

The Child Poverty Unit: an introduction

The Government's commitment

“Our historic aim will be for ours to be the first generation to end child poverty....It is a 20-year mission, but I believe it can be done.”

Prime Minister Tony Blair, March 1999

Child poverty indicators

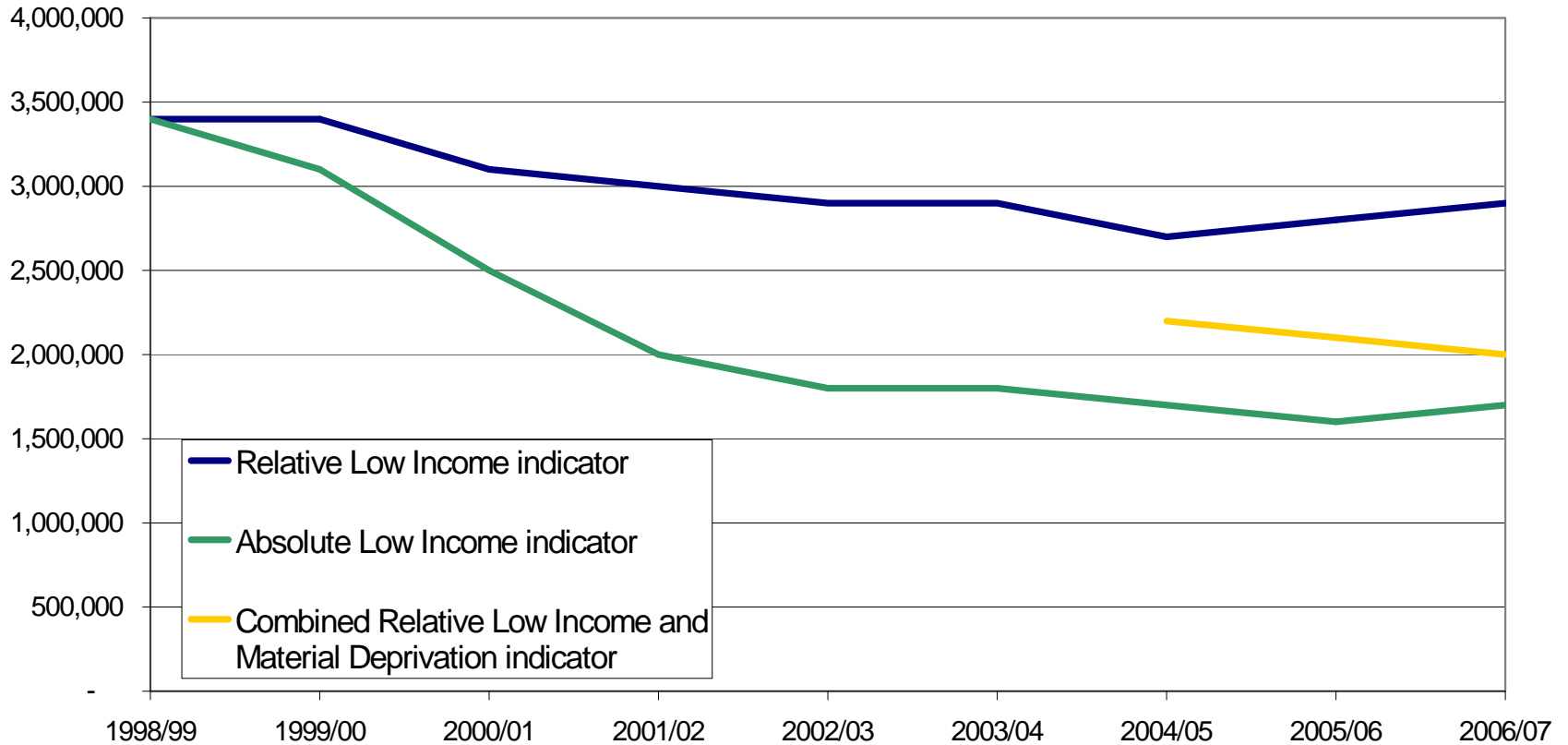
Absolute low income- the number of children in households with incomes below 60% 1998/99 median income held constant in real terms.

Relative low income- the number of children in households with incomes below 60% contemporary median income

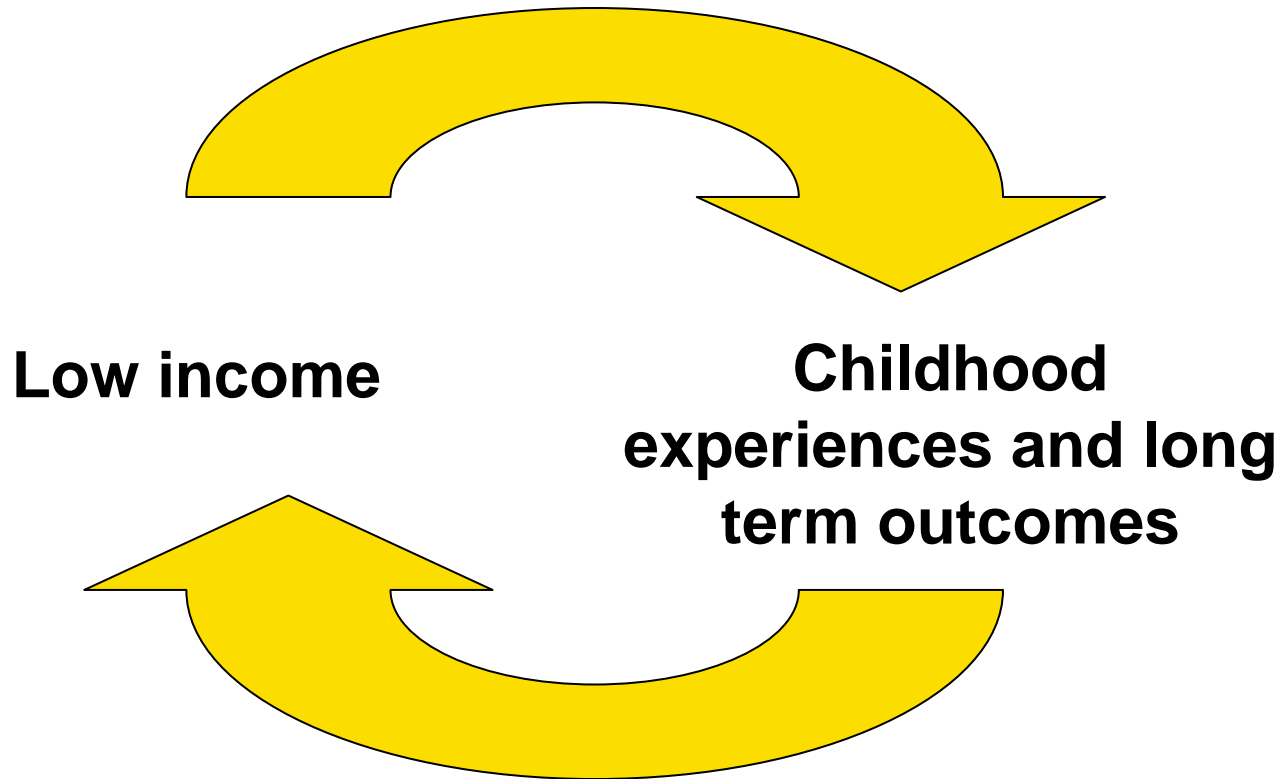
Material deprivation and low income combined- the number of children living in households that are both materially deprived and have an income below 70 per cent of contemporary median income.

