SUMMARY

Gaps and priorities in child poverty research in Scotland

We met with a group of **researchers and third sector organisations** to discuss what research is currently being done and what their priorities are moving forward.

We spoke to a group of **people with lived experience of poverty** to understand their priorities and their perspective on how participatory research on poverty should be carried out.

We had one-on-one conversations with **policymakers** to understand what factors shape anti-poverty policies and what evidence would be useful to them.
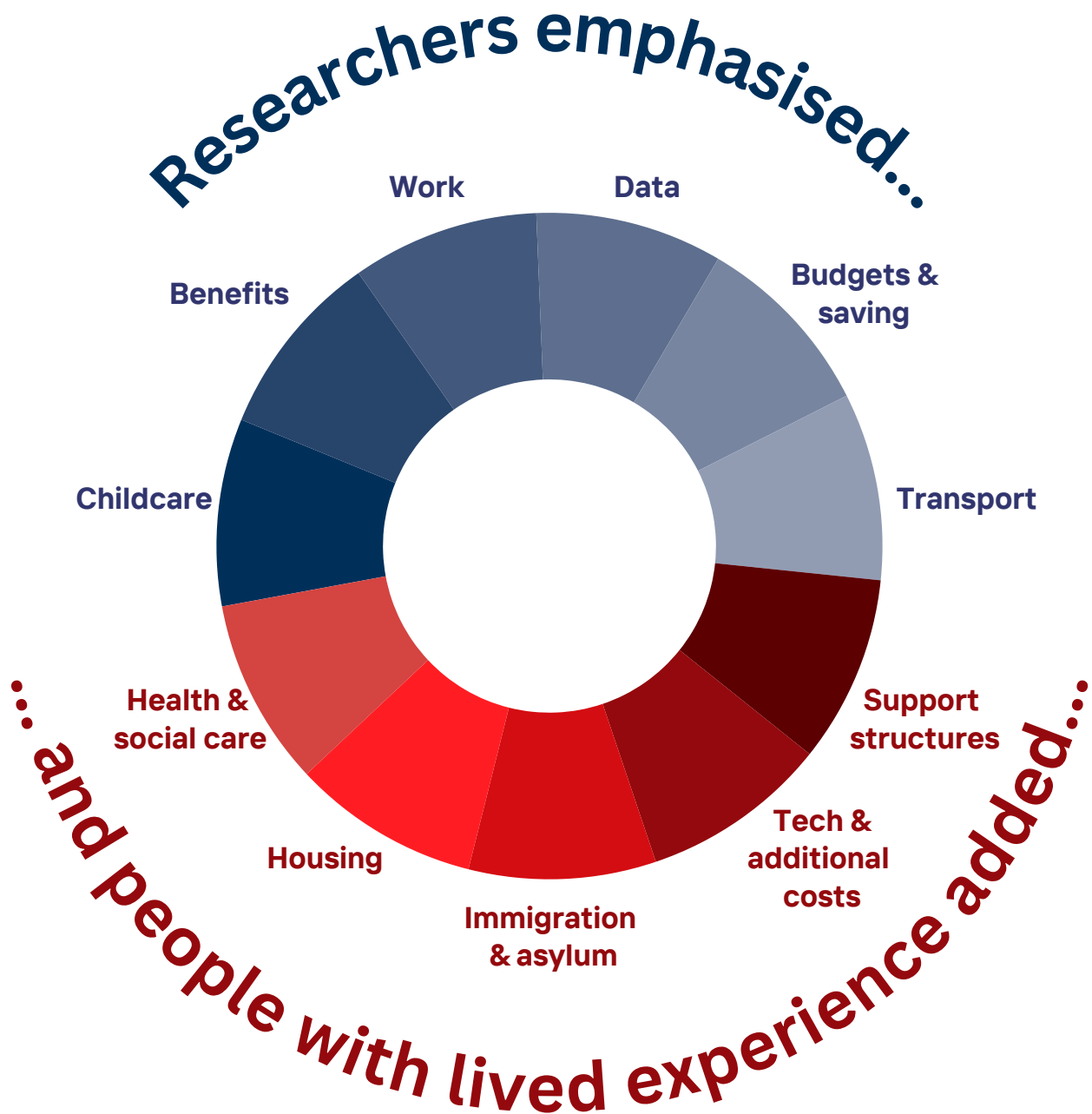
We heard from the **media** about their role in sharing research with the public and what they look for in a story about social policy.

