

ONS Local Dataset on Drivers of Child Poverty for Local Authorities in Scotland



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Contents

Guidance Note.....	3
Introduction.....	3
Context.....	3
Use Cases and Applications.....	3
Dataset Overview.....	3
Example Use Case.....	4
West Lothian (WLC) Case Study.....	5
How to Access and Use the Excel Workbook.....	9
Understanding the Likeness Metrics.....	10
Collaboration and Feedback.....	10

Guidance note

Introduction

This guidance note accompanies the dataset developed by ONS Local in partnership with the Improvement Service and Scottish Government, designed to support local authorities and partners to understand child poverty. The dataset provides comparative insights into the drivers of child poverty across all Scottish local authorities and their counterparts across Great Britain (GB). It is intended to support evidence-based policy development, benchmarking, and the sharing of good practice.

Context

This dataset is just one of a number of datasets and data tools designed to support local authorities in Scotland to understand and take action to tackle child poverty. The main point of difference for this dataset is its inclusion of GB-wide comparators. The data provide a comparable indicator set across GB and analyses this to create groupings of “like” local authorities. Our intention is that this dataset can add most value when used in conjunction with these other resources to add a wider context and a wider range of comparator local authority areas in which to understand performance and to seek good practice.

Use Cases and Applications

This dataset is designed to support Scottish local authorities to:

- Benchmark performance against similar authorities across GB, beyond those in Scotland.
- Support policy development by identifying shared challenges and successful interventions.
- Facilitate peer learning and collaborative working between councils with similar profiles and facing similar challenges.
- Inform local child poverty strategies, funding bids, and service redesign by providing a comprehensive and standard set of data.

Dataset overview

The primary purpose of this dataset is to compare all Scottish local authorities with similar areas from across GB based on the [drivers of child poverty](#). Each Scottish local authority is matched with others from across Scotland and the rest of Great Britain that are statistically similar in terms of these drivers. The tables also include data on other aspects relevant to child poverty. The data includes:

- Measures of child poverty before and after housing costs¹,
- Data on six of the seven drivers of child poverty used by the Scottish Government,
- Population characteristics for each local authority including data related to the [priority groups](#),
- Other contextual information including (Scottish) Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) share and population density.

More detail on the included data, such as sources, dates covered, and missing and imputed data can be found in the data file itself. The tables are not intended to be used solely as a dataset in themselves and will not be updated regularly.

¹ The 2020 figures represent the latest year for which comparisons between countries of GB can be made, hence the quintiles within the dataset for this year are cross-GB. The 2023 figures were the latest available at the time of writing. Because comparisons between countries is not advised the quintiles are within-country. See Notes in the published tables for more.

