SCOTTISH BORDERS

CHILD POVERTY UPDATE

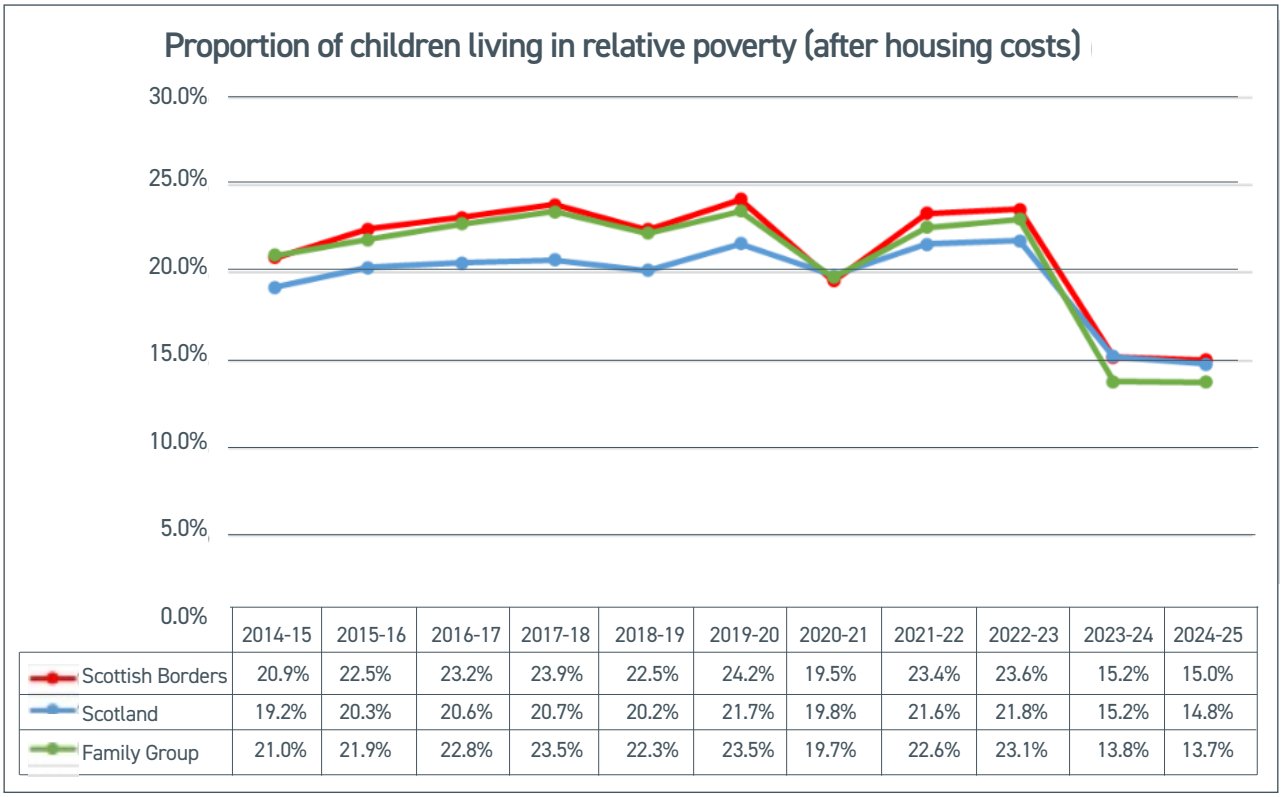
2025/26

Our Scottish Borders
Your community

This report details the progress achieved in addressing child poverty in the Scottish Borders during the 2025/26 period and outlines the areas of improvement and plans for 2026/27. Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders, Community Planning Partners, and the partnership Child Poverty Group acknowledge the significance of addressing child poverty and are committed to improving the lives of children, young people, and families in the Scottish Borders.

