


Lived experience of child poverty in Perth and Kinross

November 2021



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About this Report

This report draws from research conducted by the Poverty Alliance¹ and the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU)² in Perth and Kinross. This work was commissioned by Perth and Kinross Council, as part of an exercise to better understand the challenges faced by families living with child poverty across the region. It aims to inform how the Council in tackles child poverty, which is summarised in its annual Local Child Poverty Action Report. The Poverty Alliance and SPIRU have no vested interest in this work; this is independent observation.

About SPIRU

SPIRU is an interdisciplinary research group based at Glasgow Caledonian University, which often works in partnership with other stakeholders to investigate and develop effective responses to poverty and inequality in Scotland and beyond. SPIRU is committed to advancing GCU's mission to promote the Common Good and to align its research to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. SPIRU contributes to these ambitions through applied research, policy analysis and engaging with policy makers, campaign groups and community stakeholders.

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About The Poverty Alliance

The Poverty Alliance was established in 1992 and has more than 400 members drawn from across civil society and the public sector. The Poverty Alliance has five strategic areas of activity: influencing policy and practice; working with grassroots organisations and individuals experiencing poverty; network development; awareness raising; and research and knowledge. In all this activity, the Alliance takes a preventive approach, seeking to influence policy and practice 'upstream' to reduce poverty. In relation to the content of our work, we focus on addressing low incomes in and out of work, improving services for those experiencing poverty, enabling the participation of people in poverty in policy development, and addressing attitudes towards poverty.

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Note on Analysis and Presentation of Evidence

This report draws directly and heavily from the testimony of families experiencing poverty across Perth and Kinross.

The words of residents are used extensively in this report to convey lived experiences; these are excerpts, which have been drawn from a much wider evidence base. Testimony that has been selected for inclusion is generally indicative of experiences that are shared more widely. However, we have also included some uncommon experiences that convey important insight into everyday lives and may indicate emerging areas of concern for low-income households.

Many of the (good, bad, and indifferent) experiences that were shared with us, will also be encountered by families in Perth and Kinross who do not experience poverty. Within this work, our interest and focus are how living in poverty shapes everyday experiences, and the role of services and support within Perth in the mitigation of poverty.

There is a recognition in Perth and Kinross that accessing services is a challenge for everyone living in more remote parts of the region; however, living in poverty exacerbates this problem. It is the latter rather than the former, which is the focus of this report.

Pseudonyms are used throughout the report to preserve the anonymity of participants. Other detail that could be used to identify participants has also been removed from the testimony that is presented in the report.

More details on our approach to engaging families is presented in Annex 4.

Headline Findings

On Perth and Kinross as a place

1. Perth and Kinross is viewed as a good place to live for families with children.
2. Perth and Kinross is viewed as a place that provides opportunities for children.

On making sense of life in Perth and Kinross

3. Experiences of poverty are often rationalised through 'luck' – good luck to avoid, and bad luck to encounter – rather than identifying that the root causes of poverty originate from service design decisions and macro-structural processes (such as how the economy functions).
4. A 'rural Perthshire trade-off' is acknowledged. Limited access to services is expected and is described as a 'price to pay' for living in the area.

On how services are operating

5. There is much evidence of cross-referral across services.
6. It is perceived that the consequences of re-designing services are not always considered from the perspective of those living on low income.
7. There is some negative perception of 'the Council'. More positivity is expressed for specific Departments/services and individual staff.
8. Importance is often attached to the critical support provided by a key individual, typically an employee of Perth and Kinross Council, or someone representing a Third Sector organisation.
9. The support provided by the Third Sector is critical to many families.

On how services are received

10. Families do not experience services in the same way.
11. How services are delivered and experienced is as important as what services are provided.
12. Some families perceive that service providers do not listen to service users.
13. Gratitude is often expressed for receiving key services and support.
14. Local social media is often a key source of information. Local social media is used more than PKC communication channels to access information.

Experiences of families living with poverty in Perth and Kinross

15. Experiences of poverty in Perth and Kinross are in many ways comparable to those encountered by low-income families in urban Scotland. Poverty is no less of a problem for those who experience it in Perth and Kinross, when compared to those living in poverty in other parts of Scotland.
16. Indeed, families in rural parts of the region report that a higher cost of living exacerbates the challenges of living on a low income.

17. Intense poverty and desperate conditions are experienced by the most vulnerable in Perth and Kinross.
18. Stress and worry are omnipresent.
19. Stress and worry that results from living in poverty is often 'hidden' from others.
20. Managing everyday family life creates time pressures for families. This pressure – and the stress that results from it – is particularly acute in more rural parts of Perth and Kinross.
21. Those without family or other support networks are vulnerable when faced with unforeseen circumstances (for example, household appliances breaking down; growth spurts leading to children growing out their clothes prematurely).
22. Extended family living locally is not always able to provide routine or regular support, particularly if they themselves are in paid employment.
23. Families report that 'cash first' provision – where families are provided with money to buy goods and services, rather than provided with these goods and services in-kind – gives them the opportunity to deliver better outcomes and achieve better value for money.
24. Challenges in managing their work/life balance, particularly when employment involves a long commute, are reported by those who grew up locally as children, who left and then returned to Perth and Kinross to raise their own family.
25. Parents report being priced/squeezed out of the places in which they would like to raise their family / previously lived when growing up as children.
26. Childcare shapes the potential of families to engage in paid employment. However, in rural Perth and Kinross, childcare provision is both limited and limiting.
27. Access to a car (or private transport) and the associated costs of maintaining a car, is understood as a necessary expense in rural areas to access essential services, employment, childcare and to engage in community life.
28. Concerns are expressed over private and public sector housing supply.

On systems complexity pertaining to family poverty in Perth and Kinross

29. Families are not always fully aware of who is providing the services that they are receiving.
30. Positive work outcomes for some, can have an adverse impact on the lives of others in their network.
31. Inadequate service provision generates additional financial costs for families.
32. Service delivery decisions can impact on the work of others – when a service is withdrawn, but the need that service met remains – with workload increasing for other organisations. This can impact adversely on support and services that are available to families experiencing poverty.
33. Support and service provided can have positive impact that extends beyond the provision that is delivered.

Executive Summary and Key Recommendations

Research aims and project of which it is part

The primary objective of this research is to articulate the service needs of children and families with lived experience of poverty across Perth and Kinross, and to canvass their experiences of accessing and utilising these services. This insight is then to be used to inform Perth and Kinross Council (PKC) as it seeks to reconfigure services in a way that best meets local needs.

This research is part of a larger project on child poverty in Perth and Kinross, with complementary work programmes focusing on how child poverty is measured and how the experiences of PKC staff might be canvassed.

About this research

The Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU), in partnership with The Poverty Alliance, delivered this research under commission from Perth and Kinross Council. The Poverty Alliance and SPIRU have no vested interest in this work; what is presented is independent observation and analysis.

The findings are based on research interviews, conducted by telephone interview or video call between May and June in 2021, with twenty-two families living in poverty in Perth and Kinross. This work generated insight into the experience of a diverse range of families as they navigated services and managed everyday life across Perth and Kinross.

It is now widely accepted that small-scale qualitative research – properly designed and executed – can be of much value as large-scale quantitative research in understanding social realities and providing insight that can be used to reshape public services. This report presents powerful testimony through the words of residents of Perth and Kinross. These excerpts, which have been drawn from a much wider evidence base, are indicative of experiences that are shared more widely. However, we have also included some uncommon experiences that convey important insight into everyday lives and may indicate emerging areas of concern for low-income households.

Key Findings are presented overleaf

Key Findings

Living in Perth and Kinross

- **Good place to live.** On the whole, Perth and Kinross as a region, and the localities within, are viewed positively by families experiencing poverty. Opportunity for ready access to leisure, formal and informal, is widely appreciated.
- **Luck.** Families experiencing poverty in Perth and Kinross often used the descriptor 'luck' to rationalise positive experiences. This conveys a sense of gratitude for what they have, and an acknowledgement that others may not be as fortunate as themselves. It also suggests that a sense of rights and entitlement does not prevail.
- **A Perthshire trade-off.** Many families experiencing poverty accept or understand poor provision – for example in housing, or rural transport – as part of the price to be paid for where they live.

Families Experience of Poverty in Perth and Kinross

- **Intense poverty exists.** There is evidence of abject poverty in Perth and Kinross. Sometimes, such poverty has is a passing intensity, which may be triggered by unforeseen circumstance (e.g. breakdown of a household appliance; loss of employment; change in family arrangements). Intense poverty may subside, rather than disappear, becoming an enduring challenge of seasonal pinch points, e.g. increased living costs during summer when children are not in school for part of the week, or in winter when energy bills are higher and Christmas brings additional expense.
- **Family support.** For those with access to it (which does not apply to all families experiencing poverty), the support provided by families – at critical stress points and in everyday life – is acknowledged and highly valued. Families are a key source of childcare support, and a resource that is drawn on in times of crisis.
- **Time pressure.** Time pressures are reported by many families experiencing poverty. The challenges of managing children's lives and the challenges of combining work and family life are the primary sources of this stress.
- **Cost of living.** Housing, transport and food expenditure is reported to place strain on family budgets, particularly in rural areas.
- **Cumulative impacts.** Many of the challenges faced by families experiencing poverty are encountered by other families. However, the difficulties in facing these challenges on a low income – without the ability to draw on a safety net of financial resource – exacerbate these problems. Similarly, the cumulative impact and interaction of these problems impacts on family life.
- **Stigma** Many of the families described issues related to stigma, with narratives indicating stigmatisation was even experienced when accessing support.

Continues overleaf

Service User Experiences of Families Living in Poverty in Perth and Kinross

- **Referrals work.** There is much evidence of effective cross-referral and integration of support pathways. Where this works, it is not received as being 'passed on', but rather as being directed to the right source. Successful referrals were reported within services, and across services. Positive impacts of this included being connected to support in a timely manner which was critical for prevention of intensification of problems.
- **Key individuals.** Many parents experiencing poverty made reference to a key individual who provided them with critical support and/or who 'made things happen'. These interventions were often understood as someone going 'above and beyond' duty, rather than delivering routine service. These sources of key support were found across a range of service areas.
- **Individuals, departments and the Council.** Although people experiencing poverty did not always praise individuals or specific departments/services, on the whole, there was much more evidence of positive than negative appraisal of service rendered. In contrast, "the Council" tended to be viewed more negatively.
- **How services are delivered.** The way in which services are delivered is important. There were several examples of people experiencing poverty reporting that staff had shown a lack of empathy toward them, or had failed to appreciate the situation in which they found themselves. Poor communication was noted for some, and public information was found to be lacking.
- **Utilising local sources of information.** It was striking how many parents, turned to local sources for information about what was available to them. These local sources were not Council-led, but were often informal groups that had emerged utilising platforms, such as Facebook or Whatsapp.

Service-Specific Experiences of Families Living in Poverty in Perth and Kinross

- **Housing.** It was acknowledged that there was a housing shortage and that there was a long waiting list for Council housing. The lack of availability was leading people to accept whatever was offered, which was not always ideally suited to their needs, for example, some were living further away from family support, or living in accommodation without sufficient bedrooms.
- **Childcare.** Childcare was a particular challenge for those in-work. Although all were aware of entitlement, availability did not always dovetail with need, and available provision often required additional cost to either access the provision, or to pay for additional hours beyond universal entitlement. Childcare was constraining opportunities to access paid employment.
- **Education.** Schools were viewed positively and were often acknowledged as a source of wider information beyond education. School meals were not viewed to be meeting all children's needs.
- **Leisure.** Children were widely reported to be actively engaged in leisure and sporting activities outside of school. Families also reported utilising the local environment for seasonal 'incidental' leisure.

Continues overleaf

- **Transport.** Transport services were viewed positively in the city of Perth. In contrast, the availability and cost of transport in rural areas was often criticised. There was understanding of the difficulty in delivering rural transport. Many families in rural areas reported the necessity of having access to a car.

Service Complexity Experienced by Families Living in Poverty in Perth and Kinross

- **Poor provision generates costs.** Providing a service does not always lead to needs being met. Notably, with regards to housing, childcare and school meals, perceived inadequacies in provision led to family spend, e.g. paying extra for heating, paying for packed lunches where school meals do not meet children's needs.
- **Poor provision generates work.** Service inadequacies creates work for others. There is a need for systems thinking to reduce the overall workload, which would also be less time-consuming and stressful for services users. This does not only imply a shift of workload between organisations, but also leads to a shift of workload within organisations (for example, Welfare Support offering routine advice on availability/entitlement, as this information cannot be accessed independently with ease).
- **Unintended consequences.** Service decisions and provision impact beyond that which is provided. Where budgets are already stretched, service changes that lead to extra family cost (or added time pressure) were reported to have wider-reaching impact on family life.
- **Impact.** In a similar manner, the provision of what may appear to be a small-scale intervention can have far reaching positive impact of the lives of families experiencing poverty.
- **Some win, others lose.** The inter-connected and inter-dependent lives of many families experiencing poverty can create vulnerabilities. For example, successes in accessing paid work for some were reported to imply a loss of informal childcare support for others.

What needs to happen now?

We conclude the report with seven recommendations to Perth and Kinross Council, drawn from the experiences of people experiencing poverty.

1. ***Recognise that poverty exists in Perth and Kinross.*** It should not be assumed that the wider public, public servants and key decision-makers in Perth and Kinross either recognise the problem or poverty, the scale of the problem, or the problems it presents. As this report shows, much poverty is hidden, often deliberately so.
2. ***A collective effort – beyond service department boundaries – is required to seek solutions to the problems of childcare and housing.*** Housing and childcare presented challenges to families experiencing poverty, with the lack and adequacy of provision being widely cited among families experiencing poverty. Solutions to these problems cannot be found within these service departments alone (for example, access to work is

an issue that also impacts on the suitability of childcare). There may also be a need to shift resource if adequate and sustainable solutions are to be found. It may also be necessary to appraise whether quality assurance processes are working in practice for housing.

3. ***Changes to public services should be poverty proofed.*** The impact of changes to public service provision can be far reaching for families experiencing poverty. Existing tools to monitor the potential impact of changes to public service provision do not seem to be protecting families experiencing poverty from adverse impact. Solutions may involve a strengthening of existing tools, but may also be found from cultural change, and a more person-centred approach to service provision (in which the consequences of proposed change would be readily apparent). The Public Sector Equality Duty toolkit should be reviewed and adapted to facilitate poverty proofing.
4. ***Acknowledge the role of professionals providing critical support to families experiencing poverty.*** Key individuals providing critical support are found across a range of services (also from Third Sector partners). This work is critical but can be time-consuming. There is a need to acknowledge this work as core to function, rather than leave to the chance of diligent staff going 'above and beyond'. A 'One Council' approach should be adopted whereby it is recognised that all frontline workers can play a critical role in connecting families to the services and support that they need. This would require additional training, resources, and support to realise the gains that would accrue from this way of engaging.
5. ***Continue to listen to people experiencing poverty locally.*** This report should be the start of what is promised in 'The Perth Offer'. That is, on-going dialogue and co-production with people experiencing poverty to ensure that public services are used to best effect to meet need.
6. ***Improve communication.*** A review should be undertaken of how the Council communicates with people experiencing poverty. Consideration should be given to utilising the power of local social media and reviewing the utility and accessibility of the Council's website.
7. ***Action on food.*** Difficulties were encountered in meeting this basic need and fundamental human right. There is a need to develop better access to affordable food, and to review the effectiveness of current provision, particularly in relation to school meals. We also understand this as a means to an end – with adequate nutrition and sustenance, citizens are better placed to realise their potential.

There are other lessons that should also be learned from the research, many of which are specific to service departments or populations. These are presented in ten sector-specific briefings³, which accompany this report, outlining key considerations for housing, childcare, employment support, welfare advice, social services, leisure and sport, transport, education, credit services and health services.

1. Introduction

Introduction

The primary objective of this research is to articulate the service needs of children and families with lived experience of poverty across Perth and Kinross, and to canvass their experiences of accessing and utilising these services. This insight is then to be used to inform Perth and Kinross Council (PKC) as it seeks to reconfigure services in a way that best meets local needs.

The Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, in partnership with The Poverty Alliance, delivered this research under commission from Perth and Kinross Council. The Poverty Alliance and SPIRU have no vested interest in this work; what is presented is independent observation and analysis.

The Project

This wider project of which this is part also involved:

- Development of a PKC Scorecard for Child Poverty and Wellbeing⁴ – to enable the effectiveness and operation of the PKC offer to be monitored and evaluated.
- Preparation of a Survey Research Tool which could be administered to PKC Staff to provide insight into the tackling child poverty work of PKC personnel.⁵

The Research

This is an in-depth exploration of the needs of a range of families experiencing poverty across Perth and Kinross. The initial target was to interview twenty families, canvassing parents' opinion on what services are required and exploring how families navigate and experience what PKC (and partners) offer to support families experiencing poverty.

Annex 1 describes this work in more detail. Notwithstanding the challenges that were faced, the fieldwork delivered what was required, with the target number of interviews being exceeded (22 interviews administered). These interviews enabled the research team to offer insight into the experience of a diverse range of families as they navigated services and managed everyday life across Perth and Kinross.

Perth and Kinross

Perth and Kinross is one of the largest local authorities in Scotland, ranking 12th (of 32) in terms of population size (151,910 in 2020) and 5th in terms of area size (5286 km²). However, with 29 people per km², it lists lowly among Scottish local authorities ranked by population density.⁶

Although approaching one-third of the population live in the city of Perth (estimated 47,430 for mid-2016), and almost one-half of the population live in one of the other 33 settlements of varying sizes (with more than 5,000 each living in Auchterarder, Blairgowrie, Crieff and Kinross), almost one-quarter of the

population live in the rural hinterland beyond these settlements⁷.

