

Housing Strategy and Development Briefing Note 16/03

Shifting the Curve: A Report to the First Minister by the
Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality

February 2016



Introduction

Welcome to a series of regular briefings prepared by the Housing Strategy and Development team on the big issues concerning housing. These briefings will be shared with staff, tenants and elected members and keep everyone up to date with regards the ever changing policy context that we are operating within.

The Housing Strategy and Development section is responsible for:-

- Providing the statutory strategic housing authority role within the local authority area;
- Strategic Housing Asset Management delivery;
- The delivery of the Council House New Build Programme and the delivery of the affordable Housing supply programme;
- Supporting the development of a culture of continuous improvement in Housing services and to facilitate opportunities to excel;
- Developing and implementing effective strategies for Housing and Community Safety Services within West Dunbartonshire;
- Developing the Council's housing strategy to ensure that it supports the delivery of our strategic priorities;
- Service development within Housing and Community Safety services; and promoting effective management and the involvement of tenants across all aspects of Housing Services.

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Briefing Note

1. Background:

- 1.1 The Scottish Government's independent advisor Naomi Eisenstadt, a senior research fellow at the University of Oxford and trustee of Save the Children, has issued her report on poverty and inequality¹.
- 1.2 The advisor was given the task of advising the Scottish Government on reducing poverty – identifying what's already in place and is working well, what more could be done, and what's not working. In particular, she was tasked with coming up with ideas for “shifting the curve” – making serious proposals that could, in combination and over the longer term, move large numbers out of poverty.
- 1.3 While the report notes that Scotland is performing relatively better than the rest of the UK in respect of combating poverty, it argues that some tough decisions should be made to direct spend more effectively to tackle the issue.
- 1.4 This paper highlights the housing-related elements of the report

2. Main Issues:

- 2.1 The report focuses on four main areas:
 - Tackling in-work poverty
 - Housing affordability
 - Young people's life chances
 - Cross-cutting issues.
- 2.2 While the report notes that anti-poverty measures taken by the Scottish Government, for example around bedroom tax mitigation and in the approach taken to deal with Homelessness, have helped to protect people from poverty, it concludes that more could be done in this area. It lists 15 recommendations for the Scottish Government to consider². These range from the need to build on the Living Wage to commencing the duty in the Equality Act 2010 evaluate all policies through the lens of social and economic circumstances.

¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00492430.pdf>

² See appendix 1

2.3 The report states that housing costs push many in Scotland into poverty and that any attempts to tackle in-work poverty also needs to consider housing-related costs. Three of the recommendations come under the *Housing Affordability* heading:

- **Build more social housing:** the report welcomes the announcement from the government to set an affordable housing target of 50,000 over the next parliament.
- **Ensure fuel poverty programmes are focused to support those on low incomes, and do more to tackle the poverty premium in home energy costs:** the report suggests that the definition of “fuel poverty” be looked at again with a view to ensuring that future programmes focus on helping those in fuel poverty who are also in income poverty. Lower energy costs were crucial to reducing deprivation and more help needs to be given to people on finding lower tariffs and switching suppliers.
- **Be bold on local tax reform:** the paper advocates progressive local tax reform and suggests that the Scottish Government ends the Council Tax freeze in the interim.

3. What it means for WDC:

3.1 It remains to be seen to what extent the report’s recommendations will be adopted by the Scottish Government. However, the inclusion of *Housing Affordability* as one of the four main areas for consideration is welcome and suggests that housing will be placed higher up the policy agenda in the coming period. Similarly, that *build more social housing* is a recommendation will add some weight to the Council’s drive to deliver more affordable housing in West Dunbartonshire

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Appendix 1: The 15 Recommendations

1. Build on Living Wage Accreditation – focus on larger employers, and on incentives, would be useful
2. Encourage pay ratio disclosure as a way of tackling pay inequality
3. Ensure childcare commitments focus on quality to improve outcomes for children, and consider providing a limited number of free hours of childcare for primary school aged children
4. Make family flexible working more explicit within the Business Pledge, and consider whether approaches such as the Timewise programme could promote flexible working in Scotland
5. Do more to ensure that people claim the benefits they are entitled to
6. Make effective use of new social security powers but proceed with caution
7. Build more social housing
8. Ensure fuel poverty programmes are focused to support those on low incomes, and do more to tackle the poverty premium in home energy costs
9. Be bold on local tax reform
10. Carry out a comprehensive review of policies and services relevant to the life chances of older children and and young adults, with particular emphasis on young people from poorer backgrounds
11. Reduce the number of government-supported employment programmes targeting 16-24 year olds and simplify the landscape, to provide a clearer, sharper focus
12. Ensure that the new approach to employer engagement in education is having an impact on improving skills for work of young people
13. Do more to tackle occupational segregation
14. Ensure that public service delivery is respectful, person-centred and preserves the dignity of people in poverty: pre-employment and in-service training should include the importance of avoiding stigma and developing understanding of the challenges of living on a very low income
15. Commence the socio-economic duty in the Equality Act 2010, when powers are available to do so.