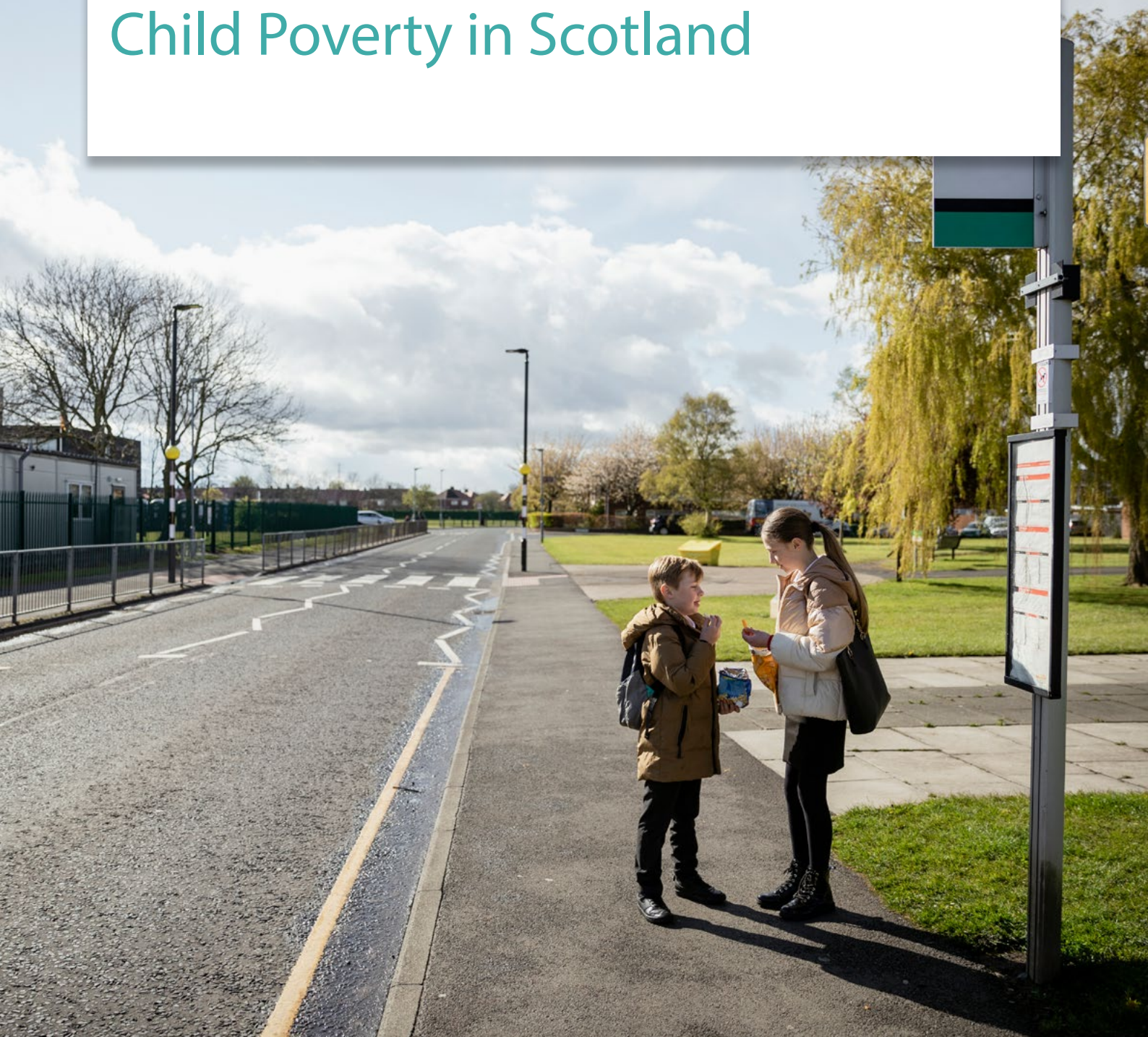




Place and Wellbeing Outcomes and Child Poverty in Scotland



Summary

The purpose of this briefing is to demonstrate how the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes provide an evidence-based framework for understanding and addressing child poverty. It brings together evidence showing how each Outcome is linked to the underlying causes of poverty. This paper illustrates how a place-based approach can mitigate child poverty by improving the quality of places, particularly where poverty is concentrated in areas of deprivation. This briefing provides decision-makers with confidence that using the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes framework can support preventative action to reduce child poverty and improve children's long-term wellbeing.



Introduction

In Scotland, more than one fifth of children are living in relative poverty before housing costs.¹ This means that even before these families pay rent or their mortgage, their household income is below 60% of the UK median.² Taking this into consideration, little money is then left for essentials such as food, heating, or clothing. For many of these households, at least one adult is employed, whereby having employment does not guarantee financial security. The basic needs for growing children are unable to be met by many families in Scotland.³

“A child is living in “relative poverty” if they reside in a household where the annual income is below 60% of the UK median income. It is estimated that 22% of children (220,000 children each year) were living in relative poverty before housing costs in 2021–2024.”

[Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2021-24
2025](#)

Child poverty impacts families as an immediate hardship, however it is also a driver of long-term inequality. Experiences of poverty in early life is linked to long-term disadvantages and challenges in adulthood⁴, including mental and physical health difficulties, a higher risk of substance misuse, and reduced life expectancy. It creates a cycle that is hard to break and poverty that persists across generations. In all of Scotland, prioritising primary prevention delivers significant economic, social, and health benefits, and is an approach encouraged throughout the literature.⁵⁶

The places where people live, work, and relax have a profound impact on their physical, mental, and financial wellbeing, shaping the experiences of those in poverty. These factors compound existing inequalities and disproportionately affect children and families living on low incomes.

[Scotland's Public Sector Reform Strategy](#) builds on the [Christie Commission](#) recommendations to be preventative, to better join up, and to be efficient in delivering services to people and reduce inequity, including tackling child poverty. To deliver this national ambition it is crucial that everyone coordinates action to improve the environmental, physical, and socioeconomic aspects of places where people live. A preventative approach to child poverty in Scotland must therefore take account for the powerful role places can have. By improving the quality of our places, there is potential to interrupt the patterns of inequality and create fairer opportunities for every child to thrive.



The Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

The Place and Wellbeing Outcomes are a consistent and comprehensive set of features of where a place has a positive impact on the wellbeing of people and planet while also reducing inequalities. The Outcomes reflect the robust evidence and research on how individual's daily lives and experiences are impacted by the places they live, work and relax.

7

Considering the Outcomes in their entirety provides a framework to underpin a place-based approach and enables decision makers to fully consider the impact of their decision on each of the features of a place. A place-based approach takes account of these different interconnections in a place and maximises the opportunity for positive consequences and minimise negative ones. To support the role of place in a more preventative approach to public service delivery, these impacts need to be identified and considered.

A place-based approach recognises that to reduce inequities, all aspects of our places need to be considered. The Place and Wellbeing Outcome framework provides a lens to consider the holistic elements of a place, encouraging coordinated action across multiple policy areas.⁸ It also requires the support of both quantitative and qualitative data, including the participation and meaningful involvement of those with local lived knowledge of the place.

The people-centred wording of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes is tailored to make sure that everyone is being considered. However, there are some people that experience an additive impact of inequalities. For example, people living in poverty or in rural areas, or those living with a disability, tend to be impacted by geographical differences more than other population groups, and thus the needs and experiences of these people should be considered to a greater extent.

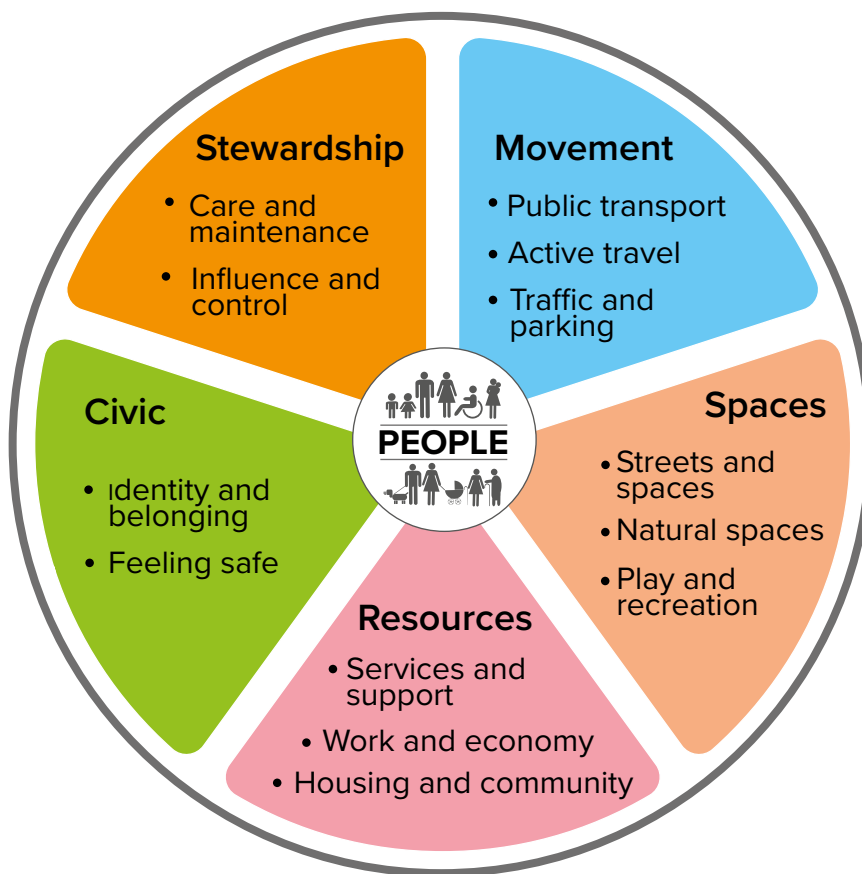
Children's rights have been embedded into law with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. This further emphasises the

obligation to ensure that all children have the right to an adequate standard of living, to health, education, play, and participation. By taking a place-based approach and involving children in decision-making, these rights can be better realised.⁹

The Place and Wellbeing Outcomes support efforts to reduce child poverty as many of the evidenced impacts of each Outcome play a role in improving the three key drivers of child poverty. More information on these can be found in the briefing paper [Integrating Child Poverty and Land Use Planning](#).

