



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba  
Paul O’Kane MSP

Sir Robert Chote  
UK Statistics Authority  
Fry Building  
1st Floor, 2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024

Dear Sir Robert

**Re: Scottish Government Child Poverty Statistics**

I am writing to seek the assistance of the UK Statistics Authority in establishing both the accuracy of statements made by the First Minister and former First Minister, and the methodology used by the Scottish Government, to claim that they have already, or they will lift 100,000 children out of poverty, as per the Child Poverty Cumulative Impact Assessment published by the Scottish Government on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2024.<sup>1</sup>

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2024, John Swinney claimed at First Minister’s Questions (FMQs) in the Scottish Parliament, that the SNP had ‘delivered measures such as the Scottish child payment, which is taking 100,000 children out of poverty today’. This was the second time Mr. Swinney had made this claim on that day alone.<sup>2</sup>

The former First Minister, Humza Yousaf, has also made similar claims on a number of occasions, including in Parliament on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, social media graphics and videos advertised by the SNP have promoted this claim as fact repeatedly.<sup>4 5</sup>

According to the most recent statistics, however, child poverty rates have broadly remained static in Scotland, with approximately 240,000 Scottish children (24%) living in relative poverty.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, single year statistic estimates actually suggest an *increase* in the number of children in poverty in 2022-23 to 260,000 children.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Child poverty cumulative impact assessment: update - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/child-poverty-cumulative-impact-assessment-2024/pages/1-1-update.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> [Meeting of the Parliament: 09/05/2024 | Scottish Parliament Website](https://www.parliament.scot/parliament/2024/05/09/09-05-2024)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/search-what-was-said-in-parliament/meeting-of-parliament-02-05-2024?meeting=15829&iob=135158#135158>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/HumzaYousaf/videos/snp-policies-expected-to-lift-100000-children-out-of-poverty/307925882000709/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/humzayousaf/reel/C4oGLpNLI6F/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8763j5p5pmo>

<sup>7</sup> <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/download.html>

**Paul O’Kane MSP**

Member of the Scottish Parliament for the West Scotland Region

Scottish Labour and Scottish Co-operative Party

Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Social Security, and Equalities

Email: paul.o’kane.msp@parliament.scot | 0141 887 5111 | Unit 1002, Mile End Mill, Paisley, PA1 1JS

Given these statistics do not seem to reflect real progress on reducing child poverty, and do not correlate with claims made by SNP politicians as outlined above, Scottish Labour put in a Freedom of Information (FOI) request into the methodology and modelling used by the Scottish Government as evidence for their claims. I have attached the FOI response we received for ease of reference.

As you can see, the modelling used by the Scottish Government uses a counterfactual scenario that presumes a number of policies were not in place. Yet, the levels forecast for this counterfactual scenario are comparable to existing poverty levels, indicating that it cannot be an accurate reflection of any alternative scenario, and therefore could give an inaccurate and misleading account of the effect of Scottish Government policies.

The guidance also makes clear, contrary to some statements by SNP politicians, that this figure is an unconfirmed forecast to be reached 2024-25 and is not *lifting* children out of poverty but just *keeping* more Scottish children from going into poverty.

The guidance given to the Scottish Government explicitly states that *'the estimated impact under this approach [the modelling used by the Scottish Government] does not equate to observable changes in poverty over time, or even... to the contribution of Scottish Government policies to those changes. For this reason, we refer to the impact of the policy package as 'keeping' children out of poverty rather than 'lifting' them out of poverty.'*

You will note, as outlined in the instances mentioned above, that this advice seems to have been ignored repeatedly by the First Minister and former First Minister in Parliament, and by the SNP on social media more widely.

Given both recent poverty statistics and official advice to Scottish Ministers appearing to contradict the claims of the First Minister about 'lifting 100,000 children out of poverty', I would welcome your view on both the language used by Scottish Government politicians, as well as the model used by the Scottish Government, which seems misleading given they compare the benefits of the policies they have implemented to an entirely unrealistic and abstract world.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



**Paul O'Kane MSP**

*West Scotland Region*

*Scottish Labour Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Social Security, and Equalities*

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