Progress so far

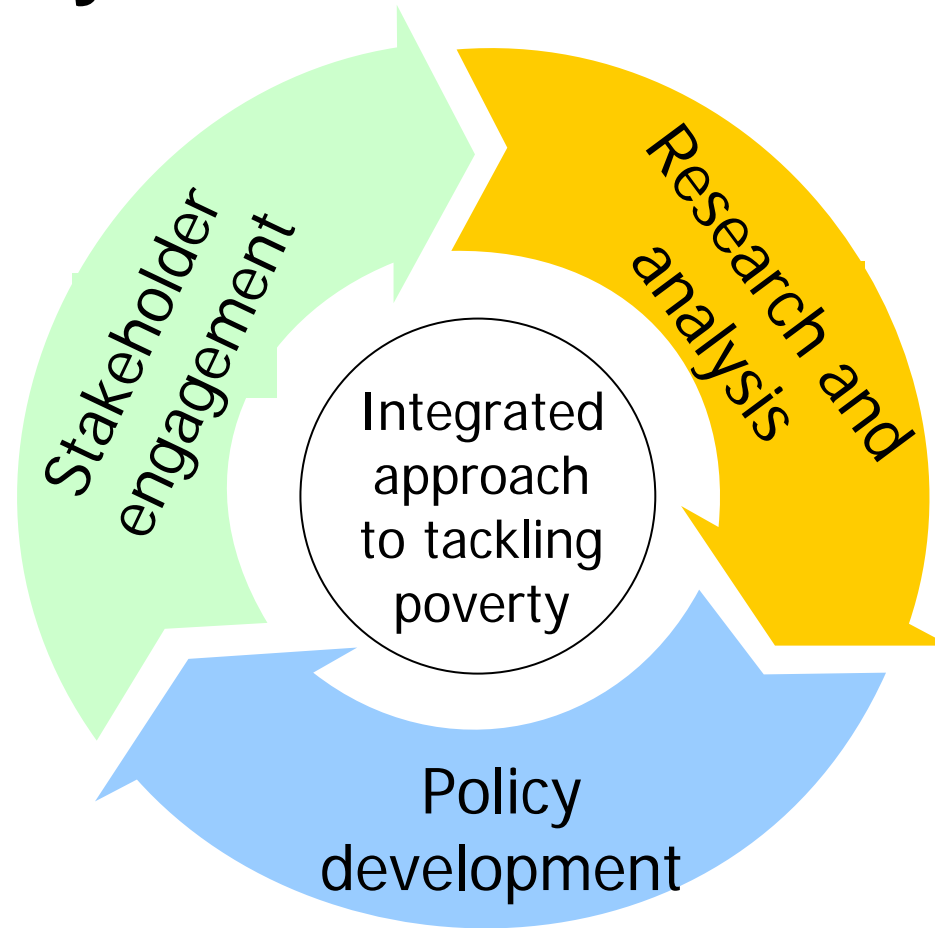
Numbers of Children in Poverty



Child poverty is about much more than low income



The new Child Poverty Unit was created to drive an integrated strategy to eradicate child poverty



Public attitudes to child poverty

Laura Adelman

DCSF/DWP/HMT Child Poverty Unit

Research and Measurement Team

Background

- Little research on attitudes to ‘child’ poverty in the UK and how these compare with attitudes to other ‘types’ of poverty
- High-profile policy area: Ministerial interest in public awareness of child poverty
- “The task of tackling child poverty faces the challenge of low public awareness of the existence and meaning of child poverty”
 - Govt publication ‘Ending Child Poverty: Everybody’s Business’, March 2008

Methodology (1)