This publication summarises the evidence to demonstrate how the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes, and therefore any decisions, processes, or documents that embeds them, assist in reducing child poverty.

Place and Wellbeing Outcomes



How to use this briefing

The Place and Wellbeing Outcomes, and the main body of this document, are grouped into five themes. Each theme looks at a different aspect of what makes a good place to live. This document focusses on those aspects that can alleviate child poverty. You can read the document end-to-end, or you can pick it up at the theme or outcomes you are most interested in.

Resources: Do people have the services they need nearby (shops, schools, healthcare)? Are there local jobs, affordable housing, and supportive communities?

Spaces: Are our public spaces welcoming, safe and attractive? Is there access to green spaces, places to play, and indoor and outdoor areas to meet with other people?

Movement: Can people get around easily and safely? Do we have good public transport, safe walking or cycling routes?

Civic: Do people feel they belong and are part of the community, feel safe, and have a sense of pride in their community?

Stewardship: Is the place well looked after? Do local people have a say in how decisions are made?



Place and Wellbeing Theme: Resources

The Resources theme of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes concerns whether families can access the essentials that support daily life. These essentials include access to affordable housing, childcare, healthcare, digital connectivity, as well as opportunities for education and good quality work. Because families in poverty experience limited access to other resources, action towards the outcomes in this theme should align services close to where families live and design employment support around areas of greater local needs. These actions help children gain a better education, support parents into sustainable work, and strengthen community and economic resilience.

Housing and Community

Everyone has access to:

- a home that is affordable, energy efficient, high quality, and provides access to private outdoor space.
 - a variety of housing types, sizes and tenancies to meet the needs of the community. And of a sufficient density to sustain existing or future local facilities, services and amenities.
 - a home that is designed and built to meet need and demand, is adaptable to changing needs and includes accessible/ wheelchair standard housing.
 - new homes that are located and designed to provide high levels of climate resilience and use sustainable materials and construction methods.
 - homes that are designed to promote community cohesion.
-

Services and Support

Everyone has access to:

- health enhancing, accessible, affordable and well-maintained services, facilities and amenities. These are informed by community engagement, responsive to the needs and priorities of all local people.
- a range of spaces and opportunities for communities to meet indoors and outdoors.
- information and resources necessary for an included life in a range of digital and non-digital formats.

Work and Economy

Everyone benefits equally from a local economy that provides:

- essential goods and services produced or procured locally.
- good quality paid and unpaid work.
- access to assets such as wealth and capital and the resources that enable people to participate in the economy such as good health and education.
- a balanced value ascribed across sectors such as female dominated sectors and the non-monetary economy.

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Housing and Community Outcome

A key contributor to tackling child poverty is delivering the **Housing and Community Outcome**, which promotes the benefits of everyone having access to a good quality home that is affordable and energy efficient. This outcome ensures that homes are designed to meet the needs of people and the community.

In recent years, there has been unprecedented numbers of families living in temporary accommodation in Scotland. The number of these that have been deemed as unsuitable by law, has doubled to 12% since 2022, with a multitude of issues such as cold, overcrowding, safety concerns, and lack of amenities. Living in poor housing conditions can have knock on effects, with increased difficulties in accessing key services, such as GPs or schools.¹⁰

Inadequate housing has been shown to hinder positive child development and contribute to a cycle of poverty in many ways.¹¹ Evidence further links these poor housing conditions to increased prevalence of respiratory illnesses, stress and mental health conditions.¹² Overcrowding can also cause tensions within the family and feelings of lack of privacy, especially for adolescents.¹³ Fuel poverty means that families are forced to choose between heating and other essential needs, exacerbating the other negative factors of child poverty.^{14,15}

Housing conditions can also impact on academic performance, for example if there is insufficient quiet, warm space for children to do their homework. Additionally, research has

shown that homeless children are two to three times more likely to be absent from school than other children.¹⁶

The evidence is clear; good-quality, and energy-efficient housing is foundational to children's health, education, and development. Ensuring housing is affordable, secure, and located near other facilities and services supports child wellbeing and better prepares them for living a healthy life into adulthood.

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Services and Support Outcome

Everyone needs access to **Services and Support**, and achieving this Outcome means that people can access health-enhancing, affordable, and well-maintained services and facilities as well as the information and resources necessary for an included life.

This Outcome relates directly to child poverty as families on low incomes face the highest barriers to these resources compared with more affluent areas.¹³ Access to high-quality and affordable local services is not only central to wellbeing but can overcome some of the barriers to accessing and maintaining good quality work. These services include access to healthcare, childcare, social care, shops, community centres, and facilities.

In some deprived and rural areas there can be particularly poor availability and/or access to some facilities and services such as health care, childcare, broadband, and healthy food options.¹⁴ Where there is a lack of services available in a rural area, this disproportionately impacts people who are poorer as it is more difficult for them to travel to services that are geographically spread out.¹⁷

Young people growing up in poverty are more likely to experience poor mental health, which in turn means as an adult are more likely to experience poorer outcomes in later life such as unemployment, addictions, and further poverty. Mental health services also appear to be accessed less by young people, despite 12 to 25-year-olds having the highest incidence and prevalence of mental illness across the lifespan.¹⁸

This Outcome also promotes everyone having access to information and resources in a range of digital formats; however, a considerable difference exists in internet access between the most and least deprived areas in Scotland.