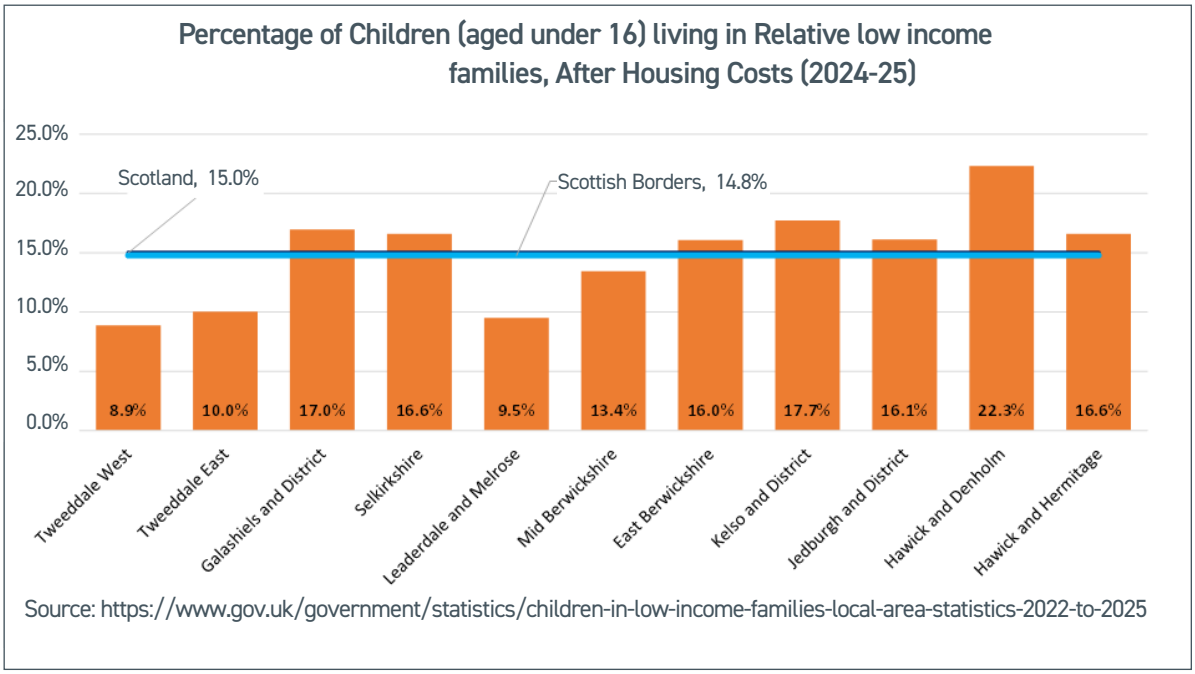
Local Context

Child poverty in the Scottish Borders currently stands at 15.0%, representing the lowest level recorded in over a decade. This reduction reflects the cumulative impact of national and local interventions, particularly the Scottish Child Payment and targeted financial support introduced during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this progress, the rate remains slightly higher than the Scottish average, highlighting the need for continued targeted action.



	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Scottish Borders	20.9%	22.5%	23.2%	23.9%	22.5%	24.2%	19.5%	23.4%	23.6%	15.2%	15.0%
Scotland	19.2%	20.3%	20.6%	20.7%	20.2%	21.7%	19.8%	21.6%	21.8%	15.2%	14.8%
Family Group	21.0%	21.9%	22.8%	23.5%	22.3%	23.5%	19.7%	22.6%	23.1%	13.8%	13.7%

Seven wards in the Scottish Borders have a higher percentage of Children (aged under 16) living in Relative low income families, After Housing Costs compared to Scotland.



Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-2022-to-2025

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Hawick High School – Vocational Pathways

Hawick High School has introduced vocational learning pathways in response to identified local labour market demand. The programme offers courses in early education and childcare, hospitality (barista skills), and health and social care. These courses are designed to provide young people with practical, hands-on learning opportunities, supporting those who benefit from applied learning environments.

The initiative aims to strengthen employability by giving students real-world experience of workplace expectations, behaviours, and skills. It also improves confidence and supports better-informed career decisions, enabling young people to transition into further education, apprenticeships, or employment within key growth sectors across the Scottish Borders.

Adopt and Adapt Programme

Through an investment of **£70,000** in 2025–26, the Adopt and Adapt programme has supported a range of flexible, community-based interventions. The programme enables services and partners to respond quickly to emerging needs, test new approaches, and scale successful models.

This has included targeted support for families experiencing financial hardship, as well as initiatives designed to improve access to services, reduce barriers, and strengthen local support networks. The flexibility of this funding is critical in ensuring that responses remain responsive and community-led.

One of the projects supported was Berwickshire Swap. This funding has supported both immediate need and future growth for Berwickshire Swap, soon to become The Clothes Loop—a name that reflects both continuity and renewed purpose.

Berwickshire Swap

To date, around **300 families** have been supported, with an anticipated reach of up to **2,500 individuals** as projects continue to develop.

During the winter period: **62 families** received Christmas clothing parcels across Coldstream and Eyemouth **53 children** across **30 families** have already been supported through emergency parcels in 2026 In addition, community events have seen 386 attendees, supporting clothing access for **723 children** across **14 events** in **7 towns and villages**.

The funding has also enabled the purchase of essential new items—such as underwear and socks—which cannot be sourced through donations. Importantly behind these figures are families navigating rising living costs and difficult circumstances. This support has provided warmth, dignity, and reassurance at a time when it has been needed most. It has also allowed the organisation to grow.

