About the respondents
The Church of Scotland has a long history of campaigning against poverty and injustice. The Kirk has committed time and resources to the very poorest communities in Scotland, most recently through the work of its Priority Areas Committee and Crossreach.

The Methodist Church in Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church work closely with the Church of Scotland, and others, to facilitate a faith-based contribution to public policy making.

No other voluntary sector organisations has the level of investment in as wide a range of communities experiencing deprivation as the Churches and it is those experiences that have helped shape our comments.

The Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Methodist Church are Scotland are among 13 denominations who are members of Scottish Churches Housing Action, which promotes a Scotland free of homelessness.

The Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland deplores the injustices caused by poverty and has encouraged churches to take practical steps to address poverty in their communities. The Parish Development Fund provides resources to support the innovative and effective work that churches across Scotland undertake in their local communities. The Church and Society Council has been actively engaged in discussions with the Scottish Government before and after the passing of the Child Poverty Act. The Council is part of the Campaign to End Child Poverty in Scotland and endorses the separate response of that group.

The Church of Scotland remains committed to these campaigns and chooses to respond to this consultation, as it has done when similar subjects have been
raised for consultation, because of what it believes to be true about humanity and our absolute interconnectedness. The Church believes that we are not autonomous beings but fundamentally connected within communities and so have a moral and ethical duty to care for our neighbour, the stranger and even our enemy. Thinking on this issue is rooted in a theological understanding that we are fundamentally, as human beings, dependent on each other for our physical and inner wellbeing. The Church believes that human society is called to carry each others burden and to live sacrificially so others may simply live. Such thinking has led the Church to move towards acting in all ways with a bias to the poor both institutionally and as members following a faith. This is the paradigm through which this response should be viewed.

**Faith in Community Scotland**

Faith in Community Scotland was established in 2005 and has directors drawn from the Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh communities. It is an anti-poverty organisation working alongside faith groups in Scotland’s poorest neighbourhoods to tackle the causes and symptoms of poverty. It does this through capacity building, grant giving and organisational support. It currently has teams working in Glasgow and Dundee as well as a national grants programme and a national scheme to support ex-prisoners and their families.

In partnership with the Church of Scotland, Faith in Community Scotland is currently supporting Scotland’s Poverty Truth Commission – a special commission comprising of senior leaders in Scottish society and people with a direct experience of poverty.

The Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland, Faith in Community Scotland, the Methodist Church in Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church welcome the opportunity to share their experiences and ideas to reflect on the best way for Government to address child poverty.

**Introduction**

The discussion paper provides a summary of existing Scottish Government strategies intended to tackle child poverty. We are in agreement with the analysis presented and the understanding of child poverty presented in the discussion paper is welcome. The Campaign to End Child Poverty in Scotland response provides detailed comments regarding local delivery and accountability and relationship between the UK Government, Scottish Government and Community Planning Partnerships. In particular we concur with the recommendation that there should be a statutory duty at local level to tackle child poverty and that the effectiveness of local work should be monitored and reported on nationally.

**Meeting the 2020 target to end child poverty**

Overall the discussion paper does not address the degree of change that would be required to achieve the 2020 targets. We are disappointed that after the thorough analysis of the issue which has previously taken place the Government
chose to issue a discussion paper without the inclusion of strategic priorities or actions. We would welcome the publication on proposed actions which should include short and long term targets. Those targets should look beyond the role of the public sector as a service provider and ensure that public money is used to create better quality jobs which have higher skill levels and pay a living wage. Public bodies, such as Scottish Enterprise and Local Regeneration Agencies, should be used as levers to support businesses to create good quality skilled jobs targeted towards the poorest groups and neighbourhoods.

The Church in Society Committee of the Scottish Episcopal Church particularly wishes to draw attention to the effectiveness of partnership work, which is currently evident, with faith/voluntary/public sector collaboration in delivering the Government's Getting It Right For Every Child framework. Experience shows that when working together under a joined up policy framework, such partnerships can be very effective and show excellent results in alleviating problems associated with poverty. This should be encouraged and further supported.

However, the remedies for alleviating poverty and associated educational and social problems are seriously undermined by the lack of integration across social work and educational funding streams preventing new SOA's fully reflecting the inclusion of the voluntary and faith sector. Government must be urged to stop the public sector's tendency to work with other sectors under such inclusive policy frameworks without the proper underpinning of shared resources.

Voluntary sector and faith communities working at the same high level of professional accountability and competence ought to receive equivalent financial resourcing and dedicated servicing as the public sector with the same proper evaluation and monitoring. Often cases of immense need and poverty are given over to the voluntary sector as last resort. This lack of resource integration dilutes any possible good that joined up policy working seeks to create. Silo thinking in this area by the public sector can only be prevented by clear government directives to ensure voluntary sector and faith partnerships are strengthened and increased to alleviate child poverty and its effects.