“In 2022, 84% of households in the 20% most deprived areas had internet access at home, compared to 96% in the 20% least deprived areas.”

[Scottish Household Survey 2022: Key Findings 2022](#)

Lack of affordable or reliable internet access, appropriate devices, and the digital skills to effectively use online services have been identified as key barriers for access to services.^{19,20} As many school activities are now digitally delivered, digital exclusion can lead to a reduced ability to adapt to digital requirements for children and young people's education.²¹

Decision makers can generate further evidence of services available to provide a comprehensive picture of the communities' assets and needs.²² By then providing and improving services in areas based on need, this lowers or eliminates some of the barriers to work and other resources and is thereby an effective way to alleviate child poverty. An example of this is to reduce digital exclusion, such as by providing free public Wi-Fi, or subsidising broadband in a similar way to public transport.

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Work and Economy Outcome

The **Work and Economy** Outcome is a cornerstone to tackling child poverty, where everyone benefits equally from a local economy that provides good quality paid and unpaid work, as well as having access to resources that enable people to participate in the economy, such as good health and education.

There is a large discrepancy between the most and least deprived areas for the number of young people who are confirmed as not being in employment, education, or training. The gap is also widening, as this figure has increased in deprived areas while remaining stable in affluent areas.¹⁰ This inequality has also existed for two decades, in the large difference in primary school students' educational attainment between deprived and less deprived neighbourhoods.²³

Families experiencing poverty face significant barriers to accessing quality work and reliable sources of income. As outlined in the previous two Outcomes, poor housing and limited access to transport or childcare services further restrict parents' ability to work.

Childcare is a major barrier, and 90% of parents with children under 5 years wanted more funded early years childcare.¹⁰ While gaps in childcare access limit parents' ability to work, a lack of high-quality education and work opportunities also undermines children's development into successfully and economically participating adults.

A place-based approach that looks to deliver on the Work and Economy Outcome, improves access to quality work, training, and education in the more deprived areas. Delivering on other Place and Wellbeing Outcomes augments the delivery of this Outcome, for example through improving the availability of affordable childcare.



Place and Wellbeing Theme: Spaces

The Spaces theme focuses on the quality of play areas, streets, natural spaces, and other public environments. Developing the Outcomes within this theme requires mapping where the outcomes are poorest and directing improvements to those neighbourhoods. These improvements could include upgrading local parks, creating more play spaces, or adding natural features that support wellbeing. By doing so, children gain access to free opportunities for social, mental, and physical activity, and can have more positive experiences which counteract the disadvantages associated with growing up in poverty.

Natural Spaces

Everyone can:

- access good-quality natural spaces that support biodiversity and are well-connected, safe, maintained, designed for climate resilience and provide multiple functions and amenities to meet the varying needs of different population groups.
- be protected from environmental hazards including air/ water/ soil pollution or the risk of flooding.
- access community food growing opportunities and prime quality agricultural land is protected.

Play and Recreation

Everyone can access a range of high quality, safe, well-maintained, accessible places with opportunities for play and recreation to meet the varying needs of different population groups and the community itself.

Streets and Spaces

Everyone has access to:

- buildings, streets and public spaces that create an attractive place to use, enjoy and interact with others.
- streets and spaces that are well-connected, designed for climate resilience and maintained, providing multiple functions and amenities to meet the varying needs of different population groups.

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Natural Spaces

The **Natural Spaces** Outcome allows everyone access to good-quality natural spaces that are designed for climate resilience and provide multiple functions to meet the varying needs of different population groups. Natural spaces include greenspaces, such as gardens (public and private), parks and woodlands, fields, greenspace alongside paths and roads, and tree-lined streets. Natural spaces can also include blue spaces such as streams, canals, rivers and the coastline.²⁴

Access to good-quality natural spaces supports children's development, improves physical activity, and can enhance wellbeing.²⁵ Evidence shows that children living in environments with more greenspaces tend to experience fewer emotional and behavioural difficulties later in life.²⁶

A study from Denmark using data from 1 million Danes born between 1985 and 2003, found that growing up deprived of green space is associated with an up to 55% higher risk of mental illness as an adult.