Adopt and Adapt funding has made a meaningful and far-reaching difference. Collectively, it has supported thousands of engagements and interactions with community members. While the numbers tell part of the story the true impact of

Community Support - Baby Bank and Cash First Approach

Local community provision, including Baby Bank services, plays an important role in supporting families with essential items such as clothing, equipment, and supplies for young children. These services are delivered in a dignified and accessible way, ensuring families can access support without stigma.

Alongside this, a cash-first approach has been promoted to ensure that families are supported financially wherever appropriate. This approach prioritises direct financial support over in-kind provision, helping families maintain choice and independence while meeting immediate needs.

Financial Inclusion

Money & Pensions Service

Partnership working with the Money & Pensions Service (MaPS) has been re-established, with agreed actions to strengthen staff training and improve the use of data. Financial wellbeing support continues to be promoted through the Wellbeing Service in NHS Borders, helping to ensure that people can access advice and support at an early stage. Early planning is also underway for Challenge Poverty Week 2026, which will provide a further opportunity to raise awareness and support wider prevention and health inequalities priorities.

Supporting young families

Health Visiting, alongside Midwifery, School Nursing and the Family Nurse Partnership, plays a central role in identifying, responding to and mitigating the effects of child poverty across the Scottish Borders. This contribution is underpinned by strong strategic leadership and partnership working, with representation on the Poverty Action Group and active collaboration through local forums to strengthen baby bank provision, develop family information resources and support cash-first approaches, including for families with no recourse to public funds.

At a local level, Health Visiting and School Nursing teams contribute to community action planning in Burnfoot and other settings, helping to identify unmet need and connect families with timely support. Routine enquiry about financial wellbeing is embedded from the antenatal period, with Midwifery also undertaking these conversations, and an opt-out referral pathway to the Financial Inclusion Team now in place to improve access to support. Referral routes to the WISE Group are also available from pre-birth through shared pathways.

Families are routinely signposted or referred to a range of practical and financial supports, including food banks, food share schemes, Citizens Advice Bureau and local charitable organisations, with strengthened pathways helping to secure timely access to essential items and advice.

The service also gathers Money Worries data to support monitoring. Key strengths of the current approach include strong multi-agency collaboration, early identification of need, clear referral pathways and an increasing use of data to inform improvement.

Child Poverty Accelerator Fund (CPFA)

The main objectives of the project was to provide holistic support for the 6 priority family groups primarily across the **5 most deprived areas of Scottish Borders**, including income maximisation and employability support. Using SIMD data, the areas of Burnfoot, Eyemouth, Langlee, Bannerfield & Walkerburn were identified as priority outreach locations with additional advice and support available from CAB. Additional aims were to embed specific budgeting advice sessions into the wider programme of support for families to prevent debt accruing and mitigate the cost of living.

There were **922 client** contacts with a total financial gain of **£456,262.** These contacts also led to **193 referrals** to other organisations and 57 financial capability advice discussions with individuals. There was an increased confidence in approaching the CAB service as advisers became known in the community. People may feel embarrassed or ashamed about needing to seek advice or to discuss financial struggles. By having a presence embedded in the community, a seed can be sown, encouraging those in need to engage.

Income maximisation advice results in increased household incomes, likely to be spent in the local community. Client financial gain in Q1 was **£52,375** from **171 client contacts**. In Q4 the client financial gain was **£104,636.36** from **279 contacts**. As confidence and trust increased and the service became known, word of mouth of impact resulted in increased demand.

Throughout the course of the project, there was a steady increase in the number of client contacts, increasing on a quarterly basis. Alongside this, there was an exponential growth in the number of clients who accepted and received financial capability advice. This is reflective of both the development of the skills and practice of the project advisors, who were able to sensitively approach the subject of financial capability advice, and of the trust and relationships built within the communities.

Locality Working - Community Focus

Community Planning Partnership Locality Plans within the Scottish Borders are increasingly focused on specific communities, including Burnfoot, Bannerfield, and Langlee. This place-based approach ensures that interventions are tailored to the unique needs and strengths of each area.

Through community engagement and partnership working, locality plans aim to reduce inequality, improve access to services, strengthen community resilience, and deliver early intervention support that prevents issues from escalating. The Locality Plans are developed through extensive engagement with communities. The information and data gathered helps us to understand some of the key challenges in communities and how our interventions will aim to tackle these. In monitoring our work we look at both national and local data. Data that is gathered and held locally will help us to see the effect of our work in a short space of time and make and required changes to our work. Nationally collated data can be several years out of date but will help to validate our input over time.

