of the problem they are trying to address. Secondly, those affected by the policies are more likely to respond having been involved in the process of developing them. Thirdly, interventions are more effective where based on a model of co-production.[67]

2. A clear role for Government as the duty bearer

The second benefit of the CRBA is that it provides clarity concerning who is responsible and accountable for child poverty reduction. It is the state party who is responsible for enabling all children and young people to realise their rights. Therefore, it is the government as 'duty-bearers' who are responsible for meeting their international obligations, including children and young people right to an adequate standard of life.

The UNCRC notes that states must:

> 'undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation.'

This implies that all efforts, plans, policies and processes should be based on the realisation of rights and corresponding obligations established by international law.

It is important to note that this does not mean individuals, families or communities can abdicate their responsibilities. The UNCRC is clear that parents and families must make every effort to help children and young people realise their rights, and that where this is not possible the Government must provide appropriate support and protection.

3. A link to international standards

While this paper has focused defined children's rights largely in the context of the UNCRC other human rights instruments and guidance should also inform a CRBA.[68]

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[67] Insert references here e.g. Action for children research, NPF/ PW work
[68] These will inlcude the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and the International

For example, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is important in helping understand and interpret economic, social and cultural rights. This is particularly important because it provides the UK with international standards and expectations regarding the right to "an adequate standard living". The Committee on the Rights of the Child and other UN Committees cross reference one another and publish general comments that provide further clarification on what particular rights and articles mean.[69]

As well as providing a clear set of international standards understanding that eradicating poverty is an international obligation linked to the realisation of rights also helps lift the stigma of poverty.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).
[69] http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/comments.htm

8. Recommendations

I. That the government must support and continue to use the current child poverty measures set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010.

II. That the Government adopts a Child Rights Based Approach in the development of any new multi-dimensional measure and its child poverty strategy.

III. That the Government undertakes Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) of its policies and legislation. This process should include the participation of children and young people.

IV. That the Government considers the impact of their measures on the perception of poverty in the UK. The Government should avoid using measures that further stigmatise the poor and the character or ability of those living in poverty.

V. Given the importance children and young people place on income, the Government should continue to ensure that the measures set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010 regarding money and income remain paramount in measuring child poverty.

VI. Family structures as a measure of poverty are inappropriate and should not be used.

VII. Any new measures should not be based on factors where there is no demonstrable nor proven direct link to poverty.

VIII. Peer support should be seen as an important source of assistance for children and young people. It should be recognised and supported by the Government outside the context of this consultation.

IX. Measures should not be linked to groups of children and young people that are defined by their needs (like those listed above). These children young people should not be counted as children in poverty, but viewed as children and young people who require specialist and expert support.

X. Child poverty should, wherever possible, be measured using child focused – not parent/adult focused – measures.

9.   Concluding remarks

Describing poverty is difficult because it has many features. Children and young people's participation in debates about child poverty is critical to its eradication. They shed light on their experiences of poverty and bring a new perspective to addressing it.

Consulting children about their experiences of poverty can only ever go some way to helping with the development of new measures of child poverty

Attempting to develop a multidimensional measure of poverty is both complex and contentious. We already have child poverty measures in the Child Poverty Act 2010 that are widely accepted both within the UK and internationally.

OCC believes that the Government must continue to use *the current child poverty measures set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010.*

It is our hope that the outcome of the consultation will be that the Government affirms the importance of the current measures and uses them alongside child–focused and children's rights-focused measures to develop a broader understanding of child poverty.

Any new measures should include income as well as other elements that measure children and young people's rights to an adequate standard of living. They must be constructed in a way that has enabled children and young people to participate in its development and evaluation.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international obligation upon the Government, and a set of promises we make to the nation's children and young people. Children and young people who are able to realise their rights do not live in poverty and have the means and opportunities to transform their lives. We believe that the Convention should be the core guiding framework used by the Government when developing child poverty policy, and that the realisation.

The OCC wishes to thank all the children and young people who participated in and shaped this consultation response. Their desire to make a positive contribution to public policy, have their voice heard, and experiences understood made this document possible. *We encourage the Government, and others who read this document, to turn to Appendix 2*. Here you will find a poem written by one young person who attended our participation event in February. It eloquently describes a young person's experience of poverty. It is a fitting end to this document and challenge to policy makers.

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Appendix 1: Priorities for policymakers

Towards the end of main child poverty consultation event, young people, working in table groups of six or seven, were asked to identify three or so 'policy priorities' that they felt would improve the lives of young people, especially those living in poverty or in other challenging circumstances. The priorities shared in the subsequent plenary are summarised below:

Group 1

- Young people need to feel safe in their own community and supported by the police

- There needs to be more employment opportunities for young people with criminal records

- There needs to be greater engagement of those with criminal records in all professions who may come into contact with young people at risk of offending

- There needs to be more apprenticeship and employment opportunities for young people

- We need 'fair' wages for young people.

