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Dear Debbie and Helen,

Thank you for your joint letter dated 28 November seeking more information about how the strategy will be developed and highlighting important policy areas for us to consider. Please accept our sincere apologies for the delay in responding. We are grateful for your engagement on this vital issue and welcome the scrutiny your work provides.

Tackling child poverty is at the heart of this Government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity. It is shameful that child poverty has increased by 700,000 since 2010, with 4.3 million children now living in poverty in the UK and 800,000 children using foodbanks to eat. The scale of the challenge cannot be overstated, but we are taking action to deliver a reduction in child poverty this Parliament.

We are writing to you to respond to your suggestions regarding process and policy and hope to clarify how we are developing this ambitious strategy.

Cross-government working

As you note, the Ministerial Child Poverty Taskforce demonstrates our commitment to working across government to ensure we explore all available levers to reduce child poverty. To date, the Taskforce has met seven times to discuss the critical issues that drive child poverty and is working well as a forum for Ministers to discuss issues and hear from a range of external experts from across the private, public, and third sectors.

The Ministerial taskforce, of which the Department for Health and Social Care is a member, is supported by a range of other forums. Officials from the Child Poverty Unit are working closely with policy and analytical experts across departments, such as the Home Office and Department for Transport, to ensure a truly cross-government approach to tackling child poverty. The Unit continues to draw in resources from departments across Whitehall.

Evidence of comprehensive strategic thought

We recognise the importance of being clear on how we will deliver on the strategy. This is why we published [Tackling Child Poverty: Developing our Strategy](#), which outlined how we are progressing the work. The strategy will provide more detail on how actions will be delivered and monitored when published.

The characteristics of effective strategic thinking

The Taskforce recognises the importance of being strategic, and we are working with a wide range of partners to develop the strategy. To ensure we gather the wealth of existing evidence and expertise that exists, Ministers and Officials have met with a substantial number of organisations since August. This includes hearing directly from families across the UK to gather insight on their current experiences and what could have the greatest impact on their lives.

A part of this process is the Analytical Expert Reference Group, of which the terms of reference and membership is available [here](#). The group brings together independent external expertise from leading universities, think tanks, and organisations to provide advice and scrutiny as we develop the strategy.

The Taskforce is considering all potential poverty metrics as part of the strategy development, including existing persistent poverty and absolute poverty measures. Furthermore, the Department for Work and Pensions is continuing to develop the Below Average Resources measure, based on the approach proposed by the Social Metrics Commission. As set out in the first Official Statistics in Development publication, [Below Average Resources: Developing a new poverty measure](#), there is significant further development work required to advance this into a robust measure. Therefore, this is not considered appropriate as a current metric for the strategy but will add value alongside existing measures once fully developed.

The strategy is focused on metrics related to child poverty, but we are working closely with colleagues on complementary metrics across government. An example is the Plan for Change measure on the percentage of five-year-olds reaching a good level of development in the early years foundation stage assessment.

Engagement with parliamentary colleagues

We greatly value parliamentary colleagues' engagement with our work and the expertise they can and have provided for the development of the child poverty strategy. Since November 2024, we have hosted feedback sessions in the House of Commons approximately every six weeks. These meetings are a forum to update interested parliamentarians on the strategy's development and discuss our work. We would be grateful if Select Committee members could join these sessions and recommend contacting childpoverty.secretariat@cabinetoffice.gov.uk to receive the invitation details.

Policy

Thank you for your helpful steers on policy. The Taskforce is considering all children across the UK in the development of the child poverty strategy. We recognise the distinct challenges of poverty faced by children in particular groups, such as migrant children, or children with disabilities or special educational needs (SEND). The causes of child poverty are deep-rooted, with solutions that go beyond government, and the Taskforce is exploring all available levers to address their needs.

We also acknowledge that the success of our strategy hinges on a deliberate, shared effort across all nations and regions of the UK. The final strategy will be UK-wide, drawing on devolved and reserved levers. We are working very closely with the devolved governments, as well as local government and MCAs in England, to understand the experience of poverty in different communities and the solutions already underway.

Further, the Four Nations Ministerial Group on Child Poverty meets regularly to provide Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland Ministers with an opportunity to contribute to the development of the UK-wide strategy and ensure that it complements their existing and developing strategies. The group is made up of Ministers with responsibility for child poverty from each of the four nations and is co-chaired by the UK Government's Minister for Employment and the Minister for School Standards. This Group's discussions are shared with the UK Ministerial Child Poverty Taskforce, to influence decision-making on the strategy. Officials across the four nations also meet on a regular basis.

In addition, we committed to visiting every nation and region of the UK to speak to families and organisations, which we are doing, and we know some parliamentary colleagues have held their own events and fed findings in.

We are glad the Committee recognises that delivering on the Government's wider agenda will be vital to increasing household income. This includes the Making Work Pay agenda and the recently published Getting Britain Working White Paper. We are working closely with the teams delivering these to ensure their activity supports our interest in increasing household income.

More broadly, we thank the Committee for flagging the other policy areas, all of which we will consider alongside the views of external experts who have fed into the strategy. Since its formation, the Taskforce has been debating and hearing views on the core drivers of child poverty. In October last year, we discussed how to reduce essential costs, particularly on food, energy, and water; in November we focused on employment as a route to increase income and financial resilience for poor families; and in December we discussed the poverty drivers in the housing sector, particularly temporary accommodation. In January, we heard from experts in children's health, early years and education, who shared their experience and expertise on ensuring low-income families can access quality services to tackle the impacts of poverty and in February we discussed how to increase the financial resilience of low-income families.

Across this Taskforce, Ministers and officials have been undertaking widespread engagement and met with over 100 organisations since August. Through this we are

building a comprehensive understanding of the most effective routes to tackle child poverty from the public, private, and third sectors while being mindful of the tight fiscal context and need to prioritise across government.

The strategy will set out over 10 years how this Government will tackle overall child poverty, reduce the cost of essentials, and work to give every child the best start in life. We are grateful for your engagement as we develop this ambitious strategy and look forward to our continued work together to achieve an enduring reduction in child poverty this Parliament.

With best wishes,



Rt. Hon Liz Kendall MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions



Rt. Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education