[Residential Green Space in Childhood is Associated with Lower Risk of Psychiatric Disorders from Adolescence into Adulthood](#) 2019

However, access to natural spaces is not equal across Scotland. Families living on low incomes, people with disabilities, people from some ethnic minority groups, and people living in more deprived urban areas, are less likely to visit a natural space, as they may have less availability in their area or reduced access to these spaces.²⁷ Households with children are the ones to most frequently visit natural spaces and for the longest duration, but this is significantly less for households of lower incomes.²⁸

There may be a greater potential benefit for having access to high-quality natural spaces for children and families in poverty compared with other groups, and can also have wider long-term benefits for communities, including cleaner air, reduced noise, supporting biodiversity and protecting from climate hazards such as heat and flooding.^{24,27} These benefits offer children in low-income households the opportunity to grow up in a sustainable environment that will support their wellbeing throughout their lives. An environmental experiment in Glasgow showed that improving woodlands in a disadvantaged community led to more frequent visits, better perceptions of neighbourhood quality, greater use for physical activity,

and higher feelings of safety over time. The research suggested that this would likely have similar impacts on other areas where there is high a prevalence of poverty.²⁹

To make the best use of this evidence, investment into improving natural spaces should be targeted where children have the least access to these spaces and expand greenspaces to cater to the varying needs of the population. Activities that directly benefit children include both active pursuits, such as sport and play activities, as well as passive activities, like places to connect with nature and enjoy the landscape.²² These improvements might look like repurposing vacant or derelict sites or upgrading existing natural spaces. Improving the Natural Spaces Outcome can have positive links with most other Outcomes for people living in poverty, such as increasing feelings of safety and belonging, supporting active travel, improving the care and maintenance of an area, and providing access to a wider variety of spaces for the community.

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Play and Recreation

Achieving the Outcome of **Play and Recreation** means that everyone can access a range of high quality, safe, well maintained, accessible places with opportunities for play and recreation.

Play underpins children’s physical, social, and cognitive development. Play and games support positive social relationships, which along with language, problem solving, and perception skills, are abilities that contribute to health and wellbeing across their lifespan. This Outcome is particularly important for people experiencing poverty as deprived areas are less likely to have high-quality or safe spaces for children to play. This under-provision contributes to reduced opportunities to lead a healthy adult life or end the cyclical nature of child poverty.

If play and recreation areas are perceived as unsafe, then parents and carers may not let children play outdoors or use play areas, and these children lose opportunities to spend active time outdoors and socialise.^{14,24}

“In Scotland, 1 in 5 children under the age of nine live more than a ten-minute walk from the nearest playground.”

[Green Space Index](#) 2024

Play, especially in outdoor and natural environments, can help children and young people to cope with stress and anxiety.¹⁴ If children are physically active when they are young, they are more likely to adopt these healthy behaviours or lifestyles as they grow up. Similarly, if they have undertaken activities such as play outside as children, they are likely to continue using outdoor spaces as adults.²⁴

There are several barriers which can reduce or prevent children and young people from play and recreation and are linked with the other Place and Wellbeing Outcomes. These include neighbourhood and road safety, availability of natural and other public spaces, and the lack of sense of community.³⁰ Cost is one of the greatest barriers to recreation for low-income families. In Scotland, the price of children’s sports and leisure activities continue

to rise faster than adult prices, and parents have expressed frustration that their financial circumstances prevent their children from taking part in activities such as swimming lessons.¹⁰ For children who live in rural areas or have disabilities, there are even fewer opportunities.³¹

“Children’s play requires provision of safe and quality physical spaces for play that are close to, or within easy reach from, their homes and are not hindered by barriers relating to accessibility.”

[Getting It Right for Play: A Toolkit to Assess and Improve Play Opportunities 2025](#)

Play Sufficiency Assessments can provide targeted engagement with children and young people and support the development of play and recreation areas for children in deprived areas. Other useful interventions could be as simple as providing chalk art areas or temporarily closing streets to create accessible play areas.^{32,33}

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Streets and Spaces

By delivering the **Streets and Spaces** Outcome, everyone has access to buildings, streets, and public spaces that create an attractive place to use, enjoy and interact with others, providing multiple functions and amenities to meet the varying needs of different population groups.

Well-designed streets and spaces can make a huge difference for children living in poverty, as they can substitute for the safe play areas or provide transportation opportunities they would not otherwise have access to. Attractive and walkable neighbourhoods allow children to travel freely, exercise, and socialise more easily, which is particularly important if they don’t have suitable spaces at home.³⁴

Children in the most deprived areas are most affected by traffic-dominated or neglected spaces. When streets and spaces don’t accommodate the needs of the people living in the area, they can exacerbate inequalities. Over the last 40 years, there has been a decline in children’s radius of independence and play ranges. This means they spend more time indoors, and have greater limitations imposed upon them from traffic and safety concerns.^{10,24,33}

Safe and attractive spaces are particularly important for families with children and those without gardens. Areas of greater deprivation may have fewer adequate public spaces available, and thus focusing on reducing this inequality is important to providing the benefit that these spaces provide. People without access to these spaces are more likely to stay indoors and won’t have as many opportunities to know their neighbours or let their children play or travel outdoors.

Improving streets and squares and designing them with pedestrians in mind, can benefit many other Outcomes described in this paper. Health and wellbeing can be improved by the extra active travel, as well as benefitting people’s sense of belonging, feelings of safety, and connection to places.³⁵

An interesting community-led action that has gained traction across the UK is the temporary closure of streets, which provide children with a supervised and secure environment to play.³² Increasing accessibility in this way builds trust and community, as well as directly benefitting the children living near the street closures. Other innovations could include creating spaces for children outwith regular hours. For example, expanding free after-school activities means that space is available to the community for longer and could reduce the need for costly after-school childcare. Local government policies like Open Space Strategies or Play Sufficiency Assessments can provide data and analysis of where improvements in these areas can readily be made.