The population of Perth and Kinross has increased by 12.9% over the last two decades (greater than that for Scotland as a whole), although most recent projections anticipate a more modest increase of 1% over the next decade (less than that for Scotland as a whole).⁸ At the same time, the age structure of the population is changing. The proportion of children has fallen by 6% over the last two decades (slightly smaller than Scotland as a whole), whereas the proportion of people of pensionable age has increased dramatically over the same period: 43.8% increase of those aged 65 to 74, and 50.1% increase for those aged 75 and over (both far greater than the increases for Scotland as a whole). It is estimated that there are around 24,421 children aged 0-15 in Perth and Kinross at the current time, with the numbers anticipated to fall to 22,447 in ten years' time (a fall of 8.1%, which is greater than that for Scotland as a whole).

In summary, Perth and Kinross has an ageing and expanding population, while the number and proportion of children is expected to continue to fall in the years ahead.

Area deprivation is not prevalent in Perth and Kinross. Only eleven of the 186 datazones in the region are among the 20% Most Deprived in Scotland (5.9%, the 8th lowest local share of Scottish local authorities). Nine of these 'most deprived' areas are in the city of Perth and the other two are in Blairgowrie. Just over 8,500 people in Perth and Kinross lives in one of Scotland's 20% Most Deprived in Scotland, with no datazones ranked among the 5% Most Deprived Areas in Scotland. (44.7%).^{9,10}

Tackling Child Poverty in Perth and Kinross

The *Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017*¹¹ obligated Scotland to work toward the eradication of child poverty by 2030, setting interim targets to achieve progress toward this goal. The Act also committed each of Scotland's 32 local authorities to work with their local NHS Board to publish an annual report to summarise progress and outline next steps to tackle child poverty with local resources. The Act provides a major stimulus to local action to tackle child poverty across Scotland.¹²

At the time of writing, Perth and Kinross Community Planning Partnership were preparing their third annual report, having published earlier reports in 2019 for year one¹³ and in 2020 for year two¹⁴. In the latest report, ten specific priority actions are outlined for the following four activities:

- Those which increase awareness of the causes and consequences of poverty for children in Perth and Kinross.
- Those which help share the Perth and Kinross Offer for parents and children living in poverty in the longer term.
- Those which help gather data on what interventions are most effective in tackling poverty for children.
- Those which will benefit children living in poverty quickly.

This latest report – *All In – To Tackle Child Poverty* – builds on existing work that is core to the business of PKC, while laying the foundations for a transformative programme of anti-poverty work.

The Perth and Kinross Offer

This research is consistent with the objectives of the Perth and Kinross Offer¹⁵, which aims to change the way that PKC works with communities, citizens, and businesses, by listening to people, involving them in decision-making and broadening opportunity. The Child Poverty Working Group of PKC contributes to one of the four workstreams (Equalities, Empowerment and Fairness).

Structure of this Report

This Introduction and a Conclusion are wrapped around the substantive research results, which are reported in six sections. General experiences of life in Perth and Kinross are first described (section 2), before families experiences of poverty are considered (section 3). Given the importance of priority groups in the Local Child Poverty Action Reports and *Every Child, Every Chance*¹⁶, some attention is paid to the experiences of some of the six priority groups (section 4). The next two sections focus more directly on services, first considering user experiences across services (section 5), before turning to reflect on system complexity (section 6). Articulated priorities are presented in the final collection of substantive findings (section 7). Four supplementary Annexes provide detail about the research.

Complementing this report are ten sector-specific briefings¹⁷, outlining key considerations for housing, childcare, employment support, welfare advice, social services, leisure and sport, transport, education, credit services and health services.

2. Living in Perth and Kinross

It's just that kind of area, ... you just don't like to leave. (Int 04)

Introduction

This report focuses on the lives of families experiencing poverty in Perth and Kinross. As might be expected, much of this report focuses on the challenges that must be overcome and the difficulties that are encountered. However, there was also an undercurrent of positivity that was expressed in relation to living in Perth and Kinross. Here, we demonstrate the positive outlook that prevails with regards to living in Perth and Kinross, and we reflect on how families living in poverty rationalise their experiences of life in the region.

Perth and Kinross as a place to live

The research interviews started by asking families experiencing poverty about the strengths and weaknesses about where they lived. Sometimes the focus was on the locality, at other times the focus was on the wider region of Perth and Kinross. Weakness was identified, many of which are considered in more detail throughout this report. However, the general tenor was that Perth and Kinross (or the places within it) comprised good places in which to live, which provided an abundance of opportunities. This created positive place attachment, and for those with adequate accommodation, a sense of living in the 'right place'.

Perth and Kinross has been judged by others as having a high 'quality of life' and there is objective evidence to support such claims. However, it is significant that in this research these sentiments were being expressed by people experiencing poverty, who were positive about the region, despite the situation in which they found themselves. In the interviews, praise was directed at outdoor amenities (such as access to parks, quality of environment), sports provision, being part of a close-knit community that was friendly with good neighbours and living in a peaceful and safe place with roads that were not too busy and good schools.

The river Tay runs through Perth and that's very beautiful. There's lovely houses around it, lots of greenery. ... it's something to do with ... taking them [the children] over the bridge, taking them to ... [the] island. You know, let them see the trains passing ... an awful lot of ... things that don't cost anything but for the children is a really great day out or a really good couple of hours out. So, I think Perth is really the highlight of everything. (Int 07)

Alyth, [is] ... a nice community to stay in, ... Everyone ... well most people, ... would say "hi" in the street ... even if they didn't know you. (Int 12)

Dunkeld [is] a brilliant place to bring up children. It really is. It's beautiful. (Int 19)

Comrie is a lovely village, lovely village feel. Everybody knows everybody, everybody looks out for everybody. We are right in the middle of the countryside, and we've got so many walks and woodlands and rivers to explore and enjoy. (Int 15)

On the other hand, some disadvantages were acknowledged, including cliques, lack of privacy, declining town centres, isolation, lack of childcare options, lack of affordable supermarkets, lack of opportunities for children, quality of play parks, poor Internet connection, potholes, lighting, anti-social behaviour, and viability of local shops.

Area prosperity also generates specific challenges for families living in poverty, which might not be encountered in other areas:

In an area like this that's quite affluent, [there is an] expectation of what you should be doing, and for the kids to ... keep up with their friends, [whether] that be hobbies or clothes ... you know, it's financially, extremely difficult. You always find a way, but ... it takes its toll ... you want the best for them, you want them to have the best education, you want them to have the best chances and it's just fighting an uphill battle all the time ... (Int 20)

The only downside I would say is that it's much more expensive as opposed to, you know, my previous council area which I stayed, everything was that little bit more affordable. (Int 09)

It just worries me ... you pay the money to stay in this area and then you see the state of the roads and ... the schools are now at full capacity, and I worry ... for what her future is going to be ... with overcrowded schools, and a sort of overpopulated area. (Int 09)

Some people experiencing poverty may also be more likely to share everyday space with other populations who are viewed as anti-social. This was particularly evident among those from the city of Perth (Int 01, 02, 08), although this was also reported in some rural areas (Int 09).

I don't think it's as friendly as it was when I was growing up. ... especially living right in the town ... there's quite a lot of alcohol and drug problems, which means sometimes when you go outside, it's not necessarily the most pleasant experience, and my boys have a few times gone out, sort of early evening, you know, still daylight, and had to come home because there [were] people outside having a big fight or sort of hassling them, so they've just come back. (Int 01)

Obviously, there's ... certain people you don't want to be involved with – [I'm] not trying to be nasty, but ... it's the type of lifestyle they live. Obviously, then I got pregnant with the twins and stuff I came away from that. (Int 02)

... like I say my neighbours ... most of them are not nice people at all. ... I've come from Pitlochry so, it's ... a big difference. (Int 08)

... the only upside to Perth is it is a pretty town. But ... It's full of junkies. The people aren't the nicest here at all or sorry, the majority of people aren't the nicest. I mean you go into a shop, and they are so rude here, like really rude in most of the shops. (Int 08)

... we've seen sort of an increase – well I don't know if it is an increase because I've been away for so long – ... anti-social behaviour seems to be on the up again and you know drugs in the area again, and you know, that's all a worry. (Int 09)

Families experiencing poverty want to benefit from what Perth and Kinross has to offer. Some specific challenges are faced in achieving this, as this report demonstrates. The goal, as interviewee 20 articulates, is often expressed as, “All I want is, ... a nice home for my kids and a nice life and that's it”.

There is also some concern that decisions are being made that do not deliver the best use of resources when more pressing concerns are not met (Int 08).

... everybody's annoyed ... in Perth just now ... they are putting planters in everywhere and yet buildings are falling apart and there's nothing for people to do and people are living in poverty ... they are more interested in how pretty the place looks than anything else and it doesn't even make the place look pretty! It just clutters the street, even more. (Int 08)

Making sense of life in Perth and Kinross

The juxtaposition of experiencing poverty in a region with much affluence and with a high overall quality of life, led some to rationalise life in terms of what might be described as ‘the Perthshire deal’. Such sentiments were particularly strong in more rural parts of Perth and Kinross. It is a sense of ‘accepting the bad with the good’ and ‘accepting that there are costs associated with choosing to live in the area’. This way of thinking was conveyed across several themes, including housing (Int 03, 15), and accessing leisure for children (Int 15, 21) as illustrated below:

... keeping [the house] ventilated and ... keeping the heating on ... it's just one of those things. It's just what comes with living in an older property I suppose (Int 03)

I think it's just one of those things, you know I think if you move to a village there's always gonna be disadvantages and the housing situation is one of them. (Int 15)

Where we live. We are in a remote little village. So, we just have to accept that we ... have to travel [to] places ... we knew that ... we had to make that commitment when we moved and that was just part of it. It's like, “Right, we will have to drive them here, there and everywhere” ... So, for us it's not a negative. It's just a given. We just do it. (Int 21).

... there's that pay-off of that decision to move rurally, you know, there are kids' clubs, but we have to drive there and that's just part of the part of the sacrifice really (Int 22)

A second way in which families experiencing poverty rationalised their life in Perth and Kinross, was by referring to being 'lucky'. Being 'lucky' for what they have was expressed for a wide range of issues from access to family who provide treats, informal support for childcare, having access to informal crisis support, living with parents when finance is stretched, eligibility for school dinners, for the support provided by Council officers, living in a property whose rental was met in full through Housing Benefit, children not requiring lots of food, and for having essentials that allowed dignity to be maintained.

*We're quite **lucky** – granny lives halfway so if we're not getting the bus that day, we can always stop off at granny's and they can get some juice and granny spoils them. (Int 02)*

***Luckily**, I do have family, so I use them as childcare when I need to. (Int 09)*

*I'm **lucky** enough, you know, that my mum, ... works full time and so does my stepdad. So, she says, ... she would never see us... going without, but ... I have obviously used the Food for Thought... a couple of times (Int 12)*

*My parents would never let us go hungry, ... I think my mum and dad can tell when I've not got much money or I'm struggling some weeks and we've been **really fortunate** that we are living with my mum and dad ... I'm not sure how I'll manage when hopefully we do get somewhere ourselves. My boys are **lucky** that they get free school dinners. (Int 15)*

*I was quite **lucky** with the housing officer I had at the time because she knew why I left [last housing provider] and she still kept my name on the [Council] housing list, and I was literally there for about three months, and she got me a brand new flat (Int 02)*

*... but **lucky** enough ... because it was a cheaper sort of private rent, it was getting covered [in full] by my Housing Benefit. (Int 12)*

***Luckily** enough my child doesn't eat massive amounts of expensive food. ... I didn't have to resort to the food bank although I did think I might have to. (Int 04)*

*I had to try and make do with what we had for a full month ... we had no milk for ages or bread ... **luckily**, we had toilet roll but ..., we had to live off baked beans and noodles a lot of the time. It wasn't, it wasn't great (Int 08)*

What is striking about this wide range of references to 'being lucky' is that this luck is expressed for everyday situations and basic needs. There is no sense of 'entitlement' or 'right': good fortune is judged to have determined outcomes. On a wider level, this raises questions on how people rationalise their experience of poverty.

Conclusion

People experiencing poverty can identify much that is positive about living in Perth and Kinross. However, challenges are evident, and a way of thinking persists that normalises and accepts poverty and the problems it presents. What might be conveyed with outrage elsewhere, may be more readily accepted – and therefore hidden – in Perth and Kinross. There is a need to raise expectations, which may be achieved through encouraging a rights-based approach, with an explicit articulation of what citizens should expect as part of any ‘Perth offer’.

3. Families Experience of Poverty in Perth and Kinross

You look at other people and you think, 'how do they manage?', ... sometimes it can be because ... they're in a full-time job so they've got money that they can just spend willy-nilly or, ...for example, they've got, ... family and friends that are able to help them out. (Int 12)

Introduction

There has been no shortage of research in Scotland that aims to better understand the experiences of families living in poverty. From early seminal studies¹⁸, through to contemporary reviews, much has been learned from a literature that includes contributions from Poverty Truth Communities¹⁹, autobiographies²⁰, issue-specific analyses²¹, place-bound analyses²², statistical analyses²³, and literature reviews²⁴. The importance of engaging the voice of lived experience to better understand poverty – and fashioning more effective solutions – is widely supported and encouraged in Scotland by campaigners²⁵, opinion formers²⁶ and policy makers²⁷ alike. Some of this work has been conducted in Perth and Kinross.²⁸ Best practice guidance on involving 'experts by experience' has recently been published by the Poverty and Inequality Commission.²⁹

Although there is much that can be learned from the existing body of knowledge on families experience of poverty in Scotland, there are three reasons for why learning from the experiences of families living in poverty in Perth in Kinross in 2021 has merit. First, it should not be assumed that experiences of poverty outside Perth and Kinross will adequately represent the challenges of living with poverty inside the region. Second, although poverty persists through

time, the challenges that it presents may take different forms at different points in time. Finally, although there some work has canvassed local experiences, this was not with the remit of gleaning understanding with a view to improving the 'Perth offer'.

Set against the wider knowledge of how poverty has been experienced in Scotland, this section recounts families experience of poverty in Perth and Kinross in 2021. Eight themes are considered.

- Intense poverty
- Mundane everyday
- Stress and pressures (everyday, time, seasonal and situational)
- Importance of family
- Access to car
- Cash first works best
- Work
- Cost of living

Cutting-across these themes is the stigma and shame that accompanies living in poverty, and the dealing with the problems that poverty presents.

Intense Poverty in Perth and Kinross

There is a tendency to assume that poverty is urban. In the context of Perth and Kinross, this might imply an expectation of poverty in some parts of the city of Perth. However, in a national context, the expectation might be that Perth's poverty is not as intense as the poverty experienced in more heavily urbanised parts of Scotland.

It is beyond the scope of this report to draw direct comparison with the experiences of poverty elsewhere in Scotland. However, it was clear from the research that there is much evidence of intense poverty in the region.

Poverty finds expression in not having money to shop for everyday items, parents worrying about feeding themselves and their children, choosing between travel and food, not having money for clothes, living in sub-standard housing, and not having money to fix problems:

If one of my friends asked me to go out, ... for lunch ... or even pick something up, ... at the Co-op or, ... like getting a meal deal and things like that. Sometimes that can be quite challenging because you don't want to ... you don't want to look like you can't afford it, if that makes sense? (Int 12)

... the boys can go to my mums two nights. (They can go Tuesday and Thursday) for tea so, that's one less meal you need to worry about. (Int 07)

I volunteer with Broke not Broken, which is a local food bank charity in Kinross, There is a huge demand and huge need for families who are struggling. It is heart breaking to see some of the circumstances, ... people are struggling all the time. (Int 20)

The difficulty with that was I still had to take him up to Perth, so like a 13-mile drive ... at that stage that fuel was just too difficult to find ... that was a few days food as far as I'm concerned. But because he was in it [organised leisure club], I felt pressured to take him. (Int 11)

They gave me some funding so I can get my kid some school shoes ... and extra funding for his clothing. (Int 04)

Our roof's really old and it's fairly leaky. It does regularly leak ... over the past ten years we have been patching up leaks and doing temporary fixes and just kind of holding ... so that ... we can live with it and it's fine. ... But what it really needs is an entire new roof, ... I spend quite a lot of time sitting in my garden looking at my roof going, ... "do you think we'll get another year out of that? I think we might get another year out of that". (Int 16)

The challenges that poverty presents are being managed, either by living with the situation, drawing on informal support, or making tough decisions on spending. However, as the following two examples in relation to food illustrate, often these strategies can be undignified, health-impairing, and can create their own tensions and problems:

He [child] has never, ever, ever gone without food. Never once. ... but there [are] times where I have... there is enough for me, but I will not eat so that there is plenty or so - there's extra for a few more days or whatever. ... or I will have to go and sell something from the house to be able to get something like get a food shop or something. (Int 08)

I didn't have food quite a bit, so that was really hard, and that's why I took on the second post actually, because I knew that I needed to do something, but it feels, it feels unmanageable. (Int 05)

The private nature of the problems that poverty presents mean that these everyday realities may be hidden to those responsible for making decisions over public services and to the wider citizenry.

Mundane Everyday

Many families experiencing poverty describe their lives as routine, largely regimented by tasks related to managing their children's lives:

About 99% of my life is just based on what the boys need. (Int 16)

I walk Liam to [primary] school ... and then I'll come back and do ... household stuff, loads of washing and things like that. (Int 01)

I guess a typical week for us [involves] ... doing quite a lot of driving the kids around to their various things. (Int 16)

I get them to nursery and then we'll take them down to nursery and then by the time we get back, ... David's already tidied up the house, and then we spend some time with baby sister, get some lunch, then probably get some shopping and then, it's, like, time to pick up the older children again, and then it's teatime, bath time, bedtime (Int 02)

Our week is split between ferrying our son back and forth to childcare, ... it is a bit military precision to get through the week. (Int 22)

The management of children's lives creates pressure for parents.