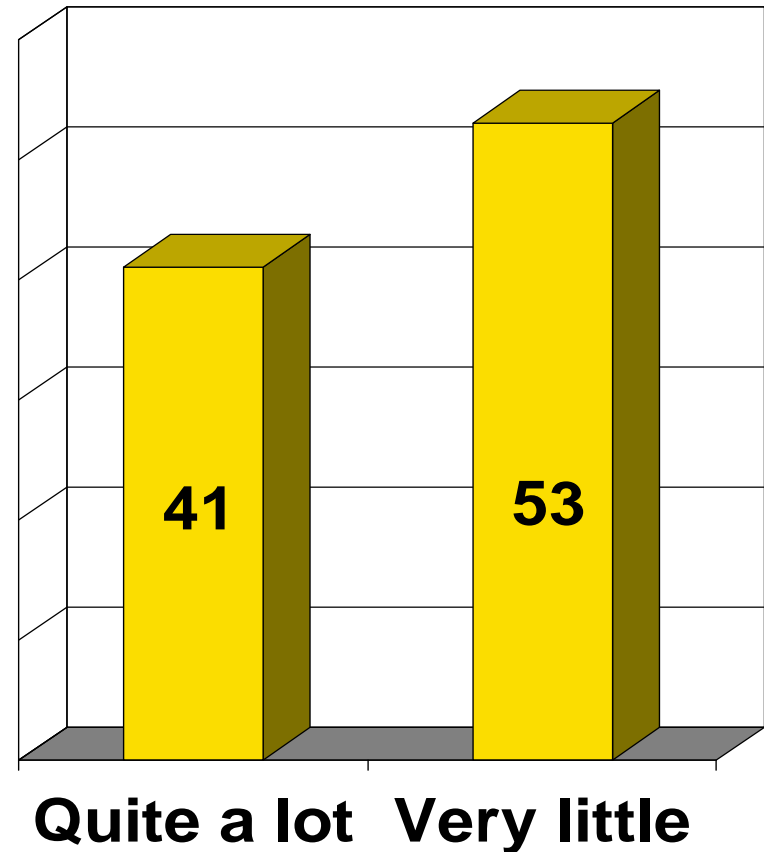
- Module of questions placed on National Centre for Social Research face-to-face omnibus survey
- Fieldwork took place July-September 2007
- Around 1,500 adults aged 16 or over, Great Britain
- Random sample, data weighted to compensate for non-response.

Methodology (2)

- Respondents not given a definition of child poverty, so their answers were based on their own interpretation of this term
- Wanted to compare responses to ‘child poverty’ with those to ‘poverty’ more generally...
- ...so, where possible, questions used same wording as ‘poverty’ questions on British Social Attitudes Survey

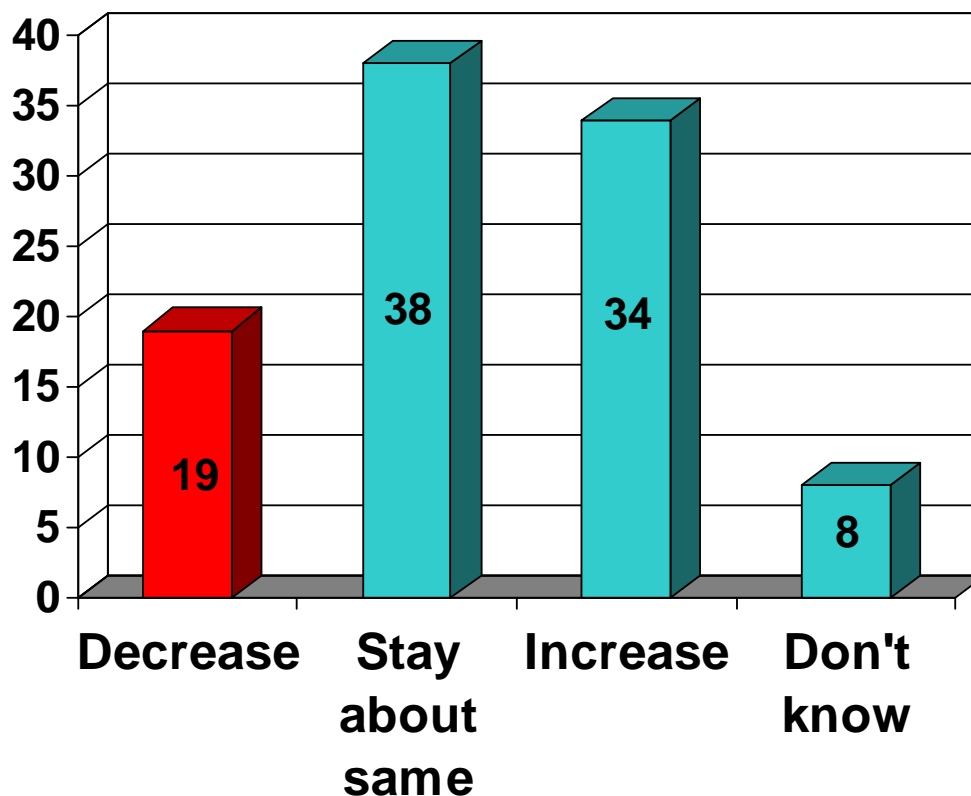
Just over half of people thought there was very little child poverty in Britain

- Women slightly more likely than men to answer 'quite a lot'
- Little difference to responses to the same question on 'poverty' from 24th British Social Attitudes report



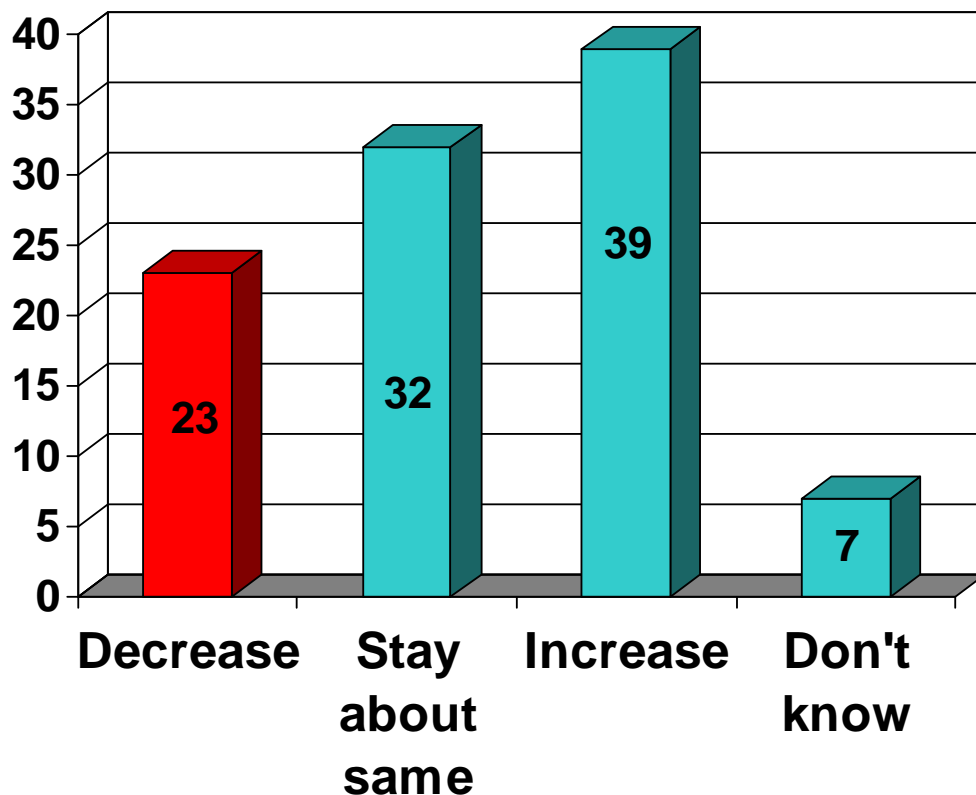
Child poverty has been falling and is forecast to fall, but the public don't agree (1)