Example use case

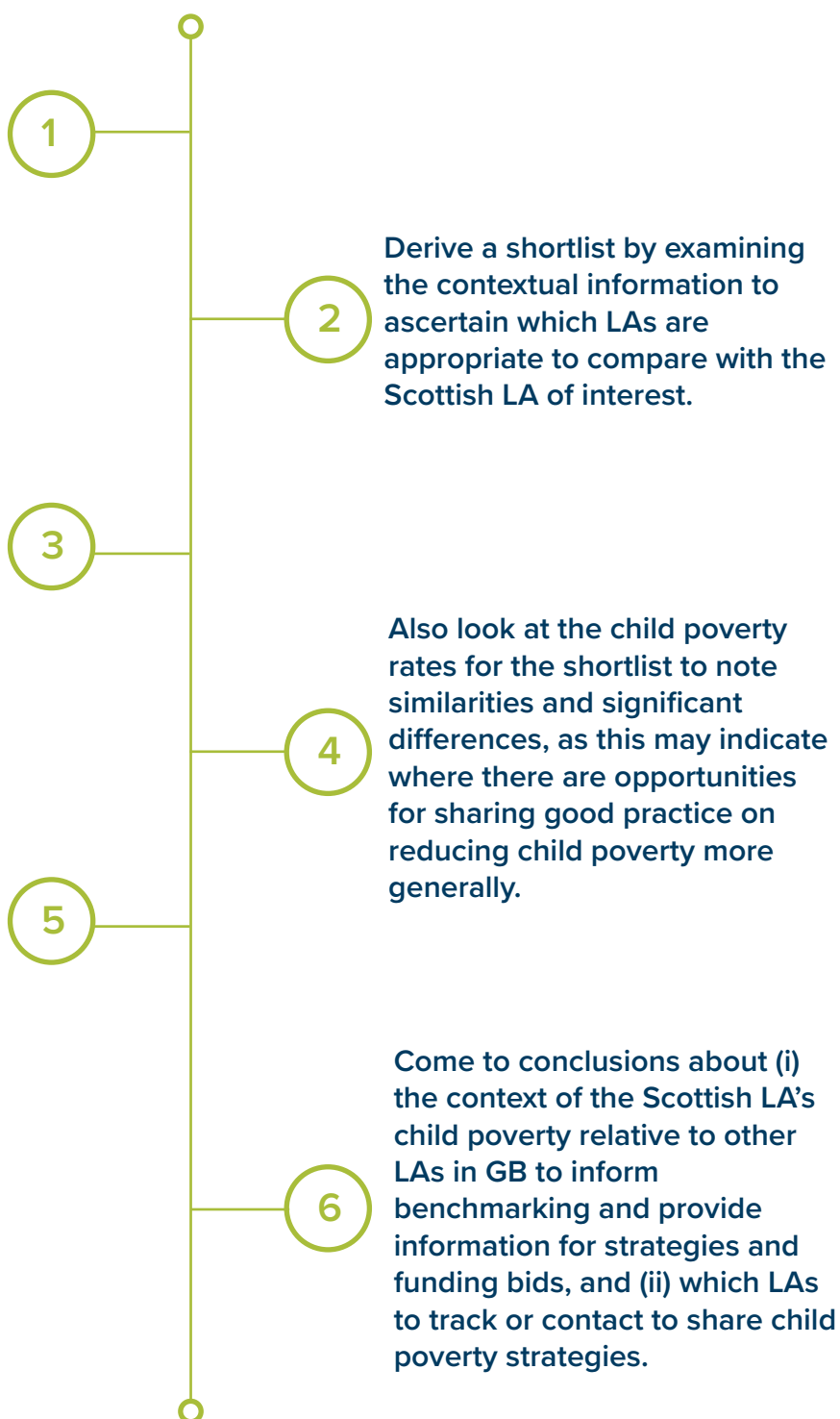
The following section provides an example of how this data set could be used, focusing on a case study for West Lothian Council.

The procedure set out here follows a six step process, which can be replicated for other areas. It is not the only procedure that could be used and may not be the best. The best procedure will depend on what the local authority wants to achieve. These steps provide a re-usable approach for understanding and analysing the data.

Derive a 'long list' of GB local authorities (LAs) that are most like the Scottish LA of interest regarding the drivers of child poverty according to the likeness ranks.

Look at the population characteristics to note similarities and differences, as this may indicate opportunities for sharing strategies for targeting particular groups. (It may be worth adding any LAs to the shortlist which show particular similarity in the population characteristics).

Examine the figures for the drivers for the shortlist to ensure we fully understand their respective contexts.



West Lothian (WLC) Case Study

West Lothian - to understand child poverty in West Lothian (WLC).

1. Like LAs

Derive a 'long list' of GB LAs that are most like West Lothian in the drivers of child poverty according to the likeness ranks.

The first six LAs in the list for WLC have likeness ranks quite consistent between methods 1 and 2 and so we will look at these in more detail. Any other LAs with rank below 10 in one of the methods are also worth including in our long list. Havering and Epping Forest are interesting in that they are close comparators according to method 2 (7th and 5th respectively), but much more distant according to method 1 (27th and 107th). If we include all of these LAs we get the following long list.

Long list

Amber Valley, Monmouthshire/ Sir Fynwy, Bedford, Northumberland, East Devon, Scottish Borders, East Riding of Yorkshire, Midlothian, South Derbyshire, Swale, Harborough, Havering, Epping Forest.

2. Contextual information

Derive a shortlist by examining the contextual information to ascertain which LAs are appropriate to compare with WLC.

West Lothian has a relatively low population density amongst the local authorities included within its data table. It also has a slightly above average IMD Local Share in this group. To derive our shortlist, we can exclude any local authorities that are very different to WLC for either measure.

Detail: WLC has a population density of 430 people per square km. This is low compared to the average in the table of 803, and the mean and median shown in the Summary Statistics tab. It is, however, relatively similar to the other local authorities in the long list. We can exclude Havering, which, as a London Borough, has a much higher density and can exclude very sparsely populated areas with densities under 100, namely Scottish Borders and Northumberland.