Stress and Pressure

The stresses and pressures experienced by families living in poverty take different forms. There are everyday pressures, time pressures, seasonal pressures, and situational pressures.

Everyday pressures

Life is described as inherently stressful by some families (Int 02), with constant money worries impacting on mental health (Int 03). Everyday sources of stress include meeting regular expenses, such as running a car (Int 04), paying for heating (Int 08, 10), paying local taxes (Int 08, 09), subscribing to TV services (Int 08), clothing (Int 10, 19), food (Int 10, 15) and the pressures of meeting all the demands of family life on a low income (Int 15).

... not that we'd have it any other way, because we love our family to pieces, but it can be stressful. ... Just because we don't always show it, doesn't mean that the stress isn't there or the worries aren't there. (Int 02)

... it affected my mental health a little bit because I was just constantly worrying about money and where it was coming from and that, ... it was quite a scary time. (Int 09)

... because I can't do public transport, I must have a car. ... whenever the car tax and the car insurance [are] due. That kind of gets a little bit difficult. If I didn't have to have the car, I don't think I would be as bad. ... Unfortunately, money is the root of everything. (Int 04)

It was literally like living on pennies. [I], would never have any money left and usually have to really scrimp to get through to the end of the month before we would get paid again. Especially ... with gas ... Trying to heat a two-bedroom flat ... because it's quite spacious. It's quite expensive to heat. ... it's definitely hard and ... we've got quite a high council tax and things so there is that as well. (Int 08)

The electric bill is very expensive. That's a serious problem. It's a top up. [she] tops up every two days, ten pounds. (Int 10)

... we are having to cut back on how much heating we're putting on ..., I've got internet and I've got a TV package which I am actually thinking I am going to have to cancel because I just can't afford it. Which is a joke because my son should be able to watch cartoons. Do you know what I mean? (Int 08)

I would say ... on a single income, ... when ... you [are] paying single occupancy council tax and all the rest of it bills ... it ... leaves not very much. (Int 09)

This is for the child's clothes and everyday needs. She's growing up. Yeah, she's growing up and she needs...and now I am talking about this my own daughter she changes sizes every three months [laughs]. And she thinks that before it was cheaper, now the prices are getting quite high. Food as well. (Int 10)

My kids get teased at school because they live in a council house, because their jackets only cost £30 instead of £100. (Int 19)

... as a single parent I find it hugely stressful trying to ... constantly juggle being a good mum and also being a good employee and making sure I've done a food shop and making sure I've got enough money to pay the bills and making sure the boys are thriving, ... I find it a real challenge, pretty stressful. (Int 15)

Time Pressure

Time pressures are often associated with the challenges involved in transporting their children to sites of leisure and sport. These pressures are also experienced by families living in poverty:

When Lauren had all her clubs on the go, it was hectic and ... crazy busy, and you ... think ... at the end of the week when you've ... crammed in so much, 'is this worth it, really?' But when I was being brought up, I had the opportunity to go to everything, like literally everything, and I just wanted to do the same for her. (Int 03)

I'm just a busy sort of ... busy mum non ... non-stop. (Int 12)

Time pressures can be exacerbated by combining work and family life, particularly when for commuters.

I'm really exhausted from all the travelling, ... I was travelling from Aberfeldy to Perth before and really struggling with that, ... mornings are particularly stressful for us. (Int 05)

It can get a little bit, ... what's the word – rushed – but I think that's because those are the days I work until five, but Thursday and Friday I work half three and four – half three on a Thursday and I finish at four on a Friday, so the earlier finishes are more manageable ... during the week it's then a rush for me, because I'm then trying to do tea, laundry, anything that I need to do, housework ... so, yeah, it can be a rush. (Int 09)

Although these time pressures are not exclusive to families experiencing poverty, they are an added strain on lives that are already stressful because of managing everyday life on a tight (and sometimes inadequate) budget.

I would say the busy-ness is hard to manage, because in order for me to develop a good supportive network of friends, I need to be able to give time, of myself, and that's the thing that I find is not really available. ... so, that's hard for me to develop a sort of good support network. (Int 05)

I think as soon as ... 2 o'clock hits every day ... that's when the mad rush starts. ... you know, 2 o'clock until about 6 o'clock every night. It is just absolute mayhem ... making sure that you're in the right place at the right time. ... Time management is always the big kind of stress ... 2 until 5, 6 every night is very stressful ... it can be quite chaotic. (Int 07)

Seasonal Pressures

Seasons bring their own pleasure and opportunities, although they also bring stresses for those managing life on a low income. Many families reported pinch points of pressure at several times of the year.

Birthdays, Christmas, School holidays. Everything is expensive and costs more ... During the summer holidays everything costs more. (Int 17)

... holidays are hard because, ... you want to take them away somewhere just to give them a change of scenery, help educate ... give them a variety in life (Int 05)

Christmas and Birthdays and probably I would say summer holidays as well because the kids are eating more, and you feel pressure as a mum to take them nice places but ... Christmas and birthdays are always a struggle (Int 15)

Christmas and just the approach to Winter when you've got jackets and boots and to kit them out in another wardrobe and then probably again, round about the Springtime. ... because it's another change of wardrobe and ... there just seems to be a lot on from ... April to June. It just seems quite a lot and then you've obviously got the school uniforms and stuff after that. But really, it's one thing after another, after another, after another. It's just constant all the time. The kids are just forever needing something. (Int 20)

Birthdays are a significant event in the family calendar. However, clusters of birthdays (Int 07a) and the challenge of finding funds to meet associated extra expenses are a source of stress and pressure (Int 07b).

Birthdays. ... we have just had a spate of them. ... 40 days we have 3 birthdays. (Int 07a)

Once upon a time back in the day somebody would make a cake and it would be £60 and it would be a big fuss but again that was when they were much younger, and they didn't go through shoes as much or clothes as much when they're very little ... all we need is nappies and wipes. [as they get older] ... you [have the] pressures of making sure they've got clothes that fit because they're growing so much ... you know they're not getting the £60 birthday cake; they're getting the £9 birthday cake from Tesco. ... you try and give them as memorable a birthday as possible and because they're only children and don't really understand finances, you tone it down financially. So, still go out for tea, but the cost is lower. You still get a birthday cake, but it's not singing all dancing. ... my son's birthday treat this year ... I took him off of nursery and I took him to Dundee on the train because he had never been on the train before (Int 07b)

There is now more awareness is that the Summer holiday is a time of additional expense for families, presenting challenges for those on a low income who do not have additional income to meet the additional expenditure that is incurred when a child is not attending school or pre-school provision (Int 07, 19).

I think it's something like 8 weeks this year ... So, I am going to be feeding 4 children for 8 weeks with no rest from it at all. ... from the moment you feed them their breakfast ... as soon as you know the plates are washed it's ... 'what's for lunch?' (Int 07)

... at the moment, they're getting a meal at school, whereas during the summer holidays you're feeding them all day every day, ... mines are so stalky at the moment, the big one is almost 6ft tall and weighs about 15 stone bless him ... that takes a lot to fuel. (Int 19)

For some, summer is a release, when cheap leisure can be found (Int 01) and some of the everyday pressures of managing family life around a structured school and leisure life timetable are relaxed (Int 21). For others, summer is inherently stressful as it intensifies child-raising without the support and release of pre-school or school. (Int 04).

... I can't wait for the summer holidays. ... I don't have to run about everywhere. ... I don't have to rush up in the morning and make sure I've got everything ready, look at what lunches I need to organise, where are we going? Do I need a packed lunch? Have I got time to cook a lunch? What are we doing for dinner? Have I got to do a slow cooker dinner? Am I going to be home? (Int 21)

Summer holidays, ... I just try to find things that are going on for free, or that are really cheap, ... take picnics places, and a few things like that (Int 01)

Me and him are stuck together 24/7 for those 7 weeks and it is hell. ... you've got to try and amuse your child. You can't be ... sitting in the house for seven weeks and just going to the same few parks ... It just kind of does your nut in. ... you have got to try and work out your expenses to make sure you can take them swimming at least once in the month and things like that. (Int 04)

Christmas also presents a significant challenge. Different strategies were adopted to meet the inevitable expense. The focus on Christmas in the interviews was squarely with how the cost would be met.

I try and budget as much as I can, or I max out credit cards that I need to repay for the rest of the year, but I try and start buying early where possible. To be honest I don't buy the boys a lot for their birthdays or Christmases because I've got so [many] family members ... so that kind of bulks up their presents, but ...it is still a stress. ... with ... the extra food and things that's required (Int 15)

Especially as the boys get older and they're obviously looking for more expensive products ... we just need to try and put money away ... I mean we make it work. We just kind of pull everything in really tight and they get the basics, ..., what's needed, not over the top, not always the same as what their friends are getting and things like that. (Int 21)

... the list gets longer [laughs] the older they get – the thing gets smaller, and the price gets higher. ... I put some money aside every month so that I've got some money saved up for Christmas. ... I send the money to my mum [laughs] so that it's safe and I know that ... I can't touch it, 'cause sometimes I would be tempted to, ... use it for something, ... like if the washing machine breaks or whatever, (Int 01)

... my family ... say, "only manage what you can manage" but again it's those external pressures for Santa to come to the little one. But, again, you know, I'm not being silly about it. I'll only get what I can afford and do what I can do, but it's a massive time, because, again, with heating and electricity, you're using more of it and, you know, winter clothes, winter boots, that sort of thing. And ... the return to school after Christmas, the added school uniform expense, ... it's two pinch points that make money more of an issue. (Int 09)

... obviously Christmas and times like that, are more stressful.

And how do you manage that?

not very well [laughs]. It's difficult, aye (Int 14)

Situational stress

Added to the everyday stresses, and the regular calendar stresses, are exceptional situations that are challenging to manage, such as appliances breaking (Int 01, 14), moving house (Int 07) or unexpectedly high bills (Int 14). Budgetary pressures were also impacting adversely on the quality and nutritional content of meals (Int 07).

... we did have the washing machine break and I think we also had the freezer break, ... one of the times I got an advance from Universal Credit and paid it off over six months, I think ... and then the other time, ... my mum and dad put it on ... buy now and pay it in 12 months sort of thing, and I just paid it back over that time. (Int 01)

The process of moving in was the absolute hardest time. That really was ... well we're not going to buy a £4 pack of mince. It is going to be beans on toast, it is going to be noodles with hot dogs through it. It is just going to be food to keep you [functioning], as opposed to nutritional content. (Int 07)

... a bill for the gas heating ... was a sudden expense that ... put us in ... arrears ... every kind of event that is ... unexpected, ... that there's an extra expenditure on something, and like the freezer or the washing machine or another one breaks down, that's ... when we ... need to ask for extra help with the money, because we are not getting enough ... to be able to set some aside. (Int 14)

The Importance of Family

Receiving informal support from family is commonplace. However, this support is often critical to enable families experiencing poverty to function, a necessity rather than an extra (going beyond making life a little easier and enabling families to thrive).

The key contributions of parents are childcare (Int 09, 18, 02), transportation (Int 01), financial support (Int 14, 18) and providing accommodation (Int 18).

Luckily, I do have family, so I use them as childcare when I need to. (Int 09)

I drop Harry at my dad's – not every day, just sporadically because I've got my own cleaning business, so, ... I go off and do a couple of hours here and there and then I pick Harry back up in time for getting the girls back. (Int 18)

... we're quite lucky – granny lives halfway. So, if we're not getting the bus that day, we can always stop off at granny's and they can get some juice and granny spoils them. (Int 02)

My parents drive and have a big car, ... so if we need to go some place that's not ... easily on the bus route, then they'll usually take us. And they take me on a Sunday to go shopping to Aldi and Lidl so that I'm not having to hoof it all back on the bus. (Int 01)

They [benefits] barely cover the cost of living so we, we quite often have to reach out to the family. (Int 14)

...we moved in with my parents, and then we just started looking for a flat ... for me and the boys, ... because ... my parents are older, and they have savings ... they were able to help with the deposit and stuff ... so I didn't need to be on the council housing list. (Int 18)

Those without family support lamented its loss (Int 03) and observed or suggested that life was more difficult without this assistance (Int 03, 04).

My dad died a few years ago and I don't have any contact with my mum so it's literally just me winging it constantly (Laughs). (Int 03)

I have no family support at all. ... it's me and him against the world. There's nobody else for us. ... There is an awful lot of us that have got no family around about us. ... We don't seem to get acknowledged or catered to very much. Like for a normal family where there's a partner or grandparents involved. Life is so much easier for them. But for people that are all by themselves, with nobody else ... life isn't very easy at all. It is a lot harder and a lot more restrictive. (Int 04)

Some families were not presented as a regular source of support but were able to be drawn upon in difficult situations, or emergencies.

I've got my mum and dad, they are, ... two minutes up the road. My brother and his girlfriend are two minutes up the road, and I have a brother-in-law who is ten minutes along the road ... as an emergency backup. (Int 09)

We have a lot of family in the area. I've got my mum and dad, my brother and sister-in-law ... so, I do have quite a lot of family near me. ... they all work full-time, are all key workers. ... so, they don't have a huge amount of time for you know ... socialising or spending time with the kids. But you know they are about in the case of an emergency. (Int 07)

We don't have very close relationship with them. It's more occasional, you know, for ... birthdays or family events. ... I think that maybe if it was some sort of a drastic situation, I think they would help us, but aside from that, we don't have family. (Int 13)

There is also a desire among some not to draw too heavily on family support, aiming to be independent and not reliant on others.

... my mum, she always made sure that I was alright, but it was that way that they're already doing so much for me, you know, it's your pride and because you've got everything else going on in your mind at that time, I think, you know, amongst a break-up like that, it was very difficult and the amount of times I thought "should I reach out?" and I just didn't. (Int 09)

I know I will definitely have my mum and that to fall back on, but I don't want to, do you know what I mean? I'm very independent. (Int 12)

Access to Car

In more rural parts of the region, the private car was presented as a necessity to access services, work, and opportunities for children (Int 20, 15, 21). Maintaining a car came at cost (Int 16, 05, 11), and there was sometimes a vulnerability associated with this (Int 11).

I live a bit away from the school and from where, ... their social lives and their activities are ... with their friends and stuff. It's not doable if I didn't have a car. (Int 20)

I feel very grateful that I have a car and it's easy for me to take the kids to Crieff, but I know other parents who don't have a car and it's practically impossible because the bus service in and out of Comrie is fairly poor. (Int 15)

It's just something that we manage. So, ... getting between places, ... is the thing you need. ... we need two cars. We definitely need to have two cars. ... I suppose that's one downside, we can't manage with just one car. I work one direction; my partner works the other direction. Doing drops offs and things, the timings just don't work out. We've got to be two places at once. (Int 21)

It's quite a lot of driving. ... I actually sat down one day and ... worked out how many hours a week I spent. ... and that's just their regular week activities and in terms of either driving them there or sitting in the car waiting on them coming out, it was like over 20 hours a week (Int 16)

I would love for her to have continued with these activities, but we all agreed ... that those extra drives, ... were just exhausting really. (Int 05)

... at the moment I'm actually waiting on the engine blowing up, I've been told it's something like £150 to get it fixed, so I don't take my son or my grandkids in the car because I know that it could break down at any minute, but I need it to go back and forward to work. ... If I'm not working it could go for weeks and weeks without me going anywhere in it because I can't afford the petrol to go to anywhere (Int 11)

Cash First Works Best

There are various ways in which needs can be met. Income can be earned, informal support can be drawn upon, and public services can provide. Much of the anti-poverty sector prefers 'cash-first' approaches to public provision in which families are given funds to access goods and services, rather than provided with vouchers, goods in-kind or passes to access specific services.

I get forty pounds, ... that's been a big help – even forty pounds a month has been a big help with Harry. ... there [have] been other things. ... I got money for the school dinners for Alison and Pauline, ... and that worked out at about twenty pounds a week extra, so that was a massive help. Especially with them when they're in the house they eat you out of house and home! ... you're ... pretty much feeding children all day until the night. (Int 18)

The council do give you £150 towards that [school uniform]. And how far does that go? Well, luckily enough we didn't have to buy a school bag. ... or new pencils and things like that. ... we did have to get the gym kit. So, we got, ... 4 jumpers, (4) shirts, a packet of shirts ...4 trousers, and then 2 pairs of trainers and ... I think I even managed to get him a wee treat ... as well. Because I managed to get the prices right. (Int 04)

Cash-first approaches are thought to be dignified, promoting choice, and removing (or at least reducing) stigma. Residents who had received additional cash payments during Covid-times praised this approach.

Although not strictly cash-first, there was also some support for vouchers. In effect, when there are limited options for local shopping (such as in many parts of rural Perthshire), a voucher for a specified store was not welcomed and was not perceived to be an unnecessary or limiting restriction.

I was in receipt of Sainsbury's vouchers ... the strain that that took off people was massive, absolutely massive, ... it meant you could get your fruit and veg ... I was going and spending £40 and that was only getting me, milk, bread, and fruit and veg for the week. (Int 20)

Work

Not being in paid employment was not an indication of a desire not to work. Most of those in this situation explained that they would like to be in paid work if the situation allowed.