“Over the LAST ten years, do you think child poverty in Britain has been increasing, decreasing, or staying at about the same level?”



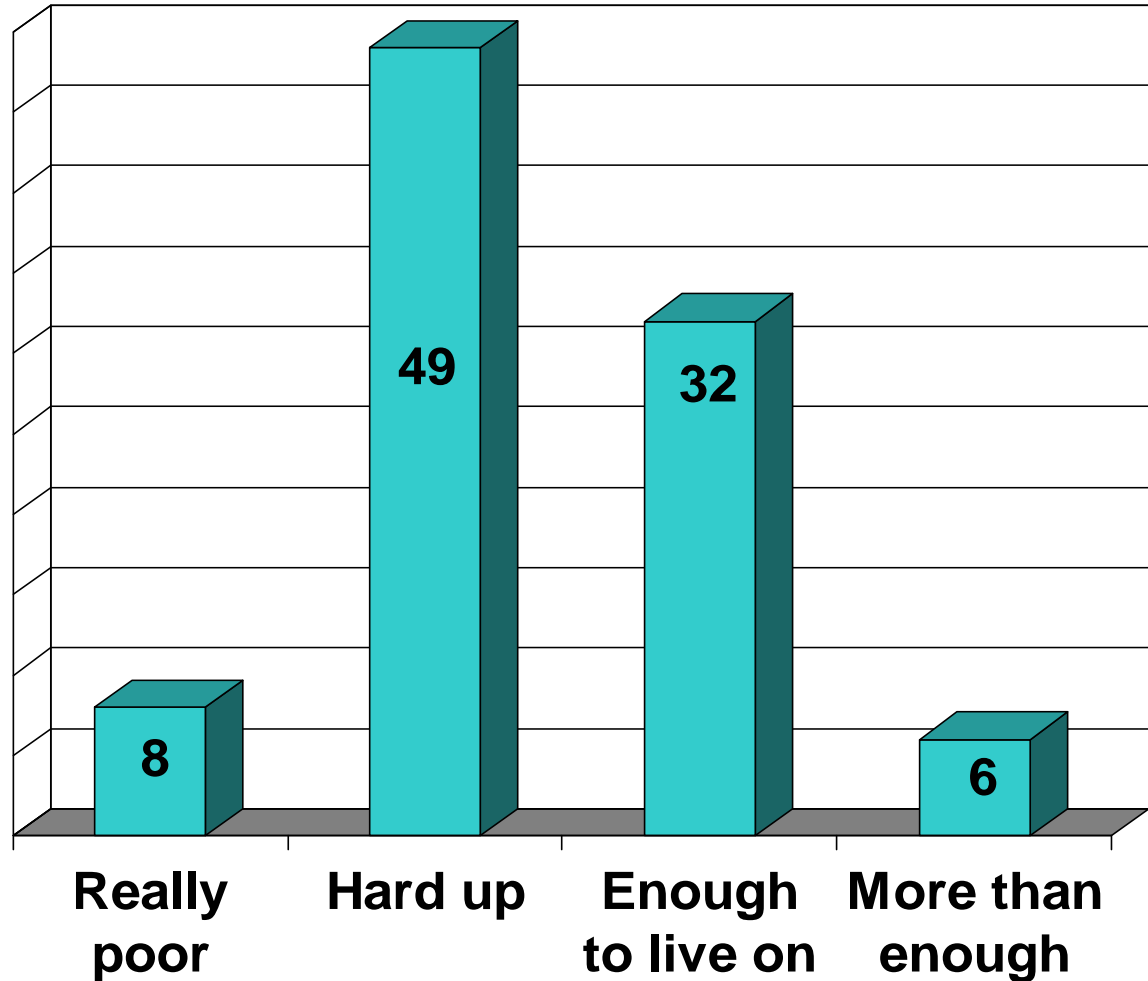
Child poverty has been falling and is forecast to fall, but the public don't agree (2)

“Over the NEXT ten years, do you think child poverty in Britain will increase, decrease, or stay at about the same level?”



Is a single mother on benefits poor?