Place and Wellbeing Theme: Movement

The Movement theme is about how easily people can travel to the places that matter to them; between their homes, and local schools, workplaces, services, shops, and social activities. Improving the Movement theme increases access to opportunity, such as by creating safe walking routes, providing direct bus services, and calming traffic on streets children use every day. These improvements can support regular school attendance, enable parents to work, and provide children with greater safety and independence needed for healthy development.

Active travel

Everyone can:

- easily move around using good-quality, accessible, well-maintained and safe wheeling, segregated walking and cycling routes and access secure bike parking.
- wheel, walk and cycle through routes that connect homes, destinations and public transport, are segregated from, and prioritised above, motorised traffic and are part of a local green network.

Public transport

Everyone has access to a sustainable, affordable, accessible, available, appropriate, safe, and public transport service.

Traffic and parking

Everyone can benefit from:

- reducing traffic and traffic speeds in the community.
 - traffic management and design, where traffic and car parking do not dominate or prevent other uses of space and car parking is prioritised for those who don't have other options.
-

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Active Travel

The **Active Travel** Outcome supports increased connection between homes and destinations by ensuring everyone can easily move around using good-quality, accessible, well maintained, safe, and segregated wheeling, walking, and cycling through these important routes.

In Scotland, 27% of all households have no access to a car, and this increases to nearly half of the households in the most deprived areas.³⁶ There are further inequalities in access to active travel opportunities in Scotland, such as a higher prevalence of cycling among higher-income groups.³⁷ Safe and accessible active travel routes are important in communities facing poverty, as they improve connectivity without relying on more expensive forms of transportation.

Children and young people tend not to have their own incomes or means of motorised transport. They are more dependent on others for transport, unless there are means for active travel.⁹ There are many other benefits to active travel, especially for children in deprived areas. Active travel can increase independence for children and young people, builds physical and mental resilience, and supports healthier lifestyles.^{7,14,38,39}

Improving walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure can increase foot traffic to certain areas. This increase can support local businesses, as well as provides access to work and services, including further education, especially for people without a car. Active travel also increases physical activity and access to green space, which reduces the prevalence of diseases, allowing people to be more socially and economically active for more of their lives.³⁷

Active travel necessitates changes in other Outcomes, especially public transport options as well as spaces. Short term interventions like implementing school “walking bus” programmes could encourage more children to walk to school. In the long term, investment in both protected cycling/walking infrastructure, and behavioural change is required to make a difference to inequalities related to active travel.⁴⁰

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Public Transport

The **Public Transport** Outcome means that everyone has access to a sustainable, affordable, accessible, available, appropriate, safe, and public transport service.

Transport poverty occurs when there is a lack of transport, and disproportionately affects low-income families.^{41,42} In Scotland, more than one million people are at risk of transport poverty and certain groups are likely to be at higher risk.¹⁴ Transport poverty can limit access to education, employment, and childcare, creating daily barriers that reinforce other disadvantages.

Where public transport is unaffordable or unreliable, families face missing appointments and work opportunities. Children may have limited freedom to travel independently, reducing access to play, learning, and friendships. With lower rates of car ownership, families on low incomes depend heavily on public transport, and especially in rural and remote areas. Where public transport is limited or too costly, this can force families to reduce costs in other important areas, which was reported to lead to a reliance on food banks.⁴³

Investing in affordable and integrated transport systems benefits families living in poverty, as those most reliant on public transport. It provides access to the essentials; health and social care services, employment, education, training, leisure, sport, and social activities. Public transport use also increases other Outcomes, such as an increase in active travel or a sense of belonging.³⁷ Taking a place-based approach to public transport, such as improving connectivity in deprived and rural areas, and reducing the costs of transport for low-income adults, will positively benefit children and families living in poverty.

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Traffic and Parking

The **Traffic and Parking** Outcome aims to reduce traffic and traffic speeds in the community.

In areas with higher levels of poverty, people are more likely to be exposed to hazards and face higher rates of child road traffic injuries. Deprived neighbourhoods can also be exposed to higher levels of air and noise pollution, which are linked to impaired health and cognitive performance in children.¹⁴

“Child pedestrians from more deprived areas in Scotland are three times more likely to be injured on the roads than those from less deprived areas.”

[Scotland’s Road Safety Framework to 2030](#) 2021

High-traffic roads can create what is called “community severance”, where these roads physically divide neighbourhoods, causing reduced access to services and social interaction.³⁷ For people living on busy streets, they are less likely to spend time outdoors and crucially, less likely to let their children play outside.^{34,35}

Reducing traffic hazards can improve air quality and children’s wellbeing, while also making streets and neighbourhoods more connected and liveable. Streets that have been designed for pedestrian use has positive links to other Outcomes, such as improving feelings of safety, connection and sense of belonging, as well as promoting walking and cycling.³⁵ Decreased car dependency means that the financial hardship that can come from car ownership is less of an issue. This particularly benefits children from low-income households, as they are primarily active travellers and are more vulnerable to the noise and emissions from traffic.^{37,44}

Several approaches have been shown to help reduce harm and provide safer outdoor environments for children.⁴⁵ Road safety education and restrictions around school entrances can dramatically improve school traffic and encourage active travel. Edinburgh’s [School Streets programme](#), for example, has reduced vehicles around school during key times. This improved safety and encouraged more children to walk or cycle to school. Introducing other traffic-calming measures, such as low-traffic neighbourhoods and 20mph zones, has been linked to reduced child road casualties.^{46,47}



Place and Wellbeing Theme: Civic

The Civic theme concerns people's sense of identity, belonging, and safety within their communities. Improving Civic Outcomes through safer design and providing opportunities for young people to feel like they belong and are connected to their communities provide the key foundations for breaking cycles of poverty.