I did have a job, but my daughter struggle[d] so much at home without me being there that I had to literally leave my job and be full time with [her]. (Int 06)

I lost my job last March, just two weeks before lockdown. ... I've always worked, so it was a bit of a shock. (Int 09)
It is really hard. ... Not a lot of people understand how hard it can be. Me and David both want to work, but because of circumstances we can't go and work. (Int 02)

There's just me and my 7-year-old erm ... and I am diagnosed as ADHD ... there's just the two of us and I don't work because of my mental health. (Int 04)

Since I have been in Perth I have not been employed and I would have quite liked to have been. ... as much as I have a lot of children ... and being a mum is wonderful ... I have a brain in my head somewhere, it would be nice to use it sometimes. (Int 07)

I've got to get my youngest to and from school. ... he's just not ... mature enough to be left to go to school and to come home on his own and I don't drive, so ... finding a job where I can travel there, do the job, and travel back within school times is a bit tricky. (Int 01)

Obviously with the baby we want to spend as much time as we can together ... there will be certain things I will not be able to do, like, working nights is ... unsuitable for me at the moment because I won't be able to get any rest when I get back home in the morning I used to work at night, which I quite enjoyed ... bar work as well ... getting three 'til eleven shifts is not suitable anymore, especially with the buses as well, because there's no bus after eleven o'clock. (Int 14)

I did go to university ... and I have a few different NVQs ... when I've tried to apply for ... say, a shop assistant role, they think that I'm not going to stay, that I'd be looking for something better and I'm not successful. ... Whereas, realistically, the hours that I am ... available to work ... that sort of job would suit me quite well. (Int 01)

I wouldn't realistically, at the moment be able to look after 4 kids, keep a house, study full time and work ... maybe, I could get a wee job over the summer holidays but there's no way that I would be able to fund childcare, because I've got 4 children, I only get help with 2 kids, so I would still have to fund childcare for 2 ... I need a bit of a break as well, I need to have time with my kids. (Int 20)

It all ... comes down to cost, obviously I would rather be working and use a childminder than not ... be working but, sometimes, you can't actually afford to work, it's too expensive. (Int 20)

I just want to get back into work but it's trying to work around nursery and everything else. It's a bit of a nightmare... (Int 08)

Childcare challenges did not only prevent some from entering paid employment; it also shaped and limited the options of those who were in paid employment.

... we always made sure childcare was in place before I started working. (Int 21)

My youngest goes to nursery soon. I'll be looking at ... more hours ... for work. (Int 03)

One summer I had to work, and James had to go stay with his dad's family ... for three weeks, but then you do all that work and have extra money, but we couldn't benefit from it by spending time together because James had to go away 'cause I was working. (Int 17)

It is quite a challenge ... my wife can only really work two days a week because there's no wrap around after-school care for our kids ... we are able to get some friends to help and step in a couple days a week, but we can't rely on that for more than that so that's the main reason my wife works part time at the moment. (Int 22)

If you're a single parent the best job you can get is in a school kitchen, so if it comes up snatch it up if its offered, because you get all the school holidays and things. (Int 22)

I had to stop working full time once we had the little one. ... before I had her, when I was pregnant, I was working full time. I was doing a Monday-Friday job and I was coaching in the evenings and at weekends. (Int 21)

There hasn't been anywhere for the kids to go before school, and that's how I've gone self-employed as well, so that I can work round the kids' hours. (Int 18)

I got one [job] ... but like the youngest got sick in the first week that I worked there and basically because of that they tried to push me out as quickly as possible. (Int 19)

I know that most of my friends and my kids' friends have one parent that is working part time or is [on] flexible home work because they can't do pick-ups, drop offs, those sorts of things for the school hours. So that's the sort of big downside. (Int 22)

Getting a job in school hours is really hard. No one wants to be flexible. (Int 17)

Those with experience of working with job coaches tended not to be speak highly of this 'support', describing it to be a stress on their life.

... it is so stressful ... when they're constantly saying ... you have to be working this many hours, you have to be earning this much money, and constantly ... phoning to get you to justify yourself ... it's frustrating ... (Int 22)

It's not so much difficult times of day, it's difficult situations ... when I have had a job, and one of the kids has been off sick or something and my sister hasn't been able to look after them, the stress that it puts on you ... so I ended up not working because I couldn't handle working while I had the kids on my own ... those stresses aren't around at the moment apart from the fact that there's the job centre (Int 19)

Low intensity and irregular work were welcomed. These 'flexible' arrangements are not first preferences; rather, they are welcomed given constraints on labour market participation, in particular accessing childcare, and travel and transport.

I usually [work] about three hours a month ... just when the paperwork needs ... collated and the invoicing needs done at the end of the month. ... its minimal ... it may be more next month - who knows? They're quite laid back ... you literally get an email when it needs done the next day and I'm like, "okay cool, that's great". A little bit more notice would've been fine but ... on average, it's three hours per month. (Int 03)

[I'm] doing supply work just now, so I just pick it up if and when there's supply in our local area. (Int 11)

I work two days a week from home doing ... admin for a charitable organisation. ... that fits in quite nicely. (Int 16)

For many parents experiencing poverty, the income that is earned from employment is welcomed. However, some parents noted that there were benefits - familial (02), financial (Int 05, 09, 15, 21), and wellbeing (Int 05, 08) - from not working, or working less (Int 05, 09). Others noted that they would not be worse off, if they were not working (although not necessarily better off) (Int 11, 15).

I do want to go back to work, but I'd rather wait until the youngest is in nursery because I just, I don't want to lose too much time with them, if that makes sense? (Int 02)
Just cutting out the stress from having to get to work for nine o'clock, has made a huge difference, ... I was spending a lot of money driving to Perth ... because I've got so much going on, [and] I'm not the most organised, ... I would then have to eat in the cafeteria, so, it would cost me a lot of money. ... So, it's been better financially [not working], but also giving me that little bit of space. I'm here for the girls when they get home on those days, which makes a huge difference. (Int 05)

So, it actually saved money with me not working ... because he was going to afterschool care ... when we were both working. So, we kind of saved a lot of money from [children not going to] breakfast club, from after school club with me not working those hours. (Int 21)

... it gets to the stage ... the money you spend on breakfast clubs and after school clubs and childminding - does it make it worth working? Often not. ... The cost of childcare is often more than what you would earn an hour for two kids. (Int 15)

... you then realise that a lot of the benefits, like, ... uniform benefit, or school dinners, [can only be accessed if you] ... earn less than this amount. ... Because I'm out of the threshold [earning above the threshold] then the cost of living is so much more. (Int 09)

I don't think it's worth my while travelling 12 miles ... every day for a job that's not much more than minimum wage. (Int 11)

... when I was just working one job, I really struggled financially ... I was struggling ... I didn't have food quite a bit, so that was really hard, and that's why I took on the second post, because I knew that I needed to do something, ... there's a cost to working. ... I feel more exhausted ... it's almost like I feel like I'm being pulled down just by the tiredness, so that's a huge stress factor for me really, because I'm working so much to make sure that I can cover my bills. I don't want to be working to this level forever [laughs]. I really don't think I physically could ... because it's impacted on my health, you know, I've put a lot of weight on, just as a result of not being physically active, but active in a different way. (Int 05)

I've got maybe 2 or 3 friends now, but they work 24/7 so, we don't really see each another. (Int 08)

Cost of living

The cost of living was noted as a problem, particularly for those living in more rural parts of the region. Transport costs were high (Int 11, 17), but most concerns were raised at the cost of feeding the family.

The shops are all expensive 'cause it's a small place, ... if you try to get petrol its 12 pence a litre or more than it is if you drive 15 miles [away] (Int 11)

High cost of food was attributed to rural gentrification pushing up costs for low-income households (Int 17) and the lack of affordable supermarkets (Int 20, 19, 14, 15, 12).

Lots of new people have moved in and many of them have a lot of money and its become a bit 'posh'. I love it – I love living here, but it can be a bit pretentious. I mean you can buy three different types of lettuce, but you can't buy an iceberg lettuce because that's too ordinary. (Int 17)

I really feel like it should be the responsibility of the council of trying to attract ... more affordable supermarkets. I think that would revolutionise people's lives in this area, 100%. That would be the biggest thing. (Int 20)

... the Co-op is quite close, so I do more daily trips, but you are basically buying the things that are on offer, because the full price things are ridiculous (Int 19)

... if you want to shop for small items then you can go local which is quite expensive (Int 14)

shopping can be expensive, you know if you need bread and milk, you're using the local down the street, which is a lot compared to the likes of being able to go to Tesco or Asda, or even Aldi in Crieff (Int 15)

... then you think, 'oh, there's a ... shop around the corner ... we could ... go there', but then, you know, it's too expensive and it's not as nice, you know. (Int 12)

The cost of food was more than an inconvenience to some; it was a source of worry (Int 12), which led some to draw on community sources of food support.

My fear is [that] ... the price of food etc. has gone up and quite dramatically, ... it is quite worrying ... if I'll be able to afford it. (Int 12)

We have one week out the month when we struggle a wee bit and that's where we use the food bank. (Int 02)

When I was off work, mum and stepdad paid my bills when I was really ill. They made sure Jack was looked after and I was fed. ... you're supposed to be a grown up and yet they still have to help you out. I had to use the foodbanks. (Int 17)

There has been quite a lot of time where I have really really struggled ... [because of] the stigma around food banks, I've never ever applied for it because I didn't want to have to go somewhere where I would know the people ... Once while I was at college, they helped me out and I got one from a ... food bank. But ... over ... many years I have struggled with having just the basics. (Int 11)

Food banks were serving an essential function in feeding families when they were at their most vulnerable. In recent times, the range of interventions to tackle food poverty has increased to include larders, community food hubs, and pantries, while demand for their services has increased.

Because of COVID, they've opened up a community hub where you can go and get, ... bits and pieces, a bit like the foodbank, but it's opened every day and you don't need a referral for things like that. (Int 02)

They use two local disused telephone boxes which volunteers stock each day with donations for the food bank so people can come and help themselves from the telephone box, ... it is being used more and more. From the start of the pandemic, it has increased two or three times, the stocking has to take place far more regularly now. (Int 22)

... just turned a telephone box into a food larder for everybody. It wasn't just for those ... in need; it was for everyone. ... If you feel like going along and getting a bar of chocolate, you had to take something, but you had to leave something at the same time. (Int 21)

... they took me shopping. It was really hard because it's really embarrassing ... I thought it was obvious, so I was quite embarrassed ... but it was really good also, because I was able to get ... enough to totally feed the kids. (Int 05)

... I noticed that a lot of people didn't actually know ... what Food for Thought was ... A lot of people, ... thought it was, ... just like a food bank rather than somewhere you can go in and just pay like a donation, ... and get what you sort of need. (Int 12)

Luckily enough my child doesn't eat massive amounts of expensive food. ... I didn't have to resort to the food bank although I did think I might have to. Because we are both as particular as we are ... we can't really go for the food bank because you just ... get whatever is available and not specific items. (Int 04)

The gentleman explained that basically you would be asked lots of questions and, you know, "Why do you need help this month, blah blah blah blah blah", and I ... feel ... you know, sometimes that's hard to explain, ... because obviously some things come up that are unexpected (Int 12)

In addition to drawing on the support of family and community interventions to tackle food poverty, a range of strategies were deployed within the family to tackle food poverty. This included bulk buying (Int 02), shopping at affordable supermarkets (Int 01), getting fed at work (Int 09), or at parents (Int 09, 07) doing without (Int 05, 08, 11), being very careful about purchases in-store (Int 18, 07), selling household wares to buy food (Int 08) and rationing food stocks (Int 08).

Once a month, we do ... a big, massive shop, so when I go down and do the big, massive shop, I would get a taxi home with that. (Int 02)

My parents drive and have a big car ... And they take me on a Sunday to go shopping to Aldi and Lidl so that I'm not having to hoof it all back on the bus. (Int 01)

I got my meals provided at work and the little one was at my parents, so she got fed and that took a little pressure off. (Int 09)

I think ... the boys can go to my mums two nights. (They can go Tuesday and Thursday) for tea so, that's one less meal you need to worry about. (Int 07)

I didn't have food quite a bit, so that was really hard, and that's why I took on the second post, because I knew that I needed to do something. (Int 05)

A lot of the time I don't eat during the week, during the day. ... on weeks that we're really struggling, I would only eat at dinner time. And it would be relatively cheap things. (Int 11)

He [son] has never, ever, ever gone without food. Never once. ... but there [are] times where I have ... there is enough for me, but I will not eat so that there is plenty or so there's extra for a few more days or whatever. ... or I will have to go and sell something from the house to be able to get something like get a food shop (Int 08)

Although it's not at the point where any of us are going to starve ... you're buying ... formula, toilet roll, mince, pasta, ... chopped tomatoes, your fruit and veg. ... We don't smoke or drink you know. (Int 18)

... the process of moving in was the absolute hardest time. That really was... well we're not going to buy a £4 pack of mince! It is going to be beans on toast, it is going to be noodles with hot dogs through it. It is just going to be food to keep you [full] as opposed to nutritional content. (Int 07)

If I was to go to Tesco, I know that I'd fill up my trolley and I would be over budget because ... you just put things in so... you sit and write out what you need and what the meals are going to be ... It's that constant - having to write lists, do meal plans to make sure that you are not going to go over ... it may not be a huge worry that I am not going to have enough money, but it's a lot of work to actually [achieve this] within a budget. (Int 07)

I think there was one point I ... had to try and make do with what we had for a full month and that wasn't much ... we had no milk for ages or bread ... luckily, we had toilet roll ... yeah, we had to live off baked beans and noodles a lot of the time. It wasn't, It wasn't great. (Int 08)

Conclusion

Life can be a struggle for families experiencing poverty in Perth and Kinross. Some intense experiences of poverty are encountered at stress points. However, there is a backdrop of a stressful existence faced with the challenge of navigating everyday issues and concerns.

4. Priority Groups and Family Poverty in Perth and Kinross

It's been really hard. I felt awful when I was a single mum at primary school. I looked really young, and people didn't talk to me. People think you are a certain way if you are a single mum. The other parents were older than me – in their mid to late 30s – I was in my early 20s – one mum wouldn't let her child play with my son because I was a single parent. People expect you to be a certain way and make judgements. I used to try hard to prove that I was okay. I washed my son's clothes every day and felt that he had to be like clean and well turned out ... but I felt like they were looking at me (Int 17)

Introduction

It is equally important to tackle the poverty experienced by all families. However, the Child Poverty Delivery Plan of the Scottish Government identified six priority groups, which together account for the bulk of child poverty in Scotland. These are:

- Lone parents
- Large families
- Mothers aged under 25
- Children aged under 1
- Minority ethnic households
- Families with a disabled person

The Local Child Poverty Action Report for Perth and Kinross – as with every other report for each local authority in Scotland – is expected to reflect on how local actions impact on the poverty experienced by each of these six groups. In this section of the report, we identify the way in which poverty impacts on four of the six priority groups.

Lone parents

Lone parents reported many challenges in relation to paid work: they reported pressures of combining work and parenting (Int 04a), the attitudes (and poor practices) of some employers (Int 09), and restricted options for work (Int 04b, 19).

I think working and being a full-time mum is a doubly hard job, ... they encourage you to work all this time, but ... you need to be there for your kids ... because your kids need a parent or carer there. (Int 04)

... being a woman, and being a mum does ... come into effect ... I've had that in a job interview last year before lockdown, and he said "oh, what do you do if your child is ill then?" And I said "Well, I'm lucky enough that my parents, ... are on hand." ... that's where childcare could be flexible. ... would I do with this child because I'm a single parent. So, having a guaranteed flexible childcare would be a big thing. (Int 09)

... being a single parent with no family support ... weekend work or night-time work is completely out of the question. (Int 04b)

If you're a single parent, the best job you can get is in a school kitchen. ... because you get all the school holidays and things. (Int 19)

Some lone parents also reported limited opportunities to meet their own needs (Int 04), with pressures on their own time (Int 17) and difficulties accessing childcare support (Int 04).

I was volunteering ... until recently but when I got full time hours I had to stop as it was too much. ... I really liked it, but you can't do everything, as a single mum – working, all the running about, and keeping the house clean and everything it's too much. (Int 17)

... because I'm on my own I tend to avoid doing anything that's fun for me. ... because obviously it's hard, it's harder for me to get a babysitter. (Int 04)

Minority ethnic households

Minority ethnic families reported mixed experiences of their interactions within the wider community and with schools. Less positive experiences were reported from travelling families (Int 06a, 06b), in contrast to those reported from migrants (Int 10).

... My kids' teacher was really good with them. The head teacher was really good with them ... it's not really the teachers, it's more the parents. ... the teachers were asking some of the kids' parents to ask the kids to apologise for called Jimmy a gypsy, and the parents were just refusing to do it, like "No, my son's not apologising because he is a gypsy. (Int 06)

The school did try their best, ... because the school was quite good with the kids, but the racism [from other children] was just absolutely unbelievable. (Int 06b)

[My] daughter feels very well at this school, ... they are very friendly with foreigners – with immigrants. (Int 10)

It was argued that more understanding of minority groups was needed, and that services to support their needs could be improved. Migrant families discussed being dependent on key friends or community connections to navigate challenges. Lack of clarity on issues such as entitlements in times of crisis, added to the worries of those who were on Universal Credit. Additionally, migrant populations shared concerns around the impacts of Brexit and how this would shape access to services such as ESOL classes.