Group 2

- We must ensure that the 'right people' are available to support young people in various settings, for instance in providing Careers Guidance, housing advice or rehabilitative support

- Every young person needs "enough money to support yourself as a young person"

- We must review regulations that impact on young people, for instance those relating to the leaving care or the right to settle in the UK.

Group 3

- There needs to be more 'living units' for young people who are homeless or otherwise in housing need

- We need better transition arrangements to support young people, especially young people with disabilities or other particular needs, at key points: moving from primary to secondary school, from secondary school to work, college or Higher Education.

- We need better public understanding about the range of behaviours displayed by young people with special educational needs (for instance, poor literacy skills), particular conditions (for instance, Autism) or a disabilities (for instance, physical impairment).

- There needs to be better SEN training for teachers, whether they be SEN specialists or not.

Group 4

- We need to "…revamp the education system to make it better for those who can't do exams"

- We need a broader curriculum with more vocational options and a stronger focus on 'education for personal safety'

- We needs to provide funding to enable young people from less affluent backgrounds to participate in curriculum enrichment extra-curricular activities, including after-school clubs and school trips, and to access work experience and work shadowing placements

- We must ensure that the voice of young people, in all kinds of settings, is better heard.

Group 5

- Public transport needs to be available and, especially in cost terms, accessible to all young people.

- Those from poor backgrounds who have gone on to achieve great things in various walks of life should be held up as role models to young people facing these challenges today

- The apparent return of 'O' level style exams and the recasting of 'A' Level in more traditional terms could reinforce social class inequalities and, therefore, pose a particular challenge to younger people from poor backgrounds

- There should be dedicated after-school provision involving Careers Education and Guidance specialists and support workers

- There should be greater access to social housing in more affluent area and a greater focus on 'mixed' developments of private and social housing.

Group 6

- Young people should be taught to avoid 'big problems' (such as drugs and crime) from an early age, and certainly in primary school, with the focus being on 'resistance and resilience'

- There should be a deliberate focus on addressing cost of living rises that especially impact on young people, for instance in areas like transport, housing and food

- Across the age-range, much greater use should be made of 'peer mediation' in school and other children and young people focused settings and young people should take on greater responsibilities in these settings, for instance patrolling playgrounds.

Group 7

- Given the established links to educational attainment, special attention needs to be given

- to supporting those young people who do not have access to a quiet place to study at home, an area in which the proposed 'bedroom tax' was seen as posing potential difficulties

- Public transport needs to be less expensive and more accessible to young people wherever they live

- Good local practice, in respect of supporting young people and especially young people in poverty, needs to be identified and shared nationally

- We need to involve young people as "part of the solution, not the cause of the problem" utilizing them as counsellors, role models and peer mediators

- We need to focus not just on money, but on network building and on cultural change.

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Office of the Children's Commissioner's response to the *Measuring Child Poverty: A consultation on better measures of Child Poverty* (February 2013)

Appendix 2:   Poverty Poem (A young person's experience of poverty)

This poem was written by Callum, a young person from Sheffield who attended OCC's participation event in February, 2013.

Poverty poem

Poverty is relative to the eye that perceives it
Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder
Poverty is about more than
Just money
It's about quality of life
Or lack of it

As a child we moved house
We forgot to pack my dad
Then it was Cereal to eat, 'cos that's all we had
Charity cured the disparity
Of the rumbling stomachs of my family
And so I would give my milk to my sister when hers got split
Eating hot water and value brand cornflakes
Over thinking about our fates
 In between the angels and insects
Before Armageddon and paradise
Is this the life we now lead?
Who else is thinking of our needs?

All sleeping in an air-bed, on floor boards
Listening to the night symphony of discord
Memories of tears and prayer
A background to shouts echoing out there

With the draft chilling the night air
From a broken window
'Cos were not from their estate
Not comprehending their casual hate
Anti social housing provides no homes

Still no stable education
To add into my equation
With no understanding of mental health
We got our Demon Haunted toys
Chucked out

No choice to work form thirteen
Working in a country with laws of equality
And age discrimination policy
Telling you're worth less per hour per pound

Having my Curtains and mental health mocked
By a hollow man that only accounts healthy human stock
Almost tempted to hug that glorified cheque writer
While peacefully protest drenched with kerosene
Flicking my lighter

But I have been listening to the wrong radio station
It's had me chained to a negative perception.
Having returned I feel free
Living a reality of possibility
Because poor self esteem is poverty of the mind
When you mentally flinch when people are kind.

The quality of my poetry didn't take my life
It grew resilience over continual strife
Made me able to speak to you today
To have an informed say, in this poetic way
It made me rebel and learn more
Because poverty is something
You should never apologise for.

Poem by Callum, Sheffield.