The Methodist Church in Scotland similarly welcome partnership working in service delivery, but believes that the Government's strategy requires to go beyond focusing on alleviating the effects of child poverty to tackle the root causes of poverty in our society, looking to issues which include parental wellbeing, including mental health, and tackling drugs and alcohol addictions; rehabilitation of offenders in the criminal justice system; the provision of education and training; and the importance of community cohesion in giving Scotland's children the best possible start in life.
The Church of Scotland is serious about wanting to reform the way statutory and voluntary bodies work in local communities, and are keen to develop a greater sense of self-worth, confidence and entrepreneurship amongst the long-term unemployed. We are, for instance, currently researching the role and impact of sound financial advice and micro-credit schemes for those living in poverty to help them achieve their ambitions. In January 2011 the Kirk will be hosting a trip to India by 14 women from some of our very poorest neighbourhoods to investigate the value of Self Help Groups (SHGs) in the Scottish context with the aim of developing an initial 6 micro social enterprises. The aspiration is to expand this programme, focused around supporting women (and children) in poverty.

If the Scottish Government is to genuinely strive to meet the 2020 child poverty targets then it is essential that the strategy now being developed is ambitious and creative. We would be pleased to discuss how the work of the Church of Scotland is reflecting on the way in which we, as a society, understand and respond to poverty. Two broad areas of work are of particular relevance:

- The Church of Scotland has established a Commission on the Purpose of Economic Activity which will spend two years from 2010 – 2012 considering how quality of life, well being and values such as justice, cohesion and sustainability become measures for economic activity as well as how inequality can be addressed while giving appropriate levels of choice for all. The Commission will explore the problem of wealth as well as the problem of poverty. Further information on the Commission on the Purpose of Economic Activity is available from churchandsociety@cofscotland.org.uk

- The Poverty Truth Commission began in March 2009 when, in front of an audience of 400 people, the Commission brought together two groups of people: people who are experts about poverty because they live with the struggle every day and people in power who speak of their desire to make a difference but who often see their attempts to understand and tackle the causes and symptoms of poverty fail. Since March 2009 the Commission has continued to meet. In much of the Commission’s work it is clear that the solution does not necessarily lie in more resources but in using resources more effectively, working with people who understand the issues to develop and implement good policy and practice. The Commission will report on its conclusions in April 2011. At the heart of all its work lies a simple understanding – unless people in poverty are included all attempts to develop a better and fairer Scotland will fail. “Nothing about us without us is for us.” Further information about the work of the Poverty Truth Commission (www.povertytruthcommission.org) is available from info@povertytruthcommission.org.

**Priorities for action**
The Church of Scotland and Faith in Community Scotland have identified four areas which we have prioritised in our work; these priorities reflect the
experience of the Church and broader faith communities working in communities around Scotland. We do not suggest that these are the only areas which should be prioritised.

- According to figures released by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, children with one working parent now account for 57% of all children living in poverty and yet the discussion paper says “Evidence clearly shows that appropriate work remains the best ways for families to escape poverty” (page 15). For many families, however, work is not a route out of poverty, a reality which is acknowledged elsewhere in the discussion paper. Government-led action to ensure that the Scottish economy is developing good quality jobs paying a living wage is essential. Over the last two years the Church of Scotland has been a strong advocate of the Scottish Living Wage Campaign.

- We are convinced by evidence of the effectiveness of spending on early years programmes. We would welcome the Scottish Government ensuring that resources, including partnerships with faith groups and others, are in place to deliver the Early Years Framework. In the work of the Poverty Truth Commission we have been particularly concerned with the plight of children in Kinship Care – a group of particularly vulnerable children who are currently not receiving the levels of support that they require and deserve.

- The UK Government proposals for Welfare Reform will impact on the income levels of the poorest people in our society. We would welcome a Scottish Government analysis of the impact of the proposals in Scotland and, should there be loss of income as a consequence of these changes, the Scottish Child Poverty strategy should take these into account. Whilst we welcome the plans to simplify the benefits system, we are not convinced that parents, specifically single parents, should always be directed into paid employment is always a sound social and economic strategy.

- It is highly likely that the cuts in Housing Benefit announced by the UK Government will lead to increased homelessness, after several years when the numbers applying as homeless have fallen or remained stable. This is particularly true of tenants in the private sector, at a time when the Scottish Government has sought to ensure that the sector makes a greater contribution to meeting the needs of homeless people. We believe that urgent analysis of the impact of the Housing Benefits cuts in Scotland is needed, and that measures to address this issue, including control of rent levels if necessary, are identified and implemented.

For further information contact Chloe Clemmons, Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer on 0131 558 8137 or chloe@actsparl.org

The Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office serves Scotland’s Churches and is administered by the Church of Scotland, Scottish Charity No SC011353.