I think it could work better if the council would just employ ... people that were trained better to deal with travellers. (Int 06)

... there's constantly pressure on them [travellers] not to be in campsites. They put pressure on people not to live in certain places, and when you try and live in a house, they also put pressure on you. ... that's the message I would say to anybody in power, to basically just get people in Housing a little bit better trained. (Int 06)

[we need] A place for the foreigners, especially for single mums. ... a place where they can share their problems ... and help each other. ... it would be good to have a place where there are people with multiple languages who would be able to speak about getting help, especially at the beginning, just to be able to get help ... especially the single mums who need help, who have just arrived in the country. (Int 10)

Large households

The specific challenges reported by large families included the additional stress that is borne by the stay-at-home parent at the times when the other parent must maximise their income by making themselves available for work (Int 06), the high bills that result from high demand on goods and services (Int 13a), and the need to live in a large property that incurs a higher Council Tax on account of the value of the property (Int 13b).

... it was only seasonal work, so he had to do that [work] right over Christmas ... it was quite a struggle because we've got so many kids in the house. So, that's usually tough. (Int 06)

... our gas is incredibly expensive. (Int 13a)

... we are shocked that, ... given ... the size of our family, we have to pay such high council tax. (Int 13b)

Families with a disabled child or adult

As with lone parents (who had to juggle the demands of work and family life alone), disabled parents also reported how managing disability presented challenges engaging in paid work (Int 02, 04, 06).

... I would love to go back to work, but because of my hearing there would only be certain jobs I would actually be able to do. ... It's trying to explain that to the job centre as well, because when I was a job seeker before, it was quite hard for them to understand that I am hard of hearing. I do wear hearing aids, but ... I couldn't work in a busy shop because I wouldn't always hear the customer, or if it was a call centre ... I would sometimes need an adjustment and ... some places aren't willing to do the adjustments for people. (Int 02)

... although I would really like to get a Saturday job, I can't get one if people are wearing perfumes or sprays because I'll get sick and offend everybody. (Int 04)

I had to literally leave my job and be full time with Hester. (Int 06)

On the other hand, positive instances were recounted when those providing services understood the situation and were able and willing to adapt provision to accommodate need (Int 16, both examples).

... she completely understood autism. She completely understood what I was trying to say when I was being clumsy with my words. She knew what it was I was actually trying to say because she's so familiar with autism she knew exactly what it was I meant. ... She was fantastic, and she said to me right at the start, "Is your son going to be able to talk to me? Or is that just too much for him?" I was like, "There's no way he will talk to you, he cannot handle speaking on the phone or having a conversation with a stranger", and she said, "That's fine. In that case I'll speak to you, and you answer the questions and that's not a problem and I don't even need to say hello to him". Like nothing at all. She was brilliant, she was absolutely fantastic. ... I know autistic families in the area where their child has gone to their one-to-one interview and the person has actually taken them by the shoulders and stared them right in the face and said, "I want you to look in to my eyes when I'm speaking to you. Make eye contact when I am speaking to you", and I'm like wow! That's an autistic child, you can't do that! (Int 16)

I contacted the lecturer [explaining that they did not have the entry requirements and they did not have the skills to handle an entrance interview]. ... He came back to me, and he said, "yep, we'd have both of the boys without hesitation, we can completely wave entry requirements and we would wave the need for interview as well. If you put in an application, they will both be accepted". So, we put in applications, and they got conditional offers for both courses. (Int 16)

Financial concerns – future (Int 16) and contemporary (Int 08) were also concerns for families with disabled parents or children. In these instances, lack of income and heightened everyday costs result directly from managing disability.

I think a big concern is actually what happens financially for us when all three kids have left education. ... just because the boys have left education or left non advanced education, it doesn't necessarily mean they no longer require my help or my input or my support. I don't know if I will ever be in a position - well certainly, I can't see in the next five or six years anyway - I don't see myself in a position where I can work full time because they're still going to need me for at least part of the week to help them with some stuff But ... I'll not get Universal Credit. ... and so, there is a bit of stress about how am I going to actually be able to make all of that work? ... How am I going to be able to pay the bills and support the boys for as long as they need my support? (Int 16)

I mean I try my best to walk everywhere ... I can't do buses with my anxiety ... and taxis are extortionate (Int 08)

The challenges of supporting children with more complex disabilities are also more demanding for their parents, drawing more heavily on their time and resources (Int 16, 07).

[Child] wouldn't cope with taking the bus on their own. They would need somebody to go with them and help them with that. ... If it's a choice between me sitting on a bus for an hour and a half keeping them company or me driving in half an hour, I'll just drive. It's easier. (Int 16)

... one of my son's has limited understanding and comprehension of things ... Lots of communication with the children, even though they are young. ... being ... well prepared during the day ... making sure the housework is always done. ... so that ... if you do get stuck in traffic, if something does go monumentally wrong or if a child becomes unwell ... it's making sure that when you've got that down time, you keep on top of everything else ... to make sure that everything runs as smoothly as possible. Ultimately it never does. (Int 07)

Concerns were also expressed that generic communication – delivered with the best of intentions – were causing concerns for some disabled children who were not well placed to handle this information. This is indicative of a lack of consideration being given to the specific needs of children (Int 11).

For families with disabled children, poverty both exacerbates the challenges that disability presents, and results directly from their inability to earn sufficient income, because of managing disability in the household.

Conclusion

Experiences were mixed for those from the priority groups, with some examples of good service, empathetic professionals, and effective practice. However, there were also reports that reflected less well on services, staff and the wider public, suggesting that more needs to be done to accommodate the needs of families from the priority groups.

5. Service User Experiences of Families Living in Poverty in Perth and Kinross

I think ... the people that ... work in the council just think they're better than anybody else. (Int 06)

Introduction

One key objective of the research was to understand how families living in poverty experienced services in Perth and Kinross. In the following section of the report, we consider issues pertaining to specific services. In this section, we are not concerned with service-specific issues. Rather, we consider how services are reported to operate and how services are received by families living in poverty in the region. For each overarching theme, we explore sub-themes that emerged from the interviews.

How Services Are Operating

Cross-referral

There were many examples of cross-referral, within and across organisations and sectors. These referrals were viewed positively, rather than representing a moving on of workload away from the referring organisation.

... she's been the health visitor for all three children, and she made a point of keeping in touch with us, 'cause she said that she could try and help us with a house, ..., like she would put in a letter of support for us. (Int 02)

I think it was through the job centre [that] I got the ... link to the website (Int 01)

... Women's Aid helps me out with that as well and they have advised me to speak to welfare rights. (Int 04)

... when my youngest was at Tiny Tots, we did the massage classes as ... part of the family learning ... It was our health visitor [who] recommended it for us and it was fab. (Int 03)

And how did you find out about the Parent to Parent?

I think it was through my health visitor at the time. (Int 07)

... now that lockdown is starting to ease up, she [social worker] is trying to help me with more things. ... getting out to groups and things like that, and to get help with my son and help my mental health and things like that. (Int 08)

However, while there many examples of cross-referrals working well, there were other instances when it was perceived to be a form of inaction (Int 27a, 27b), or when it was lacking (Int 17), sometimes considered to be a result of staff not knowing enough to support them (Int 03).

Our local area housing officer is lovely, but ... I feel like you get passed from pillar to post a lot. You know, it's like, contact maintenance about this but then maintenance isn't going to do anything for another year because of a backlog or ... go and see allocations about getting moved ... but they can't tell you anything about what's available. Yeah, nobody seems to want to fix problems. (Int 20)

... it's six weeks down the line and not one thing has changed. They've made the phone calls, you know, the staff have put the work in, but there's been no change in relation to anything so ... I don't think the staff have the powers ... There are too many departments [in PKC], and nobody is speaking to each other. (Int 20)

And you weren't directed to Citizens Advice or Income Maximisation or anything like that?

No. Just basically sent on my way crying out the building (Pullar House, PKC) ... like, "what the hell am I supposed to do?" (Int 17)

... maybe keeping the communications better, ... when you're in the hospital and you've got your midwife, or you've got your health visitor. I think they need to be sort of more clued up on all the stuff that's available I think it's just [the] luck of the draw. ... I had a really really good health visitor who knew everything, and she could tell me stuff. (Int 03)

Key individuals offering critical support

It was often a key individual that was making the cross-referrals. In the case of the health visitor referred to above (Int 02), this key source of support was sustained, with the referral to others suggested where the advice and support required extended beyond their immediate domain of expertise.

More generally, there were many examples of key individuals who offered critical support, either within their formal professional role (Int 08, 04), or informally (Int 10, 17, 18).

... he has got a problem with anger issues. So, we have got a social worker that comes and helps and she's amazing. ... but then there's other people in the Social Work that can be quite hard to deal with ... the nursery [is] amazing ...extremely helpful and very supportive. (Int 08)

... when she was off sick ... life got a bit more difficult. But ... I didn't phone up to ask for anybody else because I have got a good relationship with her. You know, building a relationship with somebody when you have gone through a dramatic time ... It makes a massive difference. (Int 04)

It's difficult. It's very hard. So, I have an acquaintance in England – an old lady. And this lady helps very much. She helps me with my English and starting college. (Int 10)

Then I met a friend, and he was out of work too and we got chatting and he cooks for us, and I cook for him. We sort of help each other. (Int 17)

...my friend is absolutely clueless as to what she's been entitled to. She's had help available to her, but she doesn't feel very savvy ... there's been lots of stuff where I've been like, "Kelly, you should be getting your school dinner money direct to your bank, and you should be doing this and that". I've set her up on the same account as I've got with the council, but she's just ... got a mind block to it all. (Int 18)

These key sources of support are highly valued, although as the experience of Int 04 above illustrates, dependency on an individual can restrict access to a service when that key source of support is not available. Not all key contacts offer personalised support, as the following extract illustrates (Int 14). Knowing people's circumstance is a pre-requisite for effective support (Int 14). Key contacts should be well placed to uncover what is hidden (such as a non-diagnosed characteristic that impacts on how life is negotiated – for example, Int 01) and should help avoid some of the frustrations that result from starting afresh with new contacts (Int 03).

... So, I've got my work coach with the job centre in Perth and he's coming up with all different things that I can do ... like training and opportunities.

And are the opportunities generally suitable?

Generally, not. ... a lot of the opportunities are for people who are able to drive. I'm not driving, and, ... that's limiting my options quite a lot because there's been a lot of training opportunities that ... require the person to be a driver (Int 14)

I don't have like any formal diagnosis – I'm just a ... nervous wee person sometimes. ... So, no, I haven't said anything about it. (Int 01)

I've not seen the same person. It's always been somebody different ... you're starting from ... day one and [have to] explain everything again. (Int 03)

The Council, key departments, and individual staff

There was much evidence of staff being praised for the service provided, but also some cases where staff were thought capable of providing better service. It was more common for individual staff (or departments) to be praised, rather than "the Council" as a whole. This is demonstrated in the following examples where Council employees (delivering the Council service) are praised, while the wider organisation is criticised.

They helped me get the kids in school. Any struggles or problems we've had. I mean, they're very, very good with the children ... my case worker comes out here [and] basically ... deals with ... the family as a whole ... social work ... are basically here to help us, whereas the Council are basically here just to ... make your life a living hell and [are] doing it constantly. (Int 06)

... she's ... getting assessed for dyslexia. Her school made sure that she [could] go in during home schooling {lockdown}. ... I was struggling to home school ... because obviously I'm not a trained school teacher, then she was going in one day a week, or an afternoon a week, ... [the school] have been absolutely amazing. But that's a credit to those teaching staff. Not to the Council. (Int 18)

Third Sector

The services and support upon which people experiencing poverty in Perth and Kinross draw is not limited to PKC. Rather, a range of specialist Third Sector providers were acknowledged for the critical support provided.

Women's Aid, they contacted me and said, "we've heard you've had problems and the police have referred you". They have been an absolute godsend in my life. ... she comes in and she helps me. When it comes to forms. ... I ... need her ... Callum really enjoys swimming. Women's Aid got me one of those 12 week passes so that I could afford to keep taking him swimming. So, it only cost me a £1 a time ... Women's Aid [is] amazing. (Int 04)

I was in a flat, and it had absolutely no furniture and they [Women's Aid] helped me source a lot of free stuff. And then I moved into a flat and they helped me apply for the Scottish Welfare Fund and get bits and pieces. (Int 15)

... we get supported by Perth Autism ... [they] help me with ... application forms. (Int 16)

I wasn't functioning at the time, so they probably saved me ... I was very, very depressed, very isolated, ... I not only got that support, but they also ... mentored me as well, ... a lady would come take the girls and I out for coffee and cake, ... just things like that. ... it was really nice, because I wouldn't have been able to do that, and I had a huge feeling of guilt about not being able to provide for the girls. (Int 05)

I'm not good with paperwork. ... she phoned them up and pretty much got them to speak to me and I ... just did it over the phone. But I didn't know. I wouldn't have known otherwise that I could have done it over the phone if it wasn't for her telling me. (Int 08)

There's an organisation called Parent to Parent that we deal with. ... that's parents who have had children with additional support needs. ... They have ... raised their children and then go onto support other parents ... you know they're not doing it for the wage at the end of the month. They're doing it so other parents don't struggle ... As much as it's generally for children with additional support needs, it is just a parent to parent... If you have a (neurotypical) child and you struggle, they will support you. ... They've literally seen it all. ... If you need to know... what benefits to get or a good café to go to, they've been there, they've done it, they've seen it, because they've got so much life experience ... you could chat to them about the best place to buy shoes! There's nothing they will not help you with ... they're a fantastic service. (Int 07)

How Services Are Received

No uniformity of experience

It is important to recognise that poverty – and the problems poverty presents – is not a universal experience, as the following paired examples illustrate, first with regards to making a claim for social security (Int 06, contrasting with Int 05), and then with perceptions about the ease with which crisis grants can be accessed (Int 20, versus Int 19).

Yeah, I found it easy. I just went online ... because we had to move from child tax credits over to universal credits. (Int 06)

... the only service that I had tried to use was the DLA, which is Disability Living Allowance for Angela, ... I have to admit, I had the form for about two or three years, and I never finished it [laughs]. (Int 05)

I've been in a situation where ... I have been ... struggling ... they refer to welfare rights to apply for a crisis grant ... you know, I don't know anyone who's ever been approved for one. (Int 20)

I have recently accessed the Scottish Welfare Fund - it's just a financial insecurity fund - and they've actually given me some assistance towards gas and electric debt that I had, and towards ... rural living expenses for a one off like covid thing. (Int 19)

The importance of how services are delivered

How services are delivered matters much to people experiencing poverty. Where service is personable and personal, it was lauded (Int 06, 07); whereas it was roundly criticised when there were failings (Int 06b, 12a, 20).

She works at the call centre, so she's a really nice woman. I usually go to them for advice. (Int 06a)

They're always at the end of the phone ... if you need them. ... but they're not intrusive. They don't say, "Right we need to speak to you every two weeks, every two months". (Int 07)

... stop treating people as a statistic. The housing waiting list is dehumanising because it's a point system. No one is looking at you as an individual, looking at how you are trying to better yourself, working hard. ... I'm at a point now where I don't know how I'm going to go on ... I'm very lucky in a lot of ways but you're up against it all the time. So, I would ask them to just look at people as individuals ... ask them to get a bus from Kinross to somewhere ... to figure out how to take their kids to the beach. Which is you know, a straightforward thing. You can't do it. £60 for a family of 4 to get to Dundee, ... it's just insane. So, ... look at your transport costs, have a much-improved minimum standard for your houses for people moving in, and sort out the ones that they are in, and treat them as individuals. (Int 20)

They [the Housing service] could have been a bit more ... I don't know if this is the right word, sort of empathetic in some way, if you know what I mean. (Int 12)

Sometimes ... [they] talk down to you as well ... like you're a bit thick. (Int 06b)

How a service is delivered does not only refer to inter-personal relations. The way a service is organised can also make it less appealing and less effective as a result.

I asked how it worked ... and the guy said to me, you know, you have to get in contact with Perth and Kinross Council and they do a referral, you know, to them and then they ... put the bags out the front of the shop, ..., and you come in and collect it, and I thought, you know, for these people that use that, it may be quite embarrassing having to go in and collect it because people obviously know, you know... the fact that that's at the front of... of the shop. (Int 12)

Listening to users

The commissioning of this research suggests that PKC is serious about listening to the lived experience of people experiencing poverty. However, some people were not convinced that PKC was listening at all, or that strategies that had been introduced to gather lived experience, were being taken seriously and acted upon.

... It was 2016. I think ... Perth and Kinross Council opened up a team called the SURE Team to ... basically look at the services that were provided and tell the Council how to improve it. ... When that first started, I was a part of that, but I felt sometimes the Council didn't follow through with what the recommendations were ... it seems like the Council have just totally ignored that. (Int 02)

Perth & Kinross Council are adamant about ... changing their perspective and putting tenants first, and their wellbeing first, but they're not. ... they're not actually listening ... They're quick enough to come down on you when they're not happy about something but, when you need help, you just get fobbed off. (Int 20)

Local social media as a source of information

There was much evidence of information being shared informally and locally, often through social media channels (Int 11, 01, 02, 05, 07, 09), although not all attempts to develop a local presence have been successful (Int 12). There are also interest groups, not always locally focused, that are used as a source of useful information (Int 16, 22)

The local Facebook pages ... are very good at ... people helping others out, information or just wee bits. (Int 11)

I use Facebook a lot, ... there's often notices about things going on locally. (Int 01)

When I do go on Facebook, I'm on ... Letham Hub, ... it ... keeps you up to date with what's going on or if something's happened in the area ... somebody will put a post up to let everybody know that something's happened. (Int 02)

Facebook is probably a good source of accessing community-based information. (Int 05)

... if there's something worth seeing, it's generally there or a friend has shared a page. So, I think Facebook has a lot of information. Not all of it good, but there are little gems in there somewhere. (Int 07)

Quite often our local community page is quite good – people will share things if they see it online or whatever, so the community Facebook page is good for that, or if there is anything locally going on. (Int 09)

To be honest with you, it's not really taken off much. ... I don't know if a lot of people are ... cliquey in some way? (Int 12)

There's Facebook groups that deal with universal credits and benefits advice. ... I very often tap into those if I have a question and ask (some) questions there as well. (Int 16)

We have a mums and dads WhatsApp group ... when they find something they share it in the WhatsApp group and say, you know, "I found this, other people might be interested", to share introductory codes and things ... recently Rugby Tots was set up in the area so one person found out about it and said "oh look this is on at this time" and they spread the word. ... Rugby Tots had provided introductory codes and got people in that way, so I suppose WhatsApp [is] the main way [of sharing local information] ... which I suppose is word of mouth as much as social media as well. (Int 22)

The PKC website was used by some (Int 20, 01, 09) although not everyone found this to be user friendly (Int 03, 06) or a useful source of information. The PKC website tended to be consulted for a specific purpose.