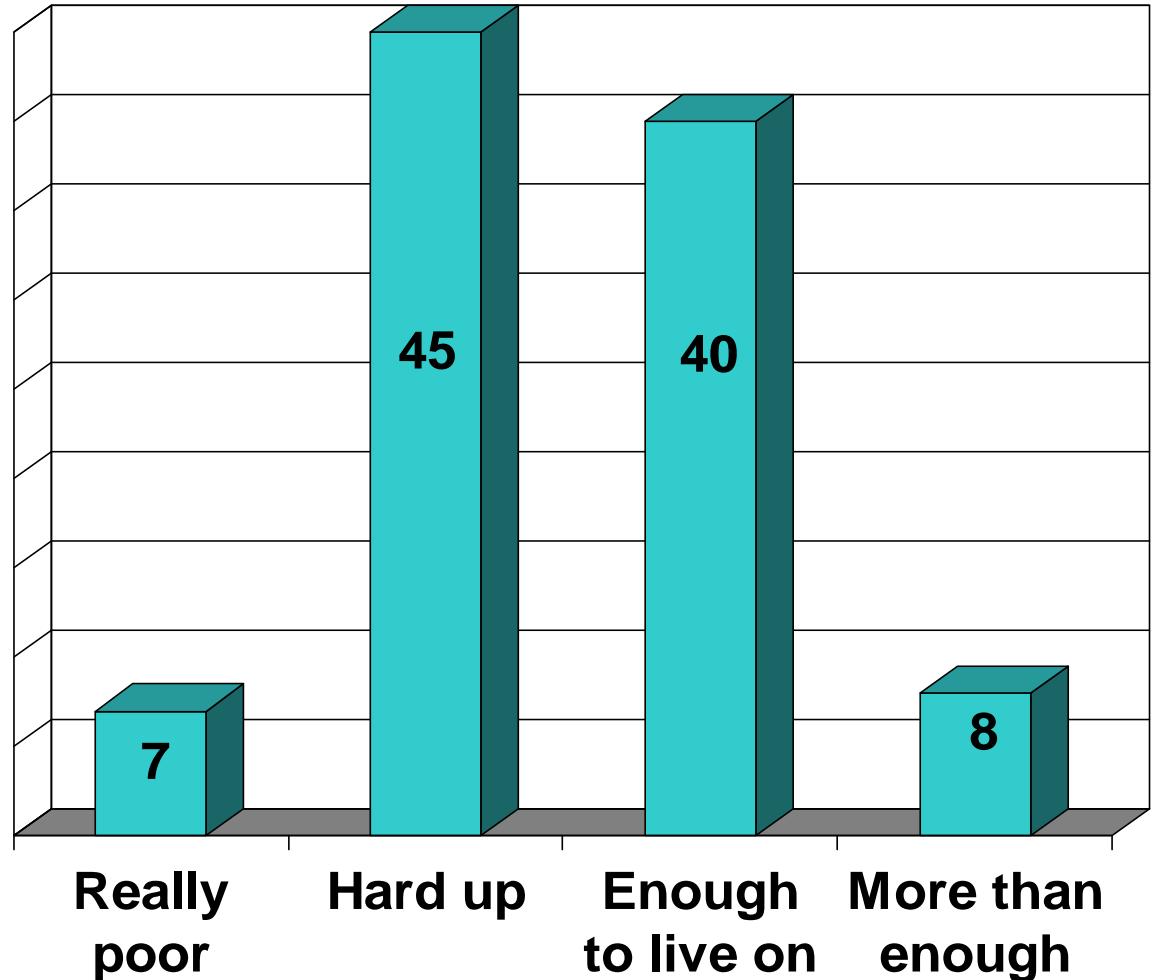
“Think of a single mother with a young child living solely on benefits
Is she...?”



Is a single mother on benefits poor?

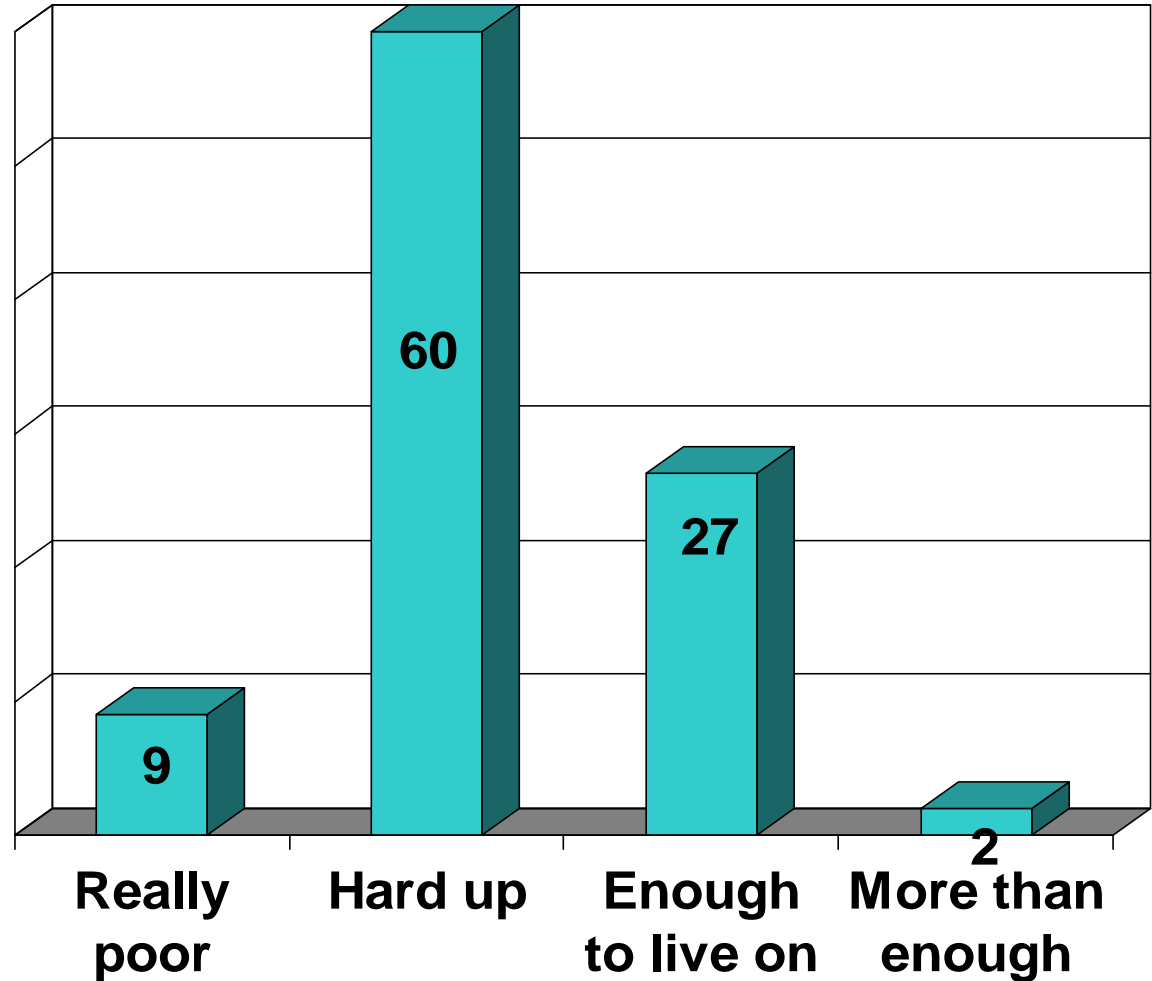
“Now think of a single mother with one child, living on £123 per week after rent and council tax.