Identity and Belonging

Everyone can benefit from a place that has a positive identity, culture and history, where people feel like they belong and are able to participate and interact positively with others.

Feeling Safe

Everyone feels safe and secure in their own home and their local community taking account of the experience of different population groups.

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Identity and Belonging

The outcome of **Identity and Belonging** demonstrates that everyone can benefit from a place that has a positive identity, culture and history, where people feel like they belong, and are able to participate and interact positively with others.

For children growing up in poverty, feeling a sense of belonging is very important. When certain neighbourhoods or ethnic groups are stigmatised or unwelcomed, this can reinforce cycles of exclusion and disadvantage. This is evidenced by people in lower income groups being less likely to report feeling strongly connected to their communities or a sense of influence over local decisions.¹⁴

Being part of a supportive and positive social network can provide self-esteem and a purpose in life. Children who feel proud of where they live are more likely to engage in school, social activities, and their community. This aspect is also associated with

better mental health outcomes and healthier behaviours in children and adolescents. Social networks can provide a sense of belonging and identity and attachment to a neighbourhood.¹⁴

Feeling listened to also helps build a sense of belonging to places, as well as trust, positive relationships, and confidence with the services in their area.^{13,22} Children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods have demonstrated a strong understanding of the connection between their wellbeing and the qualities of their environment. They understand that aspects of disadvantage, such as place-based stigma, can limit their ability to feel accepted, make friends, or even take part in activities. However, the positive influences of their places were apparent too, where it was recognised that stronger social networks benefitted their sense of belonging and feelings of safety.⁴⁸

“Creating a positive sense of place helps to foster a sense of belonging and contributes to wellbeing, inclusion and community cohesion.”

[Quality of Life Foundation Literature Review 2019](#)

Having access to local facilities, services and communities can help people to socially interact and build social capital.¹⁴ Inclusively designed neighbourhoods with a sense of stability and prosperity supports families and communities to have greater resilience during hardship.⁴⁹ Places should be designed to support everyday interactions with others, which can lead to a greater sense of togetherness and provide benefit to the most stigmatised populations.²² Creating opportunities for intergenerational interactions supports both young and elderly wellbeing and strengthens community identity and belonging.⁵⁰

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Feeling Safe

The **Feeling Safe** Outcome is an important one for those experiencing poverty and is where everyone feels safe and secure in their own home and their local community.

Low income and ethnic minority groups can have limited access to safe and well-maintained environments, as they are more likely than other population groups to live in neighbourhoods with dilapidation and unsafe recreation spaces. Research with children and young people in disadvantaged areas found that they avoided certain routes occupied by people perceived to be aggressive due to alcohol and drug use.⁵¹ This demonstrates that when people live in places that feel unsafe and unwelcoming, access to recreational or other facilities is restricted, and they face higher barriers to participation and wellbeing as a result.^{10,13}

“In Scotland, people’s feeling of safety in deprived areas is much lower (68%) than for the least deprived areas (89%).”

[Social Capital and Community Wellbeing in Scotland 2024](#)

Perceptions of neighbourhood safety is strongly patterned by deprivation, and this perception can be a critical factor for children's wellbeing, even where there are spaces and services available in the area. Parents or caregivers in deprived areas have greater safety concerns than people in affluent areas and are more likely to prevent children from walking to school, playing outdoors, or meeting friends on their own. This restriction can reduce children's levels of social interaction and physical activity, impacting their overall independence and freedom.¹³ These barriers affect girls to an even greater extent. Studies have found that girls are more likely than boys to feel unsafe when out on their own, and to avoid parks and public routes, especially where there is poor visibility and inclusive design. Often, adults will discourage girls from using public spaces "for their own safety". For teenage girls, safety is defined as more than just avoiding physical harm, and is also about not being judged or stared at.⁵²

Consultation with young people has shown that they consider a secure environment, including feeling safe in their area, to be a prerequisite for health and wellbeing, and 82% of girls thought that they should be more involved in designing playgrounds, parks, and outdoor facilities.⁵³ Including young people, and especially girls, and asking them what they want in the development of public spaces are important to improving the discrepancy between the intended and actual use of spaces.⁵²

Equity in stewardship means ensuring high standards are not limited to affluent areas but are shared across all communities. Leisure facilities and activities can be a way of keeping children safe as well as provide opportunities for exercise and learning. Having attractive, walkable, and well-connected streets with more people on them, improves passive surveillance and increases feelings of safety, as well as improving other Outcomes like active travel.²⁴



Place and Wellbeing Theme: Stewardship

The Stewardship theme relates to how well neighbourhoods are cared for and whether communities can influence the places where they live, work, and play. Strengthening Stewardship through improving care, maintenance, and community involvement gives children and young people a greater voice and creates spaces that facilitate healthier lives.