[I use the] council website to see about school holidays or dinner payments if they're continuing over the summer. I look to see ... if there's sports camps and things like that running over the holidays. (Int 20)

I have [used the PKC website], usually more if I'm looking for something specific, I'll go and look there. I wouldn't normally just be browsing there. [laughs] (Int 01)

It was only then when I was needing to find out what sort of services were available to me that I would [used the PKC website]. (Int 09)

... the horrendous website that they [PKC] have got. Because of my [learning] difficulties, I cannot ... get myself around their website at all. ... Amazon and eBay - they're nice and easy. You type in what you want, and you get a whole list ... But with [the] council [website], you've got to go digging around it and I just don't get it at all. ... it was an absolute nightmare to find the number for ... the school. (Int 03)

I would say that it's [PKC website] a five or six out of ten, with ten being the best. ... I would say their [my previous Council] website was a lot easier. It was a lot more user friendly in terms of what you needed to find. It was more literally a click and you found it. (Int 06)

On gratitude

Earlier, it was reported that many people experiencing poverty in Perth and Kinross were referring to luck to rationalise their experiences. Another sentiment that was prevalent was gratitude, which was expressed for services received. This was much more prevalent than a sense of entitlement or right to basic services.

*I have a bankruptcy process that I'm going through, ... so, financially it's quite stressful, but actually I'm in a better position now than I have been in the past, so I feel **grateful** for how I am coping with things. (Int 05)*

*I put in for temporary accommodation on the Tuesday ... and on the Wednesday, I got offered permanent accommodation. ... the accommodation itself was an area I was familiar with, the house itself was a wreck. I mean it was disgusting, damp, lots of problems within the house. ... But do you know what? ... you work on one room, you move in, you've got a roof over your head. ... when you've got no other option and someone's giving you a roof over your head, if the wallpaper is falling off it really doesn't matter. If the security system doesn't work, do you know what, it'll get fixed. So, I think I was personally **very grateful** and very lucky although the house I was given was an absolute train wreck (Int 07)*

*The matters were much easier when we were receiving housing benefit because that caused our council tax, ... to be reduced as well, which made our livelihood much easier. ... now it's much harder, I have to say. I do understand that we have been given a house, which is a **privilege**. We have a bit of a garden, which again, is a **privilege**. Our children can play outside in a contained, safe area. (Int 13)*

*I think Nicola Sturgeon has ... provided quite a lot for low-income families, and I **really appreciate everything** and I'm **grateful** for all of the financial help that has been made available to me. (Int 18)*

*I do feel **grateful**, you know I know my car doesn't work some of the time, but I am **grateful** to have it to be able to take the boys to different places. (Int 15)*

Conclusion

While there are many examples of services working well and services being well received by families experiencing poverty, there are ways in which they could be improved. A keener focus on lived experience would be helpful in reshaping the design and delivery of services.

6. Service Complexity Experienced by Families Living in Poverty in Perth and Kinross

I was totally offended at that actually ... obviously I was asking for help, and I know that ... my language doesn't always come across correctly ... but I practiced it a couple of times before I phoned and asked. ... the first thing I said was I am needing help to try and make some choices, or to find out what is best for me to do ... [s/he says:] "Well, your child is your responsibility". I'm like, that is what I am trying to do, I am trying to be a responsible parent. (Int 04)

Introduction

In this sixth and penultimate findings section of the report, we reflect on complexities that were encountered in accessing and using services. Some of these complexities were specifically acknowledged by families experiencing poverty, others were identified by the research team on reflection of the experiences reported. Five complexities are discussed, the first three of which concern the implications of what is perceived as poor provision.

- Poor provision generates costs
- Poor provision generates work for others
- Poor provision prevents service uptake
- Unintended adverse consequences of service design decisions
- Losers through winners

It should also be noted, as the following extracts convey (Int 05, 02), that the lives of some families experiencing poverty are themselves complex, with caring responsibilities sometimes extending beyond their immediate household:

... my parents ... need support at this point. I mean, my dad has dementia, and my mother has a heart condition, so they are becoming frail with it. So, there is expectations to be there. You know, they want us there every Sunday for dinner, ... which is, in many ways ... lovely, but it is also an added thing for me to deal with. (Int 05)

... my partner ... had an accident last year, ... so he's not working ... he's still ... recovering from that, but he was my carer before that. Before the accident my partner was carer for his mum. Eh, so, I've took over that role and helped out a bit as well. (Int 02)

Poor provision generates additional costs

Provision of a service does not always imply that a need is met. Many examples were cited of ways in which inadequate provision generated additional costs for families who were already on a low income. Many of ways in which poor provision generated additional cost on the family budget related to housing (Int 02, 03, 16, and 06).

... there's quite a lot of mould in the property. We've been treating it ourselves, but it's quite expensive. (Int 02)

... a hundred-year-old stone cottage ... can be cold. They're going through a process of refurbishing which we've had, but they're still cold houses so heating bills are higher. ... keeping them ventilated and keeping the heating on ... it's just one of those things. It's just what comes with living in an older property I suppose. (Int 03)

... maintenance of our house can be quite a stress and quite a pressure. (Int 16)

... the heating system had broken down and we had no heating, ... and then the council had come up and instead of fixing the heating they put like five or six electric heaters. It was costing us sometimes £90-100 a week for electric. (Int 06)

... the quality of the school dinners is really bad, and my kids are entitled to free school meals, but the quality is rubbish and at the moment there's only two choices ... so I'm spending even more on packed lunches than normal. Packed lunches are expensive and packed lunches for four kids is extremely expensive but ... the kids were going to school and not eating anything, so I don't have any other choice ... maybe, if the quality ... was better [there] would be more money in the pot. Spending £50 a week at least on packed lunch stuff, well £40 anyways, is insane. (Int 20)

I had to go through to Pitlochry the other day to have my vaccine and ... it [ticket costs] was £6. (Int 19)

Notably, in each of these examples, it is inadequate provision of a basic need (or ready access to a basic need that avoids transport costs) – shelter, food, and health – that generates additional costs for low-income families.

Poor provision generates work/costs for others

Poor provision not only generated additional costs for families experiencing poverty. It also generates work for others, either family (Int 14, 17) or additional work for other organisations (Int 04)

They [benefits] barely cover the cost of living, so ... we quite often have to reach out to the family. (Int 14)

One summer when James was six, we just went geocaching every day because it was free. My sister took us camping and paid for everything that summer too. (Int 17)

... I was trying to get the council tax form and ... it come up with about ten different forms. For somebody like me I get overwhelmed, and I can't deal with it so, I had to get support from Women's Aid ... I kind of need her. (Int 04)

Drawing extensively on family for childcare support (reported earlier) might also be considered an example of when poor provision generates 'work' for others.

Poor provision prevents service uptake

In the previous examples, solutions can be found to overcome poor provision – drawing on the family budget or drawing on the support of others. However, poor provision can also lead to lower service uptake and doing without. Low presentation and low uptake cannot always be assumed to reflect low or no demand for a service.

... the only service that I had tried to use was the ... Disability Living Allowance for Amy, and, I have to admit, I had the form for about two or three years, and I never finished it [laughs].

Did you get any help with that from, you know, Citizen's Advice Bureau, or the Council's financial support services?

No, I didn't. It would ... have been helpful because I could not get that blooming form finished, and ... I know it would have made a difference, financially. (Int 05)

It's going to the effort of accessing a service [PKC advice services] that ... there's a waiting list of 3-4 weeks. ... there [are] probably people who need it more than us. You know, we'll kind of ... struggle but we won't suffer. ... but we'll get there. So, we never reached out. We just thought, we'll just take it on the chin and get on with it. (Int 07)

Unintended adverse consequences of service design decisions

Several families shared the difficulties that they encountered because of changes to nursery provision. Although their child continued to be provided with a nursery place, the changes were reported to lead to longer journey times, were stress-inducing as plans were made to accommodate this (Int 02, 03, 07). Changes to working arrangements can also lead to work becoming unviable for families with constrained childcare options (Int 17).

We suddenly got a notification that ... the Perth and Kinross funded hours had been withdrawn from nursery. ... So, from my children going to a nursery around the corner ... that they loved, where they were thriving ... We were then told that it was going to be closing because the nursery couldn't afford to stay open without the Perth and Kinross funded places. ... We got offered another nursery place that wasn't suitable hours, wasn't suitable days. But you pretty much had to agree with it because nurseries were already full. So, if you got offered a place, you had to say yes to it. ... and that was a huge stress. I then found another nursery for them to go to and they have settled in there very well thankfully. ... but again, not having the right nursery setting or the right childminder setting for your children, it's a huge stress for the children, a huge stress for you. (Int 07)

And then I take them down to nursery – the nursery has now moved so it's a bit further away, so it takes that wee bit longer. (Int 02)

The local school to us had a nursery attached to it, but it closed down and they've never reopened one since. Lucy had to go to one which was on a bus journey away which is why I got the Megarider [multi-journey bus ticket]. (Int 03)

I worked at the Co-op 8-4 on two days a week and that was okay, but then they refurbished it and it went to different hours. They wanted me to work 7-11 then 8-10. ... I tried it for a couple of days but trying to get him to bed or give him his tea or get him to school was just too complicated. I don't know how they expected that to work for people who have kids. (Int 17)

Losers through winners

The lives of people experiencing poverty are often entwined in wider familial and social networks. This interdependency is a source of support and a strength. However, there are unintended adverse consequences when 'positive outcomes' for some leads to a loss of support or provision for those who rely on it.

When my eldest was at home, ... because of Covid he was working from home ... he could actually look after his younger sister which gave me a little bit of a flexibility, and I could actually take a job, which ended up with me working in the school which was awesome. [I] loved it. He then ... got a promotion at his work and had all this money and was like, I can afford to rent a place myself. Fabulous! So ... that was the end of my child care, literally. (Int 03)

I was volunteering for Scouts as a leader until recently but when I got full time hours I had to stop as it was too much. There was all this training, but I had training for my work so couldn't do it all. I really liked it though. I really liked it, but you can't do everything, as a single mum – working, all the running about and keeping the house clean and everything - it's too much. (Int 17)

Conclusion

It may not be possible to avert every adverse consequence of a decision that is taken in the best interests of a public service or business. However, these decisions can impact on the lives of families experiencing poverty. At the very least, there is a need for greater consideration to be given to those who are likely to be most adversely impacted by provision and service change and for mitigation actions to be taken where possible.

7. Priorities for Perth and Kinross

I like living in ... Kinross-shire, it's a really good community, but it is lacking in quite a lot [of] things that, you know, with a bit of money could be improved, would make such a humongous difference to people's lives. (Int 20)

Introduction

Each interview ended by inviting families to share their thoughts on what was lacking in Perth and Kinross, and what messages they would like to send to people in power (Annex 4). Ten 'priorities' from this part of the interview are reported in this section of the report. These cover how PKC should operate, issues that should be addressed and how people experiencing poverty should be engaged. Many of these (and many other priorities) featured earlier in the discussions. They are:

- Become less Perth-centric.
- Improve PKC website.
- Better signposting to mechanisms for support.
- Address under-staffed services.
- Re-order public spending priorities.
- Improve the affordability of leisure and sport for children.
- Build communities within communities.
- Provide more services to support parents.
- Don't just listen to lived experience, act on lessons to be learned from it.
- Treat people as individuals.

Become less Perth-centric

Those living outside the city of Perth described a Perth-centric focus to life in the region.

We really love where we live, it just seems like there's a little bit of a Perth-centric focus from Perth and Kinross [Council] and the outlying areas [are] a little bit forgotten. ... we plan to be in this community for a long time and we are really looking forward to contributing to that. ... We want to make sure that there are the opportunities there for my kids to remain in the area if they want to and to have a positive experience as well. (Int 22)

Although this was not unexpected and sometimes accepted as part of the 'Perthshire deal' discussed earlier, those outside the city would prefer readier access to a wide range of facilities and services that provided the means within local communities that support families to function and prosper, e.g., affordable shopping, childcare, transport, access to support.

Improve PKC website

There was much criticism of the PKC website, an issue perhaps more pressing for this group than most others given that their asks of the Council often concerned basic needs and access to support:

... the horrendous website that they have got. Because of my difficulties, I cannot, I cannot get myself around their website at all. ... they need to make it simpler language. ... Amazon and eBay they're nice and easy. You type in what you want, and you get a whole list ... But with council you've got to go digging around it and I just don't get it at all. (Int 04)

As this extract also demonstrates, not all users present with the same skillset and capabilities. For some, this further compounded the problems in finding what was needed on the PKC website.

Better signposting and mechanisms to support

Challenges in finding information were not limited to perceived problems with the PKC website. More generally, a sense prevailed that support was not well signposted.

If somebody is needing support or ... help, I think it is there, but you'd need to look for it, and I think maybe where things are lacking is just maybe being a bit more visible about what help is available. (Int 01)

You know, for example, putting up posters or signs on buses and, ... even like things coming through Facebook and that as well. I think things like that, ... would definitely make a difference. (Int 12)

... instead of rushing through it [interview/meetings with service providers] ... actually say "this is available, this help's available, that help's available". (Int 02)

A place where you could go where all the information is in one place and there's someone that can chat to you and explain things. ... like with the housing benefit forms, you fill in this form and send it away. Nobody tells you what happens or how the process works. Someone that's there that can explain these things to you or tell you, like, "you're probably not going to get a house, but why don't you try this." (Int 17)

The perceived problem is not always a lack of support (Int 01), but rather the way support is delivered (Int 02, Int 17) or that information is not being shared effectively (Int 01, Int 12).

... because I was on fixed term contracts [with PKC], in the summer holidays you didn't get paid for working and for a couple of years I went through the whole seven weeks with barely any money ...and then I found out about how I could claim Universal Credit for that time ... it was just by chance I had been speaking to someone ... obviously its Perth and Kinross Council that I work for ... maybe if they even made their staff aware that if they're on a fixed term contract and they're not going to get paid that they could apply for [Universal Credit over the summer]. (Int 11)

Here (Int 11), it is suggested that staff working for PKC on fixed-term contracts were not being made aware of entitlements that could support them.

Providing information may be enough to meet the needs of some, but there was also recognition that others were reticent to present for support, and that a more pro-active approach was required in these cases.

... some people are scared to reach out for support. (Int 12)

Under-staffed

Although criticism was levelled at the way some services were operating and the way some staff were performing (Int 02) - *I think they really need to try and get staff that's more on the ball, willing to do follow ups ... it's quite hard to word it without sounding nasty [laughs] - there was also some recognition that staffing levels were preventing services delivering what was required of them (Int 02b, Int 07).*

... they're [PKC housing service] severely understaffed. They need a lot more staff to cover the area that they've got to look after ... Perth and Kinross is quite a big area, and the staff need to be a bit more better trained I would say. (Int 02b)

... as long as they have got the staffing levels and everything they need, that would then have the domino effect that the people who were accessing the services would have a much more pleasant time ... If the services are correctly manned and staffed, everyone else would benefit from that. (Int 07)

Re-order public spending priorities

It is understandable that when people are struggling to meet their basic needs, then highly visible expenditure of what might be considered non-essential spend is criticised:

I noticed that the council were more interested in putting plants and things into the town centre. ... which were completely pointless and caused more hassle than they were worth in the end. ... instead of ... using the money for something useful. ... it's one of these things I think everybody's annoyed about in Perth just now is they are putting planters in everywhere and yet buildings are falling apart, and there's nothing for people to do, and people are living in poverty, and you know ... they are more interested in how pretty the place looks than anything else. (Int 08)

Affordability of leisure and sport for children

The priorities for Perth and Kinross were not only directed at the operations of PKC. Making leisure more affordable was presented as a concern for PKC and other providers.

... a lot of families don't do a lot ... it's affordability that's a lot of the problem. ... some places can be too expensive to take the kids. (Int 02)

... like her swimming lessons – I know that these are luxuries in life, but to me ... swimming is a life skill, [there should be] a discount for swimming lessons. ... I feel that other children from families that are less fortunate than me even would get a chance to have that life skill. (Int 09)

I think maybe the schools could offer more clubs that are free you know, activities, ... he could be doing with being fitter and more active and things, and if there was more that I didn't have to pay for then I could push him in that direction. (Int 11)

We'd be more confident to go out and not worry about how much it's going to cost. (Int 02)

In this discussion of priorities, affordability focused on leisure opportunities for children. Earlier in the interviews, the high cost of living and the problems it presents was discussed for a wider range of issues.

Building communities within communities

One interesting priority that was raised by one participant, reflected on the experiences of the Covid-times, suggesting that there was a need to strengthen communities and that PKC could play a role in facilitating this:

That's something that Perth and Kinross Council could look at going forward, ... building communities within communities. ... and encouraging it. ... for example, we've got a community centre at the back of us that's never used, and I know in different areas of Perth there's community centres everywhere. They could be made more of a focus. More of a hub for things to bring people together so that nobody ever felt on their own. (Int 03)

In this instance, the benefits are headlined as tackling social isolation, although potential gains extended beyond this.