Is she...?”



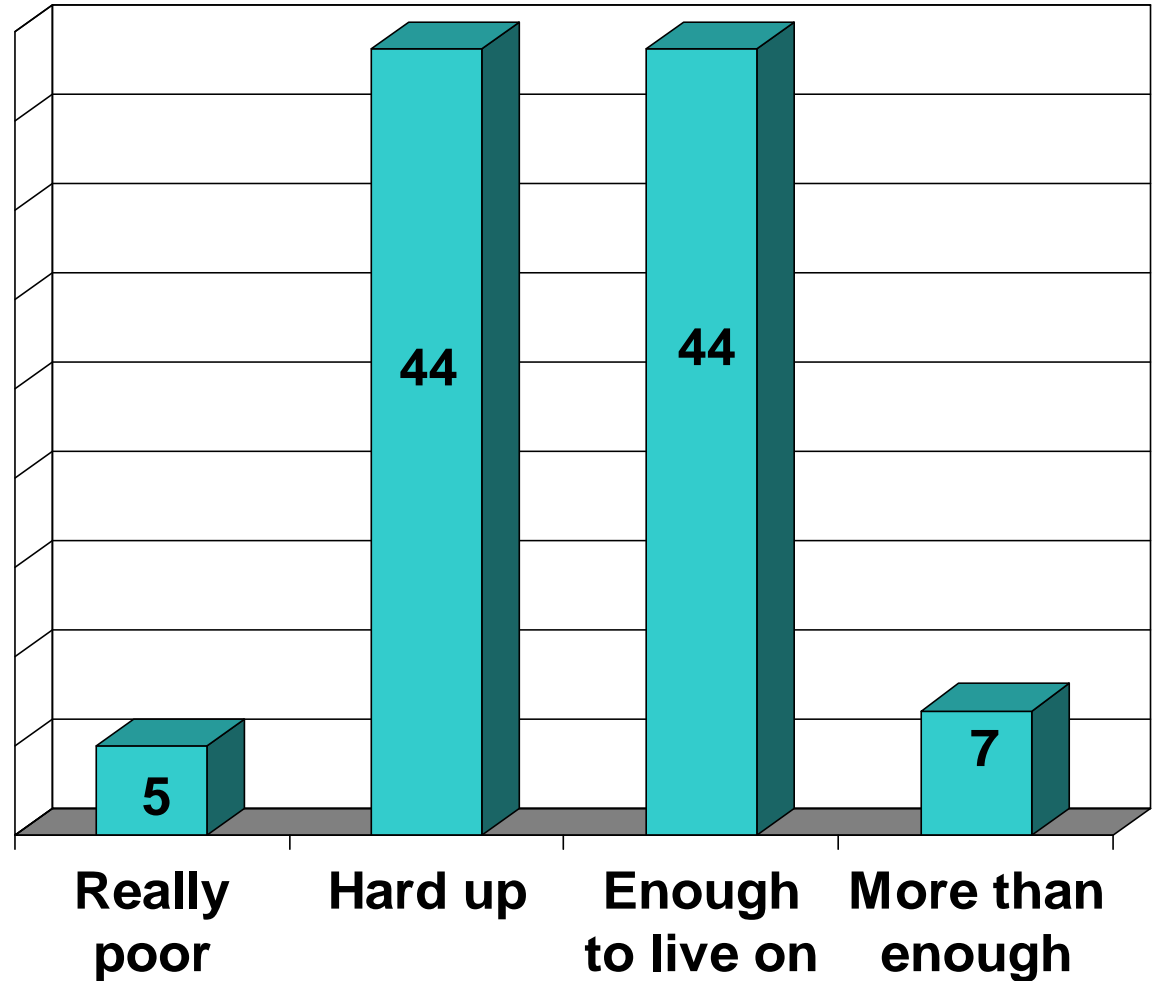
What about a couple family in low-paid work?

“Think of a couple family with two children where only the father works, full-time on the minimum wage, with tax credits...”



What about a couple family in low-paid work?

“Think of a couple family with two children, living on £241 per week after rent and council tax...