	Burnfoot	Langlee	Scottish Borders
Children in low income families	35.4%	31.9%	15.9%
Young people living in the most income deprived quintile aged 0-25 years	100%	62.2%	7.1%
Population living in the 20% most employment deprived areas in Scotland, aged 16-64	100%	59.7%	7.3%
Local school roll in receipt of school meals	55% (Oct 2025)	40% (May 2026)	17% (all Primary Schools, May 2026)
Local school roll in receipt of a clothing grant	57% (Oct 2025)	44% (May 2026)	18% (all Primary Schools, May 2026)
Child dental health in primary 1	52.8%	60.7%	78.3%
Women smoking during pregnancy	40.2%	22.2%	11.9%
Babies exclusively breastfed at 6-8 weeks	16.7%	19.4%	43.6%
Developmental concerns at 27-30 months	32.4%	16.7%	12.7%
MMR immunisation uptake at 24 months	90.7%	90.9%	93.9%
Life expectancy, females	76.1	83.8	82.7
Life expectancy, males	76.5	74.3	79
Asthma patient hospitalisations per 100,000	158.6	85.6	67.5

LOOKING AHEAD: 2026-27

We will continue to work positively to reduce Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders. There are a number of support services and intervention that will continue in 2026/27, including Breakfast Clubs throughout our schools. Scottish Borders Council and partners are aware that circumstances can change quickly for families and therefore we endeavour, along with partners, to provide access to information of support available. This will be updated regularly and can be viewed via Scottish Borders Council Cost of Living webpage; https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/benefits-grants/cost-living-crisis-support

Scottish Borders Council Employability service will continue to work with individuals and families to build key employment skills and offer additional support. We will also use information provided by the Employability service to track progress. During Apri 2026 the Employability service received 7 new referrals, including 2 families referred through the Whole Family Support Service.

A total of thirteen cases were closed during this month, resulting in recorded Annual Gains of £29,621 for the individuals and families supported.

We will continue to deliver on our child poverty actions utilising our existing reports to respond to child poverty and to effectively monitor progress. We will continue to maximise the support available to young people, including those involved in In the Scottish Borders, No One Left Behind (NOLB) projects, which is delivered as a locally led, all age employability approach focused on tackling poverty by supporting individuals and families furthest from the labour market into sustainable, fair work and increasing household incomes. It prioritises those most at risk of poverty and provides tailored, wraparound support to address barriers such as skills gaps, health issues, childcare and transport. The Local Employability Partnership, works with public, private and third sector partners to deliver a more person centred, flexible system, ensuring services are responsive to local needs, better integrated with wider support, and focused on achieving long term outcomes for individuals, communities and employers, reducing inequalities and improving economic wellbeing.

There are a number of priorities that have been identified through locality plans in Burnfoot, Bannerfield and Langlee that will have a focus on child poverty for 2026/27 these are;

- **Pre-birth and maternity support**
  Increasing investment in early intervention through strengthened pre-birth and maternity services, ensuring expectant mothers receive timely and appropriate support to improve early years outcomes.
  Proposed outcomes:

- **Parental and family support programmes**
  Delivering evidence-informed interventions to strengthen family relationships, improve communication, and support emotional wellbeing, contributing to more stable home environments and better long-term outcomes for children.
  Proposed outcomes:

    - Increased participation in parenting and family support programmes
    - Improved family wellbeing and relationship indicators
    - Reduced demand for crisis intervention services

- **Focus on tackling health inequalities**

    - Strengthen partnership working to improve health inequalities and outcomes for people living in the Scottish Borders through the Community Planning Partnership.

Locality Planning will remain a key delivery mechanism, supporting a coordinated, place-based approach to tackling child poverty.

Another key priority for 2026/27 is to develop clear and collectively understood performance measures and reporting. We have started to implement the performance measures below and we will aim to focus on this as part of our response to child poverty.

- Reduction in the proportion of children living in low-income households
- Increased uptake of financial support (e.g. Scottish Child Payment, free school meals, grants)
- Increased engagement with employability, financial inclusion, and family support services
- Improved outcomes across agreed Community Planning Partnership indicators and the shared outcomes framework

This approach will support an evidence-based assessment of impact and ensure that progress towards reducing child poverty is measurable and aligned with local and national priorities.

MORE INFORMATION

This report aims to highlight our progress in a way that can be read and understood, there is a breadth of activity taking place across our communities with the aim of reducing Child Poverty, not all of it we have been able to share. We would gladly provide more information on any of the activities above or to tell you more about what is happening in your community.

Please get in touch with communityengagement@scotborders.gov.uk