

Meeting of the Poverty and Inequality Commission

Thursday 26 March 2020

10am – 2pm

Virtual Meeting by Zoom video communications

Commission Attendees

Bill Scott, Chair

Commissioners

Shona Stephen

Professor Morag Treanor

Yvonne Blake

Linda Bamford

Katie Schmuecker

Alex Cobham

Douglas White

Lindsay Graham

Secretariat Attendees

Katherine Hudson, Secretariat Manager

Katherine Myant, Analytical Manager

Michele Barr, Secretariat/Administrator

1. Welcome and apologies

Bill Scott welcomed everyone to the meeting. Douglas White and Shona Stephen noted that they would have to leave the meeting early.

2. Impact of COVID-19: Decisions on current work programme

Bill Scott introduced a paper on the impact of the Coronavirus on the current work programme of the Commission. The Commissioners discussed the work the Commission currently had planned and which work would go ahead and what to postpone. The Commissioners agreed to continue with the legislative work of the Commission and with some other existing work where this was feasible:

- Scrutiny of progress with the Child Poverty Delivery Plan
- Annual Report - plan to publish end of June
- Strategic Plan – this will be light touch and flexible
- Research - IPPR Scotland are developing a discussion piece on intersectionality and Commissioners agreed to proceed with this research with a few adjustments.

The Commissioners agreed to postpone:

- The Working Group on Free School Meals with the intention of reviewing in 6 weeks.
- Poverty Alliance research on engaging people with lived experience.
- The Commission's Annual Public Meeting

The Commission agreed that its annual scrutiny report would need to adjust its focus and might need to be postponed. This will be revisited at a future Commission meeting.

3. Commission's role over the coming months in relation to Covid-19

Bill Scott discussed with Commissioners what the role of the Commission would be in response to Covid-19. It was agreed that a working group would be set up to discuss how the Commission responds to the Coronavirus crisis. Commissioners who have volunteered to be part of the working group are Bill Scott, Morag Treanor, Shona Stephen, Katie Schmuecker and Lindsay Graham. The group will have their first meeting at the beginning of April.

The first step will be sending a letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government to offer the support of the Commission. The Commission is keen to support Scottish Government wherever possible with its response to Covid-19.

Commissioners were asked to consider their own areas of expertise and what they could offer to the response effort – including thinking through short term and long term impacts.

4. Child Poverty Scrutiny Report

Bill Scott introduced the paper on the Child Poverty Scrutiny Report. Commissioners who attended meetings with Scottish Government policy teams provided some brief feedback on the meetings that took place on:

- Housing
- Scottish Child Payment
- Early Learning and Childcare and Out of School Care
- Income maximisation and Best Start Grant
- Monitoring and evaluation

The two meetings to discuss Employment support and the Innovation Fund had to be cancelled and written updates will be provided.

The secretariat will draft a report and this will be discussed at the Commission's meeting on 23 April.

5. Strategic Plan

Bill Scott introduced the paper on the Commission's strategic plan. Commissioners agreed to continue to prepare its strategic plan, while recognising that it would be quite different from what had previously been planned. The Commission will have a particular focus on the impact of Covid-19 and the strategic plan will need to be sufficiently flexible to allow it to respond to changing needs and priorities. The Commission aims to publish this in late June/early July.

6. Annual Report

Bill Scott introduced the paper on the Commission's Annual Report. The Commission's Framework Document sets out that the Commission needs to produce an annual report of its activities together with its budget expenditure within three months of the end of each financial year. The Commissioners agreed that the secretariat should start to prepare the annual report and aim to publish at the end of June.

7. Budget and risk register

The Risk Register and update on the budget paper were discussed by the Commission. Amendments were agreed to scores for some items on the risk register. The Commission discussed the potential impact of illness of Commissioners or the secretariat on the Commission's work and agreed that the Commission would be quorate to make decisions if four members, including either the Chair or Deputy Chair (or the nominated Deputy Chair for 2021/22), were either present virtually or agreed the decision by email.

8. AOB

- The next Commission meeting will be on the 23 April
- The Commission agreed to meet more frequently and have shorter meetings.