What did we learn?

Gaps in child poverty research

Workshops with researchers and with people with lived experience of poverty highlighted several key areas for child poverty research in Scotland.

Researchers emphasised...

Work · Data · Budgets & saving · Transport · Support structures · Tech & additional costs · Immigration & asylum · Housing · Health & social care · Childcare · Benefits

...and people with lived experience added...

There was a lot of overlap between the areas emphasised by the two groups. However:

- Researchers tended to focus on areas that more directly determine income, such as work and the benefits system, while
- Those with lived experience of poverty also included broader areas like housing, health, and the way that available support is structured as key areas of research and change.

	Research gaps identified by...	
	Researchers	People with lived experience of poverty
Data	• How to improve data quality (e.g., missing information, accuracy) • Better coverage of groups • Longitudinal evidence	
Work	• How to promote Fair Work practices • Identifying skills beyond formal qualifications	• How to promote good hours, pay
Benefits	• Measure and promote take-up • What effect receiving benefits has on work decisions • Structure of a feasible MIG	• Understand limitations of requiring work or search for work • Effects of taper rates on e.g., income, work • Structure/amount of Carers Allowance
Childcare	• What effect childcare provision has on work decisions • How to ensure adequate supply • (Public) costs of provision • Long-term benefits of good childcare	• (Private) costs to households • What childcare arrangements households make and how these can be supported
Overarching issues	• Long-term public and private benefits of poverty reduction • How to adopt a preventative approach • How to balance short- and long-term measures	• Ways of tailoring support to individuals • How to design holistic support and/or support as needed ○ Includes smaller pieces of support
Health & social care		• How to reduct waiting lists (esp. for children's mental health)
Housing		• How can housing associations be more responsive to needs? • Supply of housing for different groups

Immigration & asylum		• Impact of not having access to benefits, other public funds
Technology & additional costs of school		• How to reduce costs to households of necessary technology, start-up costs (e.g., Wifi) • How to reduct costs of school activities to households

Some areas discussed by the group with lived experience have been much-researched, but the findings have not been translated into policy changes.

An example of this are the additional costs of school, which research and feedback from parents have shown create barriers for children living in poverty. However, parents in the group said that they still struggled to meet the costs of school materials and activities for their children.

Best practices for participatory research

All participants in the group with lived experience of poverty had participated in previous research. Their experiences ranged from engaging in one-off participatory sessions to ongoing participation in community projects and expert groups.

The group fed back a number of best practices for researchers asking people with lived experience to participate in their research.

Consider individual circumstances	Think about what will enable people to participate and plan to remunerate them for their time and costs. ... is the venue easily reachable and non-intimidating? ... are materials easy to understand? ... what costs are associated with participating?

Involve decision-makers when possible. Get a range of perspectives and listen to what people have to say. Make the process and the goals of the project clear to participants.	Make engagement more than a tick-box exercise

Communicate and stay in touch	Explain what the project outputs and expected impact will be. Leave contact details so participants can add their thoughts after the session ends. Follow up with participants, even if there isn't much to report yet. Tell them how you used their input and what the impact was.

Concerns about approaches to tackling child poverty

We spoke one-on-one to a number of politicians from different parties who shared concerns about the current approach to tackling child poverty.

They acknowledged that many existing policies have clear benefits, but were concerned about how to decide between policies when the government budget is tight.

There was also concern about potential unintended consequences of government intervention, for instance in the housing market.

Further, there was a desire to strike a balance between redistributive policies like benefits and "pre-distributive" policies that focus on preventing inequalities through the labour market. Several were wary of policies like high taxes that might make Scotland's economy appear less competitive.

Translating research into policy

At our concluding event, we heard from **Professor Ashwin Kumar**, a Professor of Social Policy at Manchester Metropolitan University and the Director of Research and Policy at the Institute of Public Policy Research.