WLC IMD Local Share of 14.6% is slightly above average in the WLC table of 12.1%, but below the mean in the Summary Statistics tab of 16.3%. We could focus on local authorities that fall into the interquartile range, i.e. the middle 50% of local authorities, meaning we would exclude any below the 25th percentile (2.5%) and above the 75th percentile (26.4%). This would remove Monmouthshire, East Devon, Harborough and Epping Forest.

This leaves a shortlist of six LAs. Only one of these is in Scotland, meaning that cross-GB comparisons may be of use in WLC.

Short list

Amber Valley, Bedford, East Riding of Yorkshire, Midlothian, South Derbyshire, Swale.

3. Population characteristics

Also look at the population characteristics to note similarities and differences, as this may indicate opportunities for sharing strategies for targeting particular groups. (It may be worth adding any LAs to the shortlist which show particular similarity in the population characteristics).

Interpreting the quintiles

All five of the population characteristics measure the prevalence of groups considered vulnerable to child poverty. So, the higher the quintile number (1-5) for a local authority under a particular group (e.g. WLC, single parent households) the higher the percentage of the local population belonging to that (vulnerable) group.

WLC has relatively high prevalence (i.e. high quintile number) for disabled adults with children, births to mothers under 25, single parent households, and population under 16. However, it has a low percentage of minority ethnic population.

Amber Valley and South Derbyshire are fairly similar to WLC, being no more than one quintile different on each characteristic. Midlothian and Swale are also similar, with all but one characteristic within one quintile. Midlothian has a lower proportion of single parent households, while Swale has more births to mothers under 25. Bedford and East Riding are less similar. Bedford has a lower proportion of disabled adults with children and a far higher proportion of minority ethnic population. East Riding of Yorkshire is different across several categories, with a lower proportion of disabled adults with children, fewer single parent households, and a lower under 16 population. To make our shortlist more focused we will remove East Riding, however we may choose to re-introduce it in future analysis.

None of the other local authorities in the data table stand out as especially similar in terms of population characteristics to WLC. We can therefore leave our shortlist as it is but remove East Riding for now.

Updated short list

Amber Valley, Bedford, Midlothian, South Derbyshire, Swale.

4. Child poverty rates

Look at the child poverty rates for the shortlist to note similarities and differences, as this may indicate where there are opportunities for sharing good practice on reducing child poverty.

Interpreting the quintiles

First note that for the child poverty measures (columns E-H), quintile 1 represents low child poverty rates (i.e. within the lowest 20% of LAs), whereas quintile 5 means high rates (within the highest 20% of LAs). Note also that for 2020 figures the quintiles are across the whole of GB LAs, whereas for 2023 figures the quintiles are within country (e.g. WLC is in the middle 20% in Scotland and GB before housing costs).

Amber Valley is the closest comparator to WLC based on drivers and it has very similar rates of child poverty, although it had a lower rate of child poverty before housing costs in 2020. All other comparators in our short list fall either into the same quintile as WLC or (in the case of Bedford and Swale) a higher quintile, for after housing cost measures of child poverty in 2020. This suggests that none of them differ substantially to WLC. Looking at the 2023 data, we can only compare within Scotland, namely Midlothian, which falls into a lower quintile for both before and after housing cost rates of child poverty.

5. Drivers in more detail

Examine the figures for the drivers for the (expanded) shortlist to ensure we fully understand their respective contexts.

Let's take each LA in the shortlist in turn. West Lothian is average or performing above average across all drivers of child poverty. It has a slightly above average percentage earning less than the living wage, a below average proportion of children in working households, and below average job density, but performs above average across the other indicators. Underemployment is low, median earnings are just above average, and the percentage in lower paid occupations is very low.

Amber Valley and Bedford are close to WLC across all the drivers. Amber Valley has an especially low rate of underemployment, however it is still relatively similar to WLC. Both Amber Valley and Bedford have lower rates earning less than the living wage, but still relatively close considering the data across all local authorities.

Detail: To better understand what we mean by "similar", we can look at the drivers in more detail within the WLC data tab. For example, percentage underemployed ranges from 0% to 7.6% in the WLC tables. As Amber Valley and Bedford are 1.1 and 0.5 percentage points away from WLC's figure, we can deduce this is a relatively small difference compared to the range of 7.6.