More services to support parents

There was also recognition that parental wellbeing was important, and that more could be done to improve it. The same participant who was concerned with social isolation suggested:

... services like the gym which would come with like a creche attached to them ... whether that was within the shopping centre or within ... the leisure industry, ... just something that would let parents have a little bit more freedom ... I know when you've got ... tiny babies you can take them with you to go to classes, ...and meet parents that way, but as we get to like this age, there's nothing. So maybe something like kind of like a hub ... that parents could go, and their kids could be looked after, and you could do something as a parent but as an adult as well at the same time. Whether that was a fitness class, or a crafting class or just ... where you could meet other people. (Int 03)

Don't just listen to lived experience, act on lessons to be learned from it

Implicit in these suggested priorities is the principle that lived experience should be listened to, and the concerns raised acted upon thereafter. This was also made explicit by one participant who had experience of being engaged but was sceptical whether action followed from this.

... the original reason I got involved with the SURE team [was], because I wanted to make a difference, but it seems like the Council didn't want to take on board, they were just doing it ... to show that they were equality here and equality there. (Int 02)

Treat people as individuals

*I just think that people need to try
and look at things more on an
individual basis more than just put
everyone in a big group because no
two families are the same. (Int 07)*

There is a need to understand the challenges faced by groups, as we have discussed earlier in section four of the report. However, it is perceived that there is a need to deliver services in a way that recognises particularity and the 'person' within the sub-population.

Conclusion

The priorities that were explicitly articulated at the end of the interviews are not the only ways in which people with lived experience of poverty in Perth and Kinross indicated how services could be improved. It is to these wider conclusions, that we now turn.

8. Conclusions

I am hoping that I'm going to get a job shortly and then things will look very different ... Obviously I've got my eldest son, sort of at the beginning of secondary school, you know and the year after next, my youngest will then be at secondary school ... I think our future is looking quite bright – brighter than a couple of years ago anyway. (Int 01)

Introduction

In conclusion, we summarise overarching themes – noting that poverty is a problem for some families in Perth and Kinross, identifying the key features of Perthshire's poverty, identifying the ways in which poverty is presenting new challenges, and reflecting on the challenges that these experiences present for Perth and Kinross Council. From this, we present seven recommendations to conclude this report.

Poverty Amidst Plenty

Perth and Kinross is widely held to be a pleasant place in which to live, a view that seems to be widely shared amongst families experiencing poverty. However, poverty exists. It may be marginal or invisible to the lives of many, but it exists the length and breadth of the region.

Perthshire Poverty

In some respects, the poverty that presents in Perth and Kinross will be familiar to those with experience or knowledge of how poverty presents elsewhere in Scotland. Challenges associated with managing budgets, making tough decisions, doing without, some intense experiences, time pressures and the like are not unique to those experiencing poverty in Perth and Kinross. This is not to downplay the significance of poverty in the region. On the contrary, it

emphasises that even in one of the most affluent parts of Scotland, poverty exists blights the life of some people in Perth and Kinross.

Similarly, some of the challenges of managing life in poverty elsewhere in rural Scotland are found within the region. Higher costs of travel associated with travelling longer distances, the necessity of managing a car, lack of affordable food options, and a concern with 'visibility' that is heightened in small close-knit communities have all been identified as problems elsewhere in Scotland.

On the other hand, there seems to be a mindset among families experiencing poverty in Perthshire that while problems exist and while these should be addressed, the absence of problems is a result of good fortune, and their existence is understandable (if not acceptable), perhaps even a 'price to pay' for living in Perthshire.

The Regeneration of a Familiar Foe

This research largely adopted a contemporary focus and did not attempt to track poverty trajectories. However, it is widely understood that poverty is not new in Scotland, and we should not expect that the experiences of family poverty in Perth and Kinross that are shared in this report have emerged in recent years. On the other hand, it is

important to contextualise that the Covid pandemic is likely to have a long-term impact on the populations experiencing poverty across Perth with emerging challenges ahead including the loss of Universal Credit uplift, the impacts of the furlough scheme ending, and rising fuel prices anticipated.

On the other hand, the nature of poverty changes through time. The report has provided evidence of food insecurity in the region. That food poverty should be an issue in one of Scotland's agricultural heartlands is particularly ironic.

More positively, the public health response to the coronavirus crisis did momentarily strengthen support mechanisms for the most vulnerable. It remains to be seen what lies ahead, as the region 'builds back' in a way that lives with the Covid-19 virus. Should these support mechanisms – which were both formal and informal – unravel or contract, and public spending pressures lead to reduced service provision in the years ahead, then the experiences of the already vulnerable may be set to worsen.

Scrutinising Services

The primary purpose of this report was to scrutinise services to inform future work in Perth and Kinross to tackle child poverty.

Many services are functioning well and are appreciated by families experiencing poverty. Schools were praised (although school meals less so, and access to pre-school provision was not ideal), and there was much reference to children accessing leisure and sporting activities.

On the other hand, the cost of living was high, housing resource was scarce and

sometimes criticised for its poor quality (although it was acknowledged that this was a significant challenge to address), and transport services were, predictably, more highly praised in urban than rural settings.

There was evidence of effective cross-referral and much praise for individuals who provide critical support, often viewed as going 'above and beyond' duty to support families experiencing poverty. However, there were concerns with 'direction of travel', with a sense that less personal service provision was increasingly prevalent and often ill-suited to meet needs. Both how services are delivered and what services are provided are important.

Recommendations

We conclude the report with seven recommendations to Perth and Kinross Council, drawn from the experiences of people experiencing poverty. There are other lessons that should also be gleaned from the research, many of which are specific to service departments or populations. These 'considerations' are presented in a series of separate service-sector briefings.

1. ***Recognise that poverty exists in Perth and Kinross.*** It should not be assumed that the wider public, public servants and key decision-makers in Perth and Kinross either recognise the problem or poverty, the scale of the problem, or the problems it presents. As this report shows, much poverty is hidden, often deliberately so.

2. ***A collective effort – beyond service department boundaries – is required to seek solutions to the problems of childcare and housing.*** Housing and childcare presented challenges to families experiencing poverty, with the lack and adequacy of provision being widely cited among families experiencing poverty. Solutions to these problems cannot be found within these service departments alone (for example, access to work is an issue that also impacts on the suitability of childcare). There may also be a need to shift resource if adequate and sustainable solutions are to be found. It may also be necessary to appraise whether quality assurance processes are working in practice for housing.
3. ***Changes to public services should be poverty proofed.*** The impact of changes to public service provision can be far reaching for families experiencing poverty. Existing tools to monitor the potential impact of changes to public service provision do not seem to be protecting families experiencing poverty from adverse impact. Solutions may involve a strengthening of existing tools, but may also be found from cultural change, and a more person-centred approach to service provision (in which the consequences of proposed change would be readily apparent). The Public Sector Equality Duty toolkit should be reviewed and adapted to facilitate poverty proofing.
4. ***Acknowledge the role of professionals providing critical support to families experiencing poverty.*** Key individuals providing critical support are found across a range of services (also from Third Sector partners). This work is critical but can be time-consuming. There is a need to acknowledge this work as core to function, rather than leave to the chance of diligent staff going 'above and beyond'. A 'One Council' approach should be adopted whereby it is recognised that all frontline workers can play a critical role in connecting families to the services and support that they need. This would require additional training, resources, and support to realise the gains that would accrue from this way of engaging.
5. ***Continue to listen to people experiencing poverty locally.*** This report should be the start of what is promised in 'The Perth Offer'. That is, on-going dialogue with people experiencing poverty to ensure that public services are used to best effect to meet need.
6. ***Improve communication.*** A review should be undertaken of how the Council communicates to people experiencing poverty. Consideration should be given to utilising the power of local social media and reviewing the utility and accessibility of the Council's website.
7. ***Action on food.*** Difficulties were encountered in meeting this basic need and fundamental human right. There is a need to develop better access to affordable food, and to review the effectiveness of current provision, particularly in relation to school meal

Annex 1: Our Approach to Engaging Families

Introduction

In this section, we describe and appraise the approach taken in this research.

Objectives

As noted in the introduction, our primary objective was to articulate the service needs of children and families with lived experience of poverty across Perth and Kinross. This involved canvassing parents' opinion on what services are required and exploring how families navigate and experience what Perth and Kinross Council (and partners) offer to support families experiencing poverty. The objective of the research was to inform Perth and Kinross Council as it seeks to reconfigure services in a way that best meets local needs.

We were also mindful of the wider commitment in Perth and Kinross to tackle child poverty, which is reported annually through the Local Child Poverty Action Report³⁰.

Research Team

John McKendrick (SPIRU) managed and designed the overall project. Fieldwork was conducted by Fiona McHardy and Laura Robertson (The Poverty Alliance) and Kathryn Machray, Sue Lyons, Leah Hester, and Leia McKie (SPIRU). Monica Allen provided administrative support and liaised with local groups in Perth and Kinross.

The research team met regularly throughout the fieldwork phase to discuss progress and reflect on emergent themes and research issues. The Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each member of the research team analysed the transcript of their own interviews. John McKendrick analysed each interview and drafted the research report on behalf of the whole team.

John McKendrick liaised regularly with Perth and Kinross Council throughout 2021 and presented monthly updates to the Child Poverty Action Group of Perth and Kinross Council from April through July 2021.

Research Design

John McKendrick drafted the initial interview schedule, which was revised after comment from Fiona McHardy (The Poverty Alliance) and Margaret Lynch (Perth and Kinross Council). Perth and Kinross Council (through Margaret Lynch) approved the schedule (Annex 3).

The interview comprised open-ended questions and was adapted in the field to avoid repetition, and to address the most pertinent issues for each participant.

The research aimed to shape an understanding of lived experiences, both during and beyond the particularities of contemporary COVID times. Families were invited to reflect before and during the pandemic, and to reflect on future needs.

Research Ethics

The Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Sciences at Glasgow Caledonian University approved the fieldwork. At each stage of the research design and administration, steps were taken to ensure that the research adhered to recommended practice. Specific steps taken included:

- Providing interviewees with information about the purpose of the research and the research requirements, to ensure that participation was based on informed consent.
- Only collecting personal details (names and contact details) for the purpose of arranging for the provision of a voucher (for a store of their own choosing), as a token of appreciation for their participation.
- Asking for permission to record interviews and explaining the reasons for recording.
- Storing research data securely, for example, password-protecting interview transcripts and recordings.
- Removing personal details (names and contact details) from data files and storing in line with General Data Protection Requirements.
- Offering interviewees the opportunity to receive copies of the final report.

More generally, we approached the work in was that adhered to the ethical principles and guidance as outlined by Social Policy Association³¹.

Researching during a global pandemic presents its own challenges. Although aware of these challenges in advance, additional issues emerged as the research progressed. We drew on wider learning and best practice from work being conducted with low-income families

during the pandemic, for example from the Covid Realities Project³². Examples of adaptations by the team included a stronger focus on the aftercare and exit process from the research interview. Time was taken (where this was convenient to the participants) to ensure that they were ready to move-on from any issues raised in the interview.

Accessing Participants

A range of strategies were used to access participants. To incentivise participation, and to acknowledge the time voluntarily given to this research, each participant received a £25.00 voucher for a store of their choice.

At the outset, it was agreed that Perth and Kinross Council staff would approach service users and would provide SPIRU with details of those who agreed to be interviewed. PKC and SPIRU agreed on what data should be collected on candidates to ensure that the research delivered representation from all priority groups. PKC regularly updated a password-protected spreadsheet, sharing the following data on each candidate with SPIRU:

- Name
- Address and Postcode
- Age and sex of each child
- Contact telephone number
- E-mail address
- And whether,
 - lone parent
 - disabled person in household
 - large family (3+ children)
 - Minority ethnic household
 - Child aged under one
 - Mother aged under 25
- And whether,
 - Child in receipt of school meals
 - Family in receipt of other benefits

PKC identified fourteen candidates who SPIRU then attempted to contact. Contact could not be established with some candidates, and some changed their minds and chose not to participate. Nine interviews were arranged from the Perth and Kinross contact list. Although far short of the target number of interviews for the research (which was 20), this approach was valuable:

- It accounted for almost half of the target number of interviews.
- It ensured participation from residents who were service users of PKC services, with close contact to PKC staff
- It was successful in accessing priority groups: interviewees were drawn from five of the six priority groups (all but mothers aged under 25), including three families from Minority Groups which are often not engaged in area-based poverty research (including a family from a traveller community background and two others who required an interpreter to participate in the research).
- It was successful in reaching residents from a range of localities across the city of Perth.

It quickly became apparent that SPIRU would need to supplement the work of PKC to access participants. The approach taken was to enlist the support of trusted intermediaries to access potential interviewees: approaches were made to Third Sector organisations and local (area based) Facebook groups. SPIRU employed a researcher with responsibility for this work. Third Sector organisations were approached, if they were judged by SPIRU to be likely to serve the needs of the priority groups. PKAVS were approached for assistance, and helpfully provided advice. SPIRU used the Your PKCommunity website³³, searching for

groups serving 'children and families' (434 groups were listed). Nineteen groups were identified and approached for assistance. Key contacts from the groups were provided with information about the research (Annex 2) and invited to share this information with members/services users who might be able and willing to take part. Although time-consuming, this approach only generated a single interview.

A similar approach was used with local social media Facebook groups. Groups were approached in areas that were under-represented among the interviewees accessed through PKC. Eleven Facebook groups or pages were identified. Page Admins were approached, either as a courtesy before posting, or to request that a post was made on our behalf. Page Admins were provided with the project briefing (Annex 2) and text that could be used in the Facebook post (Annex 3). This work generated four interviews.

These three strategies had exhausted returns by early June, with the project five short of the target number of interviews. A final more intensive round of recruitment was then introduced. This comprised two strategies.

First, Perth and Kinross Council Community-Planning Locality contacts were approached for their assistance. Eight local officers were approached across the seven CPP localities, inviting them to draw attention to the research among their community contacts.

Second, more intensive targeting of local groups was undertaken, which in turn comprised two tasks. First, contacts for local Community Councils were identified from the Perth and Kinross Council

website³⁴ and approached for their assistance. Local contacts were approached if a local group existed and if contact details were published online from the 53 local community council areas across Perth and Kinross. At the same time, a more intensive search of Facebook was undertaken to identify local groups across Perth and Kinross. This search identified 39 local groups or pages across Perth and Kinross. For both cohorts, the approach replicated that which was used when approaching local Facebook page/group contacts at an earlier stage: permission was sought for the key contact to share SPIRU text with members/contacts. In response, thirteen local residents approached SPIRU to express an interest in participating. Attempts were made to follow-up on contact with each, which led to seven more interviews, surpassing the target of 20 interviews to give a final total of 22 interviews.

The supplementary SPIRU-led strategies, complemented the work of Perth and Kinross Council, making a useful contribution to meet the research objectives. It:

- Enabled the target number of interviews to be achieved (and indeed surpassed).
- Achieved representation from across the whole of Perth and Kinross (ensuring representation from those rural areas)
- Accounted for more than half of the target number of interviews
- Ensured participation from residents who did not necessarily have close contact with PKC staff

The approach taken to reach out to candidates implied that SPIRU's screening of candidates was less intensive than that of Perth and Kinross Council. Although all but one of the interviewees met the

research objectives³⁵, the SPIRU profiling of participants was not as detailed as those accessed by PKC.

Clearly, it proved difficult to access participants, particularly in the early stages of the research. In other work we have completed recently, it has also proved challenging to access research participants. For example, in our recent work exploring use of holiday provision in Inverclyde³⁶, we argued that research fatigue (as Inverclyde had been the focus of several COVID-19 related research projects) and timing (this work was completed in the lead-in to the Christmas holidays) may have accounted for the difficulties encountered. However, these were not concerns in Perth and Kinross. It is likely that the difficulties of building up trust with intermediaries at a distance made it more challenging to access families for this research.

Arranging Interviews

With contact brokered through Perth and Kinross Council or local partners, our approach was to be responsive to every expression of interest we received. Interested parties were invited to register interest with Monica Allen, the nominated contact within the project research team, via text message, phone call or email.

On receiving an expression of interest, Monica paired candidates to a member of the research team. The researcher contacted potential participants in advance of the research interview to clarify any queries, and to agree interview arrangements that were convenient to participants. Participants determined whether the interview would take the form of a video-call or a telephone-call, and if the former, whether their camera would be activated.

Timeline

Interviews were conducted in 2021 between May 6th and June 24th.

Participant Profile

The research was not designed to be representative of families across Perth and Kinross. Rather, it purposively sought to learn from the experience of a range of families. Table 1 profiles each interviewee and their family: the table is ordered by district (fourth column) within Perth and Kinross, with the order completed reported in the first column.

Table 1 demonstrates that the research engaged a diverse group of families experiencing poverty in Perth and Kinross. Interviewees were drawn from:

- Small and large families (eight were single child families, eight had three or more children).
- With and without work in the household (ten with, and nine without).
- A range of child compositions (ten with pre-school aged children, thirteen with primary school aged children, and ten with secondary school aged children).
- Four families were drawn from minority ethnic cultural backgrounds.
- Seven families reported having a disabled person in the household.

To preserve anonymity, Table 1 does not present locality for each respondent. However, it should be noted that:

- All parts of Perth and Kinross (Strathmore, Strathearn, Highland, Kinross-shire, and different localities within the city of Perth) were represented in the research.
- Participants were drawn from Aberfeldy, Alyth, Amulree, Blairgowrie, Bracco, City Centre (Perth), Comrie, Dunkeld, Earn, Gannochy (Perth), Kinross, Letham (Perth), Milnathort, Muirton (Perth), Muthill, North Inch (Perth), Stanley and Tulloch.