Care and Maintenance

Everyone has access to:

- buildings, spaces and routes that are well cared for in a way that is responsive to the needs and priorities of local communities.
- good facilities for recycling and well organised refuse storage and collection.

Influence and Control

Everyone is empowered to be involved a place in which:

- local outcomes are improved by effective collaborations between communities, community organisations and public bodies.
- decision making processes are designed to involve communities as equal partners.
- community organisations co-produce local solutions to issues.
- communities have increased influence over decisions
- democratic processes are developed to be accessible to all citizens.

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Care and Maintenance

The **Care and Maintenance** Outcome aims for everyone having access to buildings and outdoor spaces that are well cared for in a way that meets the needs and priorities of local communities. This Outcome matters for people living in poverty because derelict land and poor maintenance are more common in deprived areas.²³

Abandoned buildings, vacant sites, and poorly kept public spaces can have a substantial impact on children living in poverty. When local spaces feel unsafe or uncared for, families are less likely to spend time outdoors, reducing opportunities for social connection, play, and physical activity. These conditions contribute to isolation and poorer wellbeing, reinforcing the inequalities already affecting children in low income households.¹⁴ Neglect of the physical environment can also send a harmful message to families experiencing poverty by implying that their communities are less deserving of care. This can heighten feelings of shame or reduce confidence in local services.^{54,55}

Across Scotland, derelict sites are unevenly distributed, mostly concentrated in only five local authority areas. Families in deprived areas are more than twice as likely to live near derelict sites.^{56,57} This inadequate maintenance can contribute to crime, discourage investment, and increase health risks, whereas addressing dereliction can help communities to thrive. Children and families have expressed that they care about keeping their places being maintained, and they want their neighbourhoods to be easy to use and built to last.⁵⁸

There are many potential opportunities for reusing vacant and derelict sites. They could be used for new homes, community food growing, generating renewable energy, and as learning and play spaces. A place based approach would therefore prioritise investment and maintenance where the neglect and derelict sites are most concentrated, ensuring that children in deprived communities benefit from improved surroundings that are safe and health-promoting.⁶²

Place and Wellbeing Outcome: Influence and Control

The Influence and Control Outcome is where everyone is empowered to be involved a place. This happens where communities, local organisations, and public bodies, work together and have decision-making processes that have been developed to be accessible to everyone.

Children's experiences of influence in Scotland vary widely, and perceived influence over local decisions is lower among residents of areas with more deprivation.⁵⁹ Young people in more deprived areas, older pupils, and teenage girls, are all less likely to feel that their views are acknowledged or taken seriously.⁵² Barriers such as limited time, confidence, or appropriate engagement opportunities mean that families facing poverty can be underrepresented in local engagement processes.^{60,61}

Having a voice in local decisions can counteract the reduced sense of control that often accompanies people experiencing financial hardship.^{14,62} When children and young people take part in shaping their surroundings, they are more likely to feel shared responsibility and ownership of their neighbourhoods, and to be more hopeful about their futures.^{22,60,63}

Children and young people repeatedly say they want their views to matter in decisions about their neighbourhoods. Research has shown that children in deprived areas do have a good understanding of the relationship between their environment and their wellbeing.⁶⁴ Starting with simple conversations about what children and families value in their area can help build the relationships needed for more meaningful collaboration over time.²²

Further deliberate effort is needed to ensure the voices most in need of support are heard.⁶⁵ This is especially true in more deprived neighbourhoods, where engagement opportunities may be less accessible or not designed with children in mind.⁶⁰ There are many complex barriers that people in poverty face.

High quality engagement, especially early in the decision-making process, helps address inequalities by adding community views at the time where they would have the greatest impact.³⁵ Approaches that are inclusive and encourage children to share their experiences allow them to influence improvements in ways that make sense to them. Through this involvement, they develop skills such as problem solving, collaboration, and creative thinking, which support their long term wellbeing.⁹

A place-based approach to the Influence and Control Outcome ensures that children and families facing the greatest disadvantages are central to shaping decisions. By building trust, improving engagement, and creating accessible decision-making processes, places can be developed to improve wellbeing for children growing up in poverty.

Conclusion

Children's lives are shaped by the places where they live, learn, and play; by the quality of the environment they are surrounded by. The evidence presented throughout this document shows how these place-based factors can either reduce or deepen the impacts of poverty, and often in ways that are not captured by income measures alone.

The Place and Wellbeing Outcomes are a practical framework for recognising the wider influences of our places by bringing together socioeconomic and environmental considerations. They support a place-based approach to direct action to improving deprived areas and to reducing child poverty. Embedding the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes in decision-making therefore offers a method to support preventative and long-term alleviation of child poverty and improve children's wellbeing across Scotland.

End Notes

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- 33 [The Safe Way to Let Children Play in Your Street](#) 2013
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- 43 [Transport and Child Poverty – Beyond the pandemic](#) 2021

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