He emphasised that our data and modelling capabilities for the immediate effects of anti-poverty policies on things like household income and poverty rates in the short term are good. We also have past evidence on what has worked for specific groups, for example the success of Labour's anti-poverty strategy from 1997-2010 for improving the employment of lone parents.

Ashwin noted that some further evidence is needed or needs updating, particularly on how to ensure that employability programmes support people into better jobs and careers once they are in work.

He also mentioned that we don't understand the link between poverty and health as well as we could, and further evidence on the link might find traction with those wanting to improve the NHS as well as those wishing to reduce inactivity.

Finally, Ashwin pointed out the limitations of requiring high-quality evaluations of all interventions to prove that they work. He said that evaluations should be taken into account where possible, but other types of evidence should also be considered by government departments when making decisions about interventions for which it is harder to produce the most rigourous types of evidence.

Media coverage of child poverty research

Also at our final event, we heard from **Chris Clements**, the Social Affairs correspondent for BBC Scotland. He described the current context and motivation for coverage of child poverty research, and provided some recommendations for researchers looking for media coverage of their work.

He spoke about the usefulness of case studies, and said that including people who are affected by a certain policy helps readers to relate to and contextualise the research.
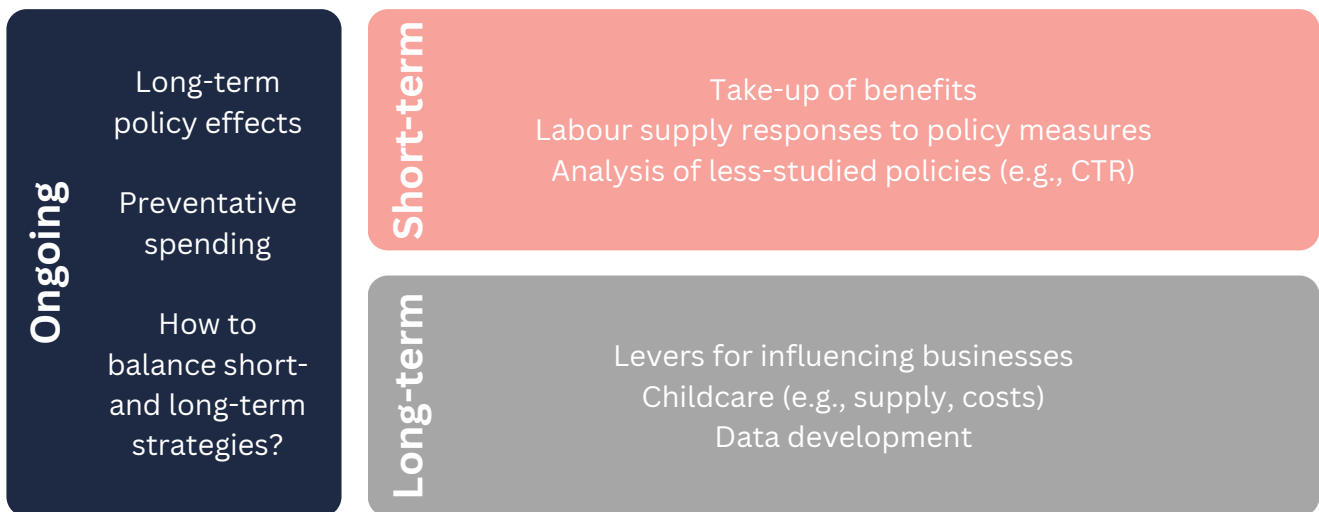
He emphasised that the BBC makes significant efforts to ensure lived experience participants are looked after as part of the process, and they understand what being part of a news story means when they are giving their consent. However, he reflected it isn't always a positive experience for all.

Finally, Chris described how involving the media early on in a story is useful, particularly if the researcher cannot provide a contact to someone with lived experience that the journalist can speak to.