Table 1: Participant Profile

Interview ID	Gender	SIMD Decile	Children, number	Children, age s	Work status	Lone parent	Disabled in Hhold	Large family	Minority Ethnic	Child aged <1	Mother under 25	Free school meal	Other benefit
Int 1	W	2	2	PS, SS	Not	Y	No	No		No	No	Y	
Int 2	W	4	3	Pre	Not x2	No	Y	Y		No	No	NA	Y
Int 3	W	8	2	Pre, PS	PT	Y	No	No		No		Y	
Int 4	W	4	1	PS	Not	Y	Y	No		No		Y	No
Int 5	W	7 or 8	2	PS, SS	FT	Y	Y	No	No	No	No		
Int 6	W	3	6	PS, SS	PT, Not	No		Y	Y	No	No	Y	
Int 7	W	2,3,4	5	PS, PS	FT, Not	No	Y	Y		Y		Y	
Int 8	W	4	1	Pre	Not	Y		No		No		NA	
Int 9	W	6,7,9 or 10	1	PS	Not	Y		No		No			Y
Int 10	W	6	1	PS	Not	Y	No	No	Y	No		Y	
Int 11	W	6,7,9 or 10	1	SS	Yes	Y	Y	No	No	No	No		Y
Int 12	W	4,5 or 7	1	Pre		Y		No		Y		NA	
Int 13	M	3	4	PS, SS			Y	Y	Y	No	No	Y	
Int 14	M	5 or 6	1	Pre	Not x2	No	No	No	Y	No	No	NA	Y
Int 15	W	6, 8 or 9	2	PS	FT	Y		No	No	No	No	Y	
Int 16	W	7	3	SS	PT	Y	Y	Y	No	No	No		Y
Int 17	W	6 or 8	1	SS	Yes	Y		No		No	No	Y	
Int 18	W	5 or 9	3	Pre, SS	Yes	Y		Y		No	No	Y	
Int 19	W	7 or 8	2	SS	Not	Y		No	No	No	No	Y	
Int 20	W	7,8,10	4	Pre, PS	Not	Y	No	Y	No	No		Y	
Int 21	W	7	3	Pre, PS, SS				Y		No	No		
Int 22		6 or 7	2	Pre, PS	FT, PT	No	No	No		No			No

Notes:

(i) Specific decile is drawn from postcode; Possible SIMD Decile (range) reflects the range of SIMD deciles in their locality.

(ii) Abbreviations as follows: W (woman interviewee), M (man interviewee) / Pre (pre-school aged), PS (primary school age), SS (secondary school age) / Y (yes, fits characteristic), No (does not fit characteristic).

(iii) Blank cells denote where information was not collected from interviewee.

(iv) Empty cells indicate where profile data was not collected and could not be ascertained from interview dialogue.

Although, it proved very challenging to access participants, the research delivered its objective of engaging a diversity of family experiences across Perth and Kinross. However, Table 1 also notes that there were some imbalances among the participating population. Of note:

- Most interviewees were women (twenty).
- Most interviewees were lone parents (fifteen).
- No mothers were reported as being aged under 25.
- Most children were aged over one (only two were not).

There are insufficient data to consider the challenges faced by all the populations which were represented in the research. Although such an analysis was beyond the scope of this research, it is acknowledged that the experiences and perspectives of younger mothers and the experiences of those with very young children would require additional research. On the other hand, the number of participating families from minority ethnic backgrounds and households containing a disabled person, allowed insight to be gleaned from populations that were (unexpectedly) well represented among interviewees.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted remotely at a time chosen by the interviewee. Interviews lasted between 14 and 80 minutes (with a median of 53 minutes). Interviews were conducted in video-call or telephone-format, according to the preferences and resources available to interviewees.

No participants were distressed because of discussing the issues raised in the research. However, it was judged necessary to signpost one participant to local support that would assist them to manage some of the challenges that they faced.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Each interview was analysed by two members of the research team, working collectively as an interpretive community. John McKendrick analysed each interview, before handing over to the field interviewer for a second round of analysis.

Although focused on meeting the research objectives, key themes were allowed to emerge from the data, as analysis was approached in an inductive manner.

Reflections on Researching in the Pandemic

Researching during the pandemic resulted in alterations to the research process. Some of these adjustments were heightened sensitivity to issues, which already informed our research practice. For example, we approached recruitment with a recognition of the pressures that families living in poverty were likely to be

experiencing. Similarly, when preparing a list of support services to which it might be helpful to signpost families, we were mindful of the challenges being faced by families at this time.

This research fieldwork took place during the COVID 19- pandemic when much leisure and sporting provision was not available, and when Scotland was still operating within COVID restrictions. Indeed, in the year prior to the fieldwork (within the recent memory of interviewees) the lockdown measures and other public health measures to manage the pandemic resulted in the withdrawal of provision (and access to in-person support) for prolonged periods of time.

Even beyond periods of lockdown, the pandemic impacted adversely on the provision of activities and services that were wrapped around primary and secondary schooling.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the challenges that were faced, the fieldwork delivered what was required, enabling the research team to offer insight into the experience of a diverse range of families as they navigated services and managed everyday life across Perth and Kinross.

Annex 2: Information Leaflet



Navigating Local Services - Learning from Families in Perth & Kinross

What is the research about? This research is being undertaken by the Poverty Alliance and the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit of Glasgow Caledonian University. The work has been commissioned by Perth & Kinross Council. We are looking to find out how families with children access, use and experience what Perth and Kinross Council (and their partners) have to offer. We are keen to find out ‘what works’ and ‘what could be improved’.

What services are of interest? We want to find out more about all of the services that are used by you and your family!

What families would we like to talk to? We are keen to speak to families on a low income (*either living in poverty, those on the cusp of living in poverty, and those who are ‘getting by’, but only just*). We are keen to hear from families from across Perth and Kinross. We want to learn about experiences for all age ranges (pre-school, primary and secondary). We are hoping to talk to families with working parents, families with non-working parents, or families who might have a mix of working and non-working parents. We are hoping to speak to lone parent and two parent families.

What will the research involve?

- We are looking to conduct interviews with 20 families during May and June
- The interviews will be telephone or video calls (whatever suits the Parents/caregivers)
- The interviews will last around 45-60 minutes.
- The parent being interviewed will be sent a £25 gift voucher of their choice as a thank you for their participation.

What will the Information be used for? We will use the information in reports and other outputs as part of our research. We will make sure that participants’ names are not included in anything we write. Recordings from will be stored on password protected computers.

Who should I contact to take part? Professor John McKendrick, Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, jmke@gcu.ac.uk; or call 0141-331-8221.

Annex 3: Text for Facebook Posts

Research with families living on low incomes in Perth and Kinross

Dear XXX,

My name is John McKendrick (Professor John McKendrick) of Glasgow Caledonian University. We have been asked by Perth and Kinross Council to undertake some research to better understand the experiences of families with children aged under 18 and living in poverty (or on very low incomes) across the whole of Perth and Kinross. This independent work aims to find out how life is managed and how services are navigated.

As the Admin of the XXX pages on Facebook, we were wondering whether you would post (or allow us to post) the text at the bottom of this message with your groups. Our thinking is that some of your families might be willing to talk to us. Our work has a community focus, and we are keen to have coverage of families from a wide range of communities.

We are an experienced research team who are sensitive when researching issues related to low income living. The interviews would be telephone or video based and would last around one hour, at a time that suits participants. We will be gifting participants a voucher for £25 for an outlet of their choosing as a thank you for taking part.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any further information,

John
Professor John McKendrick
Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit
Glasgow Caledonian University
jmke@gcu.ac.uk

Text for Facebook Post / E-Mail

Would you be willing to talk to us about living in XXX (or surrounding areas)? Glasgow Caledonian University has been asked by Perth and Kinross Council to undertake some research to better understand the experiences of families with children aged under 18, who are living in on low incomes (whether or not in work). The research aims to cover the whole of Perth and Kinross, so the researchers are really keen to include families from XXX (or nearby areas). We have talked with 14 families so far and are keen to talk to 6 more families. It would involve a chat with one of our friendly researchers, which would last about one hour, and could be either a telephone call or video call (your preference) at a time that suit you. We are offering a voucher for £25 (of your choosing) as a thank you for taking part. For more information, please contact John at spiru@gcu.ac.uk

Annex 4: Interview Schedule

Introductions covering standard topics

- Thank them for agreeing to be interviewed
- Aims of the research
- Explain who research is for
- Explain who 'we' are
- About the interview
- Explain how interview will be used (reassuring them that this will be anonymous, and that only GCU / Poverty Alliance researchers will have access to the interview)
- Ask for permission to record (confirming informed consent)
- Explain that they can stop the interview at any stage, or choose not to answer any particular question
- Ask if they have any questions they want to ask

{Throughout the interview proper, how some questions are pitched (and whether probes are followed), may depend on how they have answered the previous questions}

The first group of questions is about you and your typical family week.

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your family?

- Household type and composition – *note that if interviewee has been accessed through PKC, these data may be provided in advance.*
 - Is there a spouse/partner living in household?
 - Any other adults living in household
 - Age/sex of each child
 - Do children live there throughout week (details if split between parents / other family members)
- Take note of any additional relevant characteristics
 - Economic status
 - Work status
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Disabled Status
 - Minority ethnic / Cultural background
- Wider family connections
 - Any in area?
 - If so, who
 - If so, where they live

2. What does a typical week look like for the family? Here, I am thinking about paid work, volunteering, unpaid 'work', managing home and family, and clubs/activities that family members may be involved in?

- Is there a typical week?
 - Ask whether they prefer to describe (i) by family member (ii) by day of the week. Either way, for each family member, get descriptions of:
 - Themes
 - Work
 - Volunteering
 - Caring
 - Activity/Clubs
 - Ask whether there are any 'pinch points' where managing the commitments becomes challenging?
 - What causes 'pinch points'?
 - How are these managed?
-

The next group of questions is about where you live.

Just to confirm, you live in XXX

3. How long have you lived in XXX?

- If forever
 - Anywhere else they have lived in area.
- If migrated in
 - When had they moved in?
 - Why they moved here
 - Anywhere else they have moved in the area

4. Does any of your wider family live locally?

- If so
 - who
 - where they live
 - How often they see them
- If not
 - Where is nearest family

5. If you were to introduce your community to a stranger what would you say were its good points and bad points?

- Strengths
- Weaknesses

6. How well do you know other parts of Perth & Kinross?

- Overview
 - Probe first for the wider area around them, and then ask directly about other parts
 - Cover
 - Perth City
 - Eastern Perthshire
 - Strathearn and Strathallan
 - Highland and Strathtay
 - Kinross-shire, Almond and Earn
-

We know that – whether we are rich or poor, single, or partnered, in paid work or not, in good health or not – managing family life can be a juggling act.

The next group of questions is about the challenges of managing family life in Perth & Kinross

7. How much of a challenge is it to manage family life and all it involves?

- And, if not a challenge ...
 - **What is it that you do that makes it manageable – doing without, not getting involved, something else?**
- And, if a challenge ...
 - **What makes it challenging?**
 - Lack of money
 - Lack of time
 - Expectations of others
 - Demands within family (competing demands / level of demand)
 - Too many opportunities, can't do everything

8. I would like to ask specifically about food. Have there been times when you've have been struggling to get by and have not had enough money for food?

- And, if so, ...
 - **How did you manage?**
 - Doing without / Sources of support
 - Awareness of sources of support
 - How often this occurs

9. To what extent does managing family life impact on your ability to do paid work?

- And, if not (and working)
 - **How do you manage a work life around your family commitments?**
- And, if not (and not working)
 - **What other factors stop you doing paid work?**
- And, if it impacts
 - **In what ways does family life have an impact on work life?**

10. Are there any times of the year when there is added pressure on household finances?

- When
 - What are the pressures
 - How are these managed
-

The next group of questions are about the challenges of managing childcare and accessing advice and support in Perth and Kinross

11. How often do you use childcare / childminding?

- If Y
 - Is it regular?
 - Who provides the support?
 - Costs (financial or otherwise)
 - Where is it provided
 - (How) Does it differ for different types of school holiday
 - Summer
 - Easter / October
 - Long weekends
 - Occasional midweek day off
- If no
 - What arrangements would you make when there is unexpected illness in the family

12. Are there ways in which childcare / childminding support could work better for you?

- If Y, explore how
- If Y, ask them to speculate on what impact that might have on their life

13. How often do you use the internet /e-mail to access services or find out about what is going on locally?

- If Y
 - How often used
 - How used
- If not
 - Why not

14. Is there any person or service that provides you (or someone within your family) with general advice and support?

- If Y
 - Who
 - How often used
 - In what ways
 - If not
 - Would this be helpful
 - Why do they not have this?
-

We are now going to ask about a range of services that you or your family might use. For each, we are interested to find out your experiences of using these services.

15. Can you tell me your experience of using XXX

- **Housing**
 - **Employment support**
 - **Accessing Benefits**
 - **Social Services**
 - **Leisure or Sport Services/Groups**
 - **Transport**
 - **Schools**
 - **Credit services**

 - **Explore**
 - How services are accessed
 - Experience of people providing services
 - What works
 - What could work better
-

The final group of questions asks you to think about the future.

16. Do you have worries or concerns about the future?

- If Y,
 - What they are
 - Why they are concerned

17. What hopes do you have for your and your children's future?

- Children and self/partner
- Shorter- and longer-term perspectives
- Whether personal, familial, or societal

18. What, if anything, is lacking in Perth & Kinross that would make it easier for you to manage family life and/or work-life balance?

- Details
- Understand what impact
- Understand why this would matter

19. Is there any other messages about managing family life that you would like to send to people in power?

Sign off covering standard topics

- Thanking them for participation
- Confirming address details for voucher
- Explaining what happens now with the interview
- Explaining what happens with the final report

Endnotes

- ¹ For more information about The Poverty Alliance, please visit: <https://www.povertyalliance.org/>
- ² For more information about the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, please visit: <https://www.gcu.ac.uk/gsbs/research/spiru/>.
- ³ For more information, please contact, Margaret Lynch at MLynch@pkc.gov.uk
- ⁴ For more information, please contact, Margaret Lynch at MLynch@pkc.gov.uk
- ⁵ For more information, please contact, Margaret Lynch at MLynch@pkc.gov.uk
- ⁶ NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND (2021) *Mid-2020 Population Estimates Scotland* [online], Table 9. Available at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates/mid-2020>
- ⁷ NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND (2018) *Mid-2016 Population Estimates for Settlements and Localities in Scotland* [online], Table 1a and 2a. Available at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/settlements-and-localities/mid-2016/list-of-tables>
- ⁸ All evidence in this paragraph is drawn from: NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND (2020) *Perth and Kinross Council Area Profile*. [online]. Available at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/council-area-data-sheets/perth-and-kinross-council-profile>
- ⁹ SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT, (2020) *Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, Data to Download, 2020*. [online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020/#datatodownload>
- ¹⁰ BBC SCOTLAND NEWS (2020) Scotland's Most and Least Deprived Areas [online], 28 January 2020. [online]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-51279966>.
- ¹¹ *Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017*, asp 6. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2017/6/contents/enacted>
- ¹² McKENDRICK, J.H. (2018) Swift Read: Project 2030 – local government and the eradication of child poverty across Scotland. *Local Government Information Unit Briefing Series*. Edinburgh: LGIU Scotland. Available to members at: <https://lgiu.org/briefing/swift-read-project-2030-local-government-and-the-eradication-of-child-poverty-across-scotland/>
- ¹³ PERTH AND KINROSS COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP (2020) *Perth and Kinross Fairer Futures. Tackling Child Poverty Action Report. Perth and Kinross Child Poverty Action Report 2020*. Perth: PKC. Available from [here](#).
- ¹⁴ PERTH AND KINROSS COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP (2021) *All-In – To End Child Poverty. Perth and Kinross Child Poverty Action Report 2020*. Perth: PKC.

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- https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/24715/Perth-and-Kinross-LCPAR-2019_2020_FINAL.pdf
- 15 For more information, visit: <https://www.pkc.gov.uk/pkoffer>
- 16 SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT (2018) *Every Child, Every Chance: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, 2018-2022*. Edinburgh. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/child-chance-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2018-22/>
- 17 For more information, please contact, Margaret Lynch at MLynch@pkc.gov.uk
- 18 MCKENDRICK, J.H., CUNNINGHAM-BURLEY, S. and BACKETT-MILBURN, K. (2003) *Life in Low Income Families in Scotland: Research Report*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive. <https://era.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/2791>
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- 29 THE POVERTY ALLIANCE (ROBERTSON, L. and MCHARDY, F.), WITH JAKISA, I., KELTER, D., KENNEDY, C. and STOCKDALE, J. (2020) *Guidance for the Poverty and Inequality Commission, Involving Experts by Experience*. Glasgow: The Poverty Alliance.

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- ³¹ For more information, visit: http://www.social-policy.org.uk/downloads/SPA_code_ethics_jan09.pdf
- ³² For more information, visit: <https://covidrealities.org/>
- ³³ For more information, visit: <https://www.yourcommunitypk.org/>
- ³⁴ For more information, visit: <https://www.pkc.gov.uk/communitycouncilcontacts>
- ³⁵ The final interview was with a family who were grappling with rural living and experiencing high expenditure, but who would not be judged to have an income level typical of a family experiencing poverty. The interview was useful in highlighting experiences common to families in and out of poverty in rural Perthshire.
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