

Meeting of the Addressing low income policy circle

Thursday 23 July 2020

10:00 – 11:30

Virtual Meeting by Zoom video communications

Attendees

Bill Scott, Chair, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Professor Morag Treanor, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Yvonne Blake, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Linda Bamford, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Katie Schmuecker, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Alex Cobham, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Shona Stephen, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Emma Ritch, Executive Director, Engender
Satwat Rehman, Director, One Parent Families Scotland
Robert McGregor, COSLA
Kerry McKenzie, Public Health Scotland
Andrew Fraser, Social Justice Strategy Unit, Scottish Government
Ann McKenzie, Social Justice Strategy Unit, Scottish Government
Katherine Hudson, Secretariat Manager, Poverty and Inequality Commission

In attendance

Ewelina Lucaszek, One Parent Families Scotland
Mar Sanchez, One Parent Families Scotland
Zoe Young, One Parent Families Scotland

Apologies

Lindsay Graham, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Douglas White, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Professor Jennifer Davidson, Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures, and Co-chair, Scottish Leaders Forum Child Poverty Group
Katherine Myant, Analytical Manager, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Michele Barr, Secretariat/Administrator, Poverty and Inequality Commission

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Bill Scott welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were given for Douglas White, Jennifer Davidson, Lindsay Graham, Michele Barr and Katherine Myant. Introductions were made and Bill Scott thanked the experts by experience from One Parent Families Scotland for joining the meeting.

2. Update on action points from the last meeting

Katherine Hudson gave an update on the action points from the last meeting. All the actions had either been completed or were in progress.

3. Feedback from experts by experience from One Parent Families Scotland

Satwat Rehman introduced the experts by experience from One Parent Families Scotland who spoke about their experience of lockdown and what would help them, and the broader experiences of single parents working with One Parent Families Scotland. Some of the points that were raised included:

- Single parents lost employment during lockdown because of redundancy, or having to leave their jobs to care for children to avoid their families becoming ill.
- Lockdown had an impact on mental health for both children and parents.
- Parents are concerned that lack of access to technology will mean that some children will have fallen behind while others have had access to virtual learning
- Children's experience of education during lockdown varied depending on their school and the resources and support available. This is likely to be the same when they return to school.
- Schools need to help children catch up without overwhelming them. There needs to be a focus on wellbeing as well as learning.
- More support is needed to help parents get back to work, or from part-time to full-time employment, including help with childcare costs.
- COVID-19 has created uncertainty that is making it difficult to move jobs at the moment or plan to work full-time, particularly because of the risk of future lockdowns.
- Moving to Universal Credit because of changes to employment or housing has pushed single parents further into poverty.
- Single parents from minority ethnic groups can face discrimination in applying for work and commitments to equality and diversity in recruitment processes can be tokenistic.
- There is an issue with student loans being viewed as income for housing benefit, leading student parents to have their housing benefit cut.

Action points

- The Poverty and Inequality Commission will look into the issue of student loans and how they interact with benefits in other parts of the UK.

4. Discussion of potential Programme for Government recommendations

The Circle discussed