Priorities for a child poverty research agenda

Participants in the researchers' workshop discussed the difficulty in balancing short- and long-term priorities. At the end of the workshop, their research priorities included:

Researchers' priorities

Ongoing	Short-term	Long-term
Long-term policy effects Preventative spending How to balance short- and long-term strategies?	Take-up of benefits Labour supply responses to policy measures Analysis of less-studied policies (e.g., CTR)	Levers for influencing businesses Childcare (e.g., supply, costs) Data development

We asked those who attended our concluding event to vote on the research areas highlighted by participants from both workshops.
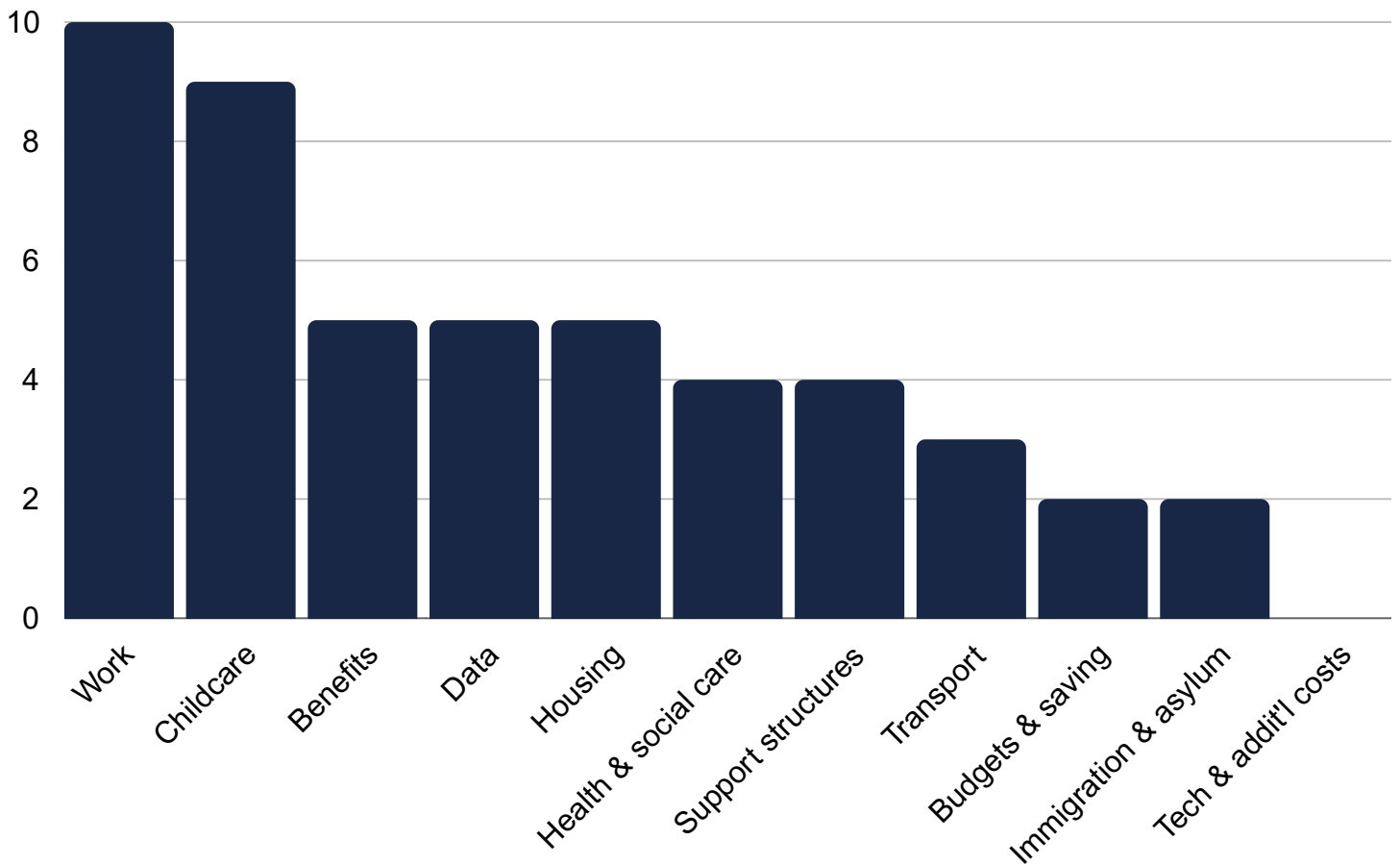
The people who voted generally thought that research on work and childcare were of the highest priority, followed by work on benefits and housing. Improving data for research was also considered a priority.

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