Looking at median earnings, the range in WLC's data tab is £211.50, while the differences for Amber Valley and Bedford from WLC are £32.40 and -£12.40 respectively, so quite small. We could also compare these differences with the data across all GB instead by examining the tab 'Summary Statistics'. We see the interquartile range for this driver is £95.70 (i.e. the middle half of the data or difference between the top and bottom quarter of data spans a difference of £95.70), meaning the differences between WLC, Amber Valley, and Bedford are relatively small at a GB level. The same approaches can be used to examine the other drivers.

The other local authorities are less similar for some of the drivers but remain fairly close to WLC. Midlothian has a high proportion of children in working households, while WLC sits closer to the average. Across the other drivers, WLC and Midlothian are fairly similar.

6. Conclusions

Come to conclusions about (i) the context of WLC child poverty relative to other LAs in GB to inform benchmarking and provide information for strategies and funding bids, and (ii) which LAs to track or contact to share child poverty strategies.

Bringing all the observations together for the expanded shortlist.

Summary so far

West Lothian is a relatively sparsely populated area with below average levels of deprivation and average to below-average levels of child poverty. In terms of its economic context, it has a relatively low level of underemployed people in low wage positions and has a slightly above average level of earnings.

Amber Valley in Derbyshire is very similar to West Lothian across several of the data. It has a similar population profile, similar child poverty levels, and similar contextual factors underpinning those levels.

Bedford is another very good comparator, with very similar characteristics. Its vulnerable population differs slightly, with a larger minority ethnic population and fewer disabled adults with children. Notably, it did fall into a higher quintile for child poverty (i.e. higher child poverty rate) in 2020 after housing costs.

Midlothian would appear to be the best Scottish comparator for WLC. It has some slight differences but many similarities. Again, it was notable that Midlothian fell into a lower child poverty quintile in 2023, both before and after housing costs.

South Derbyshire is like WLC in terms of population density and child poverty levels. It did, however, differ slightly in terms of drivers.

Swale is our final comparator. It is again very similar to WLC but did have some larger differences in its population profile and child poverty drivers. Swale fell into a higher quintile for child poverty than WLC.

If we use this data to benchmark performance, we could say that, considering the drivers, West Lothian's overall child poverty rate is very similar to its closest comparators, and lower than Bedford and Swale. It is also interesting that West Lothian falls into the same or next quintile as some comparators that have lower deprivation shares, such as Midlothian. Overall, the data suggest progress in reducing child poverty.

Possibilities for tracking or contacting other LAs would include: Midlothian as the most similar Scottish LA, and one with a lower level of child poverty; Amber Valley and Bedford as the most similar local authorities overall; and perhaps South Derbyshire and Swale as other similar areas.

How to Access and Use the Excel Workbook

The dataset is available for download from the [ONS website](#).

The data is presented in an Excel workbook with several tabs:

- A **Cover** tab - containing a description of the data included, its intended use, and contact details.
- **Contents** - brief description of all the tables with hyperlinks to each table.
- **Notes** - detailed notes for all references in the worksheets.
- **Methods** - the essential information about the methods used to compile the data.
- **Data sources** – a table with hyperlinks to all data sources used for each of the indicators.
- **Imputations** - details of the imputations made for data that was unavailable.
- **Summary Statistics** – a GB wide statistical summary for indicators used.
- **Reference Data** – with data for all indicators for all local authorities.
- **32 tables**, one for each Scottish local authority, listing its most alike local authorities across GB in terms of the drivers of child poverty

We recommend starting with the Contents tab to orient yourself before examining your local authority's data in detail.

Understanding the Likeness Metrics

Each table dedicated to a selected Scottish local authority lists around 25 other GB local authorities that are similar to it regarding drivers of child poverty:

- Similarity is measured by ‘likeness’ rankings, according to two different methods.
- The lower the likeness rank for a listed local authority, the more similar it is to the selected Scottish authority.
- Each method provides a different perspective, complementary and equally valid. It is therefore important to consider likeness by both measures.

Regarding the difference between the methods, the main point to understand is that Method 1 tends to omit local authorities from the list of ‘like’ authorities if they have extreme values for one or more driver, whereas Method 2 does not. Similarly, Method 1 is more likely to produce ‘like’ LAs where the differences are modest across all the indicators rather than small for many indicators but large for just one or two. The opposite being so for Method 2. The results of both approaches could be of interest.

Collaboration and feedback

- Local authorities and partners are invited to share feedback on the usability and relevance of the dataset.
- Suggestions for improvement or requests for support can be submitted to ONS Local or the Improvement Service.

For queries or support, contact: research@improvementservice.org.uk