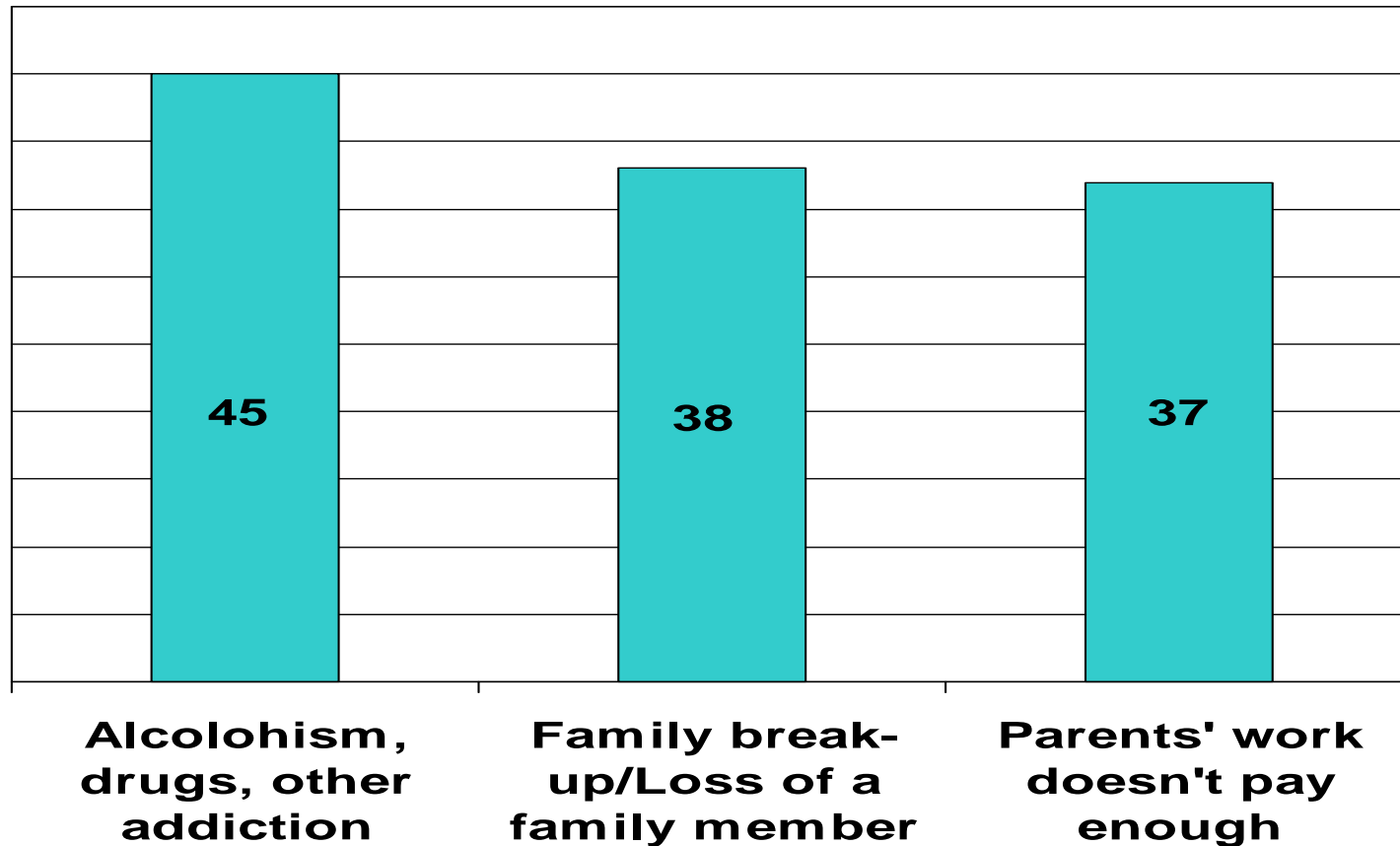
Perceived causes of poverty...

“Why are there families with children who live in need? Pick ONE of these four options...”

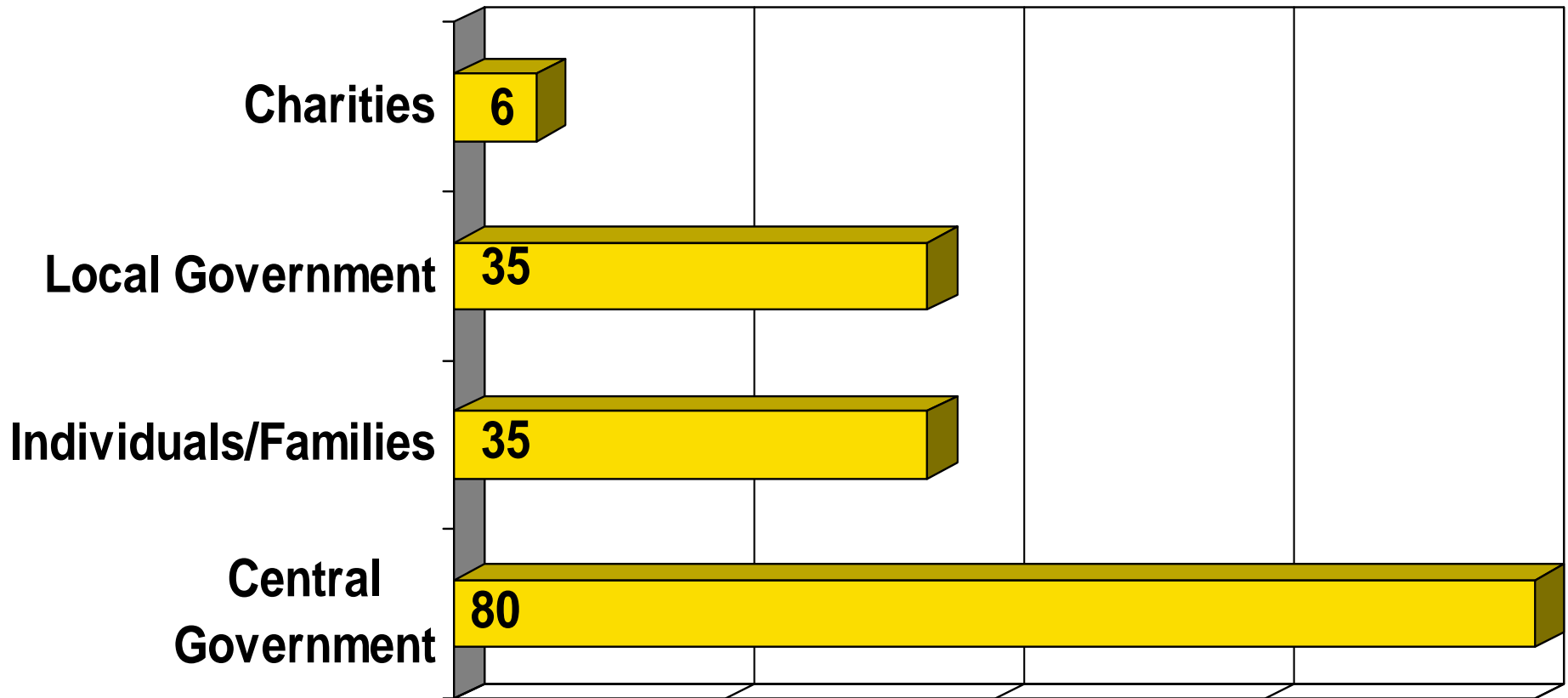


Perceived causes of poverty...

Respondents given a card listing thirteen possible causes, and asked to pick three best explanations for child poverty



Whose job it is to address child poverty?



Conclusions

- General awareness and knowledge of relative poverty for children – prevalence, recent trends, and causes – is low
- People don't respond very differently to questions about 'child poverty' than to questions on 'poverty'
- Is there a need to consider using more meaningful terms to discuss child poverty, which resonate with the public – including specific groups e.g. practitioners, employers – and those on low incomes?
- Need to communicate accurate information on the causes of child poverty – and that it's 'everybody's business', not just central Government's

What next?

- Child Poverty Unit will be carrying out work to develop a robust measure of public attitudes to, and awareness of, child poverty over time.
- This is likely to use the DWP-funded block of questions on the British Social Attitudes Survey.
- This work will be informed by cognitive testing of survey questions on child poverty NatCen carried out in early 2008. Due for publication shortly.

The Child Poverty Unit: Analysis and Research

The Child Poverty Unit's objectives

To develop the strategy to eradicate child poverty by 2020

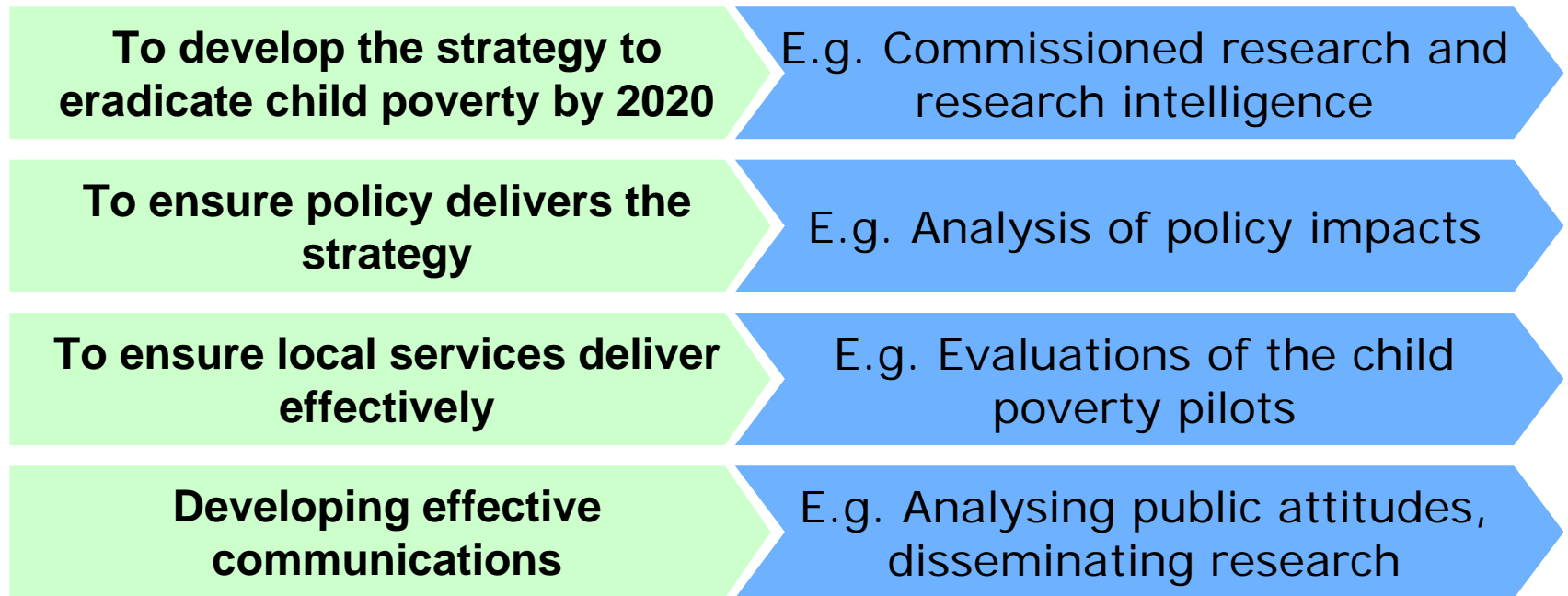
To ensure policy delivers the strategy

To ensure local services deliver effectively

Developing effective communications that influences attitudes and behaviours

Making ending child poverty everybody's business

Research and analysis cuts across all the objectives



Which children are in poverty?

	Key segments	Issues
2.9 million		
1.4 million 48% of poor children	Workless and face substantial barriers to working	Disability, ill-health, caring, low confidence, lack of skills, length of time out of work. Desire amongst mothers to look after children, particularly when young. Reluctance to use formal childcare.
800k 27% of poor children	Workless but could work	Concerns about: lack of suitable job opportunities, finding suitable childcare and whether financially better off in work. Difficulties due to health or disability, despite desire to work.
700k 25% of poor children	Potential second earners	Low pay or low number of hours for earner. Disincentives for second earner to work. Desire amongst mothers to look after children themselves – young children, large families.
	All parents already working	Given lack of 'barriers' preventing work, key issues are low pay related: therefore potential for insecurity in labour market and less potential for training and progression.

Current commissioned research

- Ethnicity and child poverty
- Living standards of families reporting very low incomes
- The views and experiences of poor self-employed families
- Review of poor children and families experiences of poverty

Developing ideas for our research programme

- Following up on key areas we identify in our *scoping* currently underway
- Taking forward *previous commitments* to analysis (specifically those in *Ending Child Poverty: Everybody's Business*)
- Analysis to inform how we measure child poverty going forward
- New areas of work for the Child Poverty Unit – specifically on the role and contribution of local Government and partners to tackling child poverty

Questions

- What research are you undertaking that we should know about?
- What gaps in the evidence base do you think exist?
- How would you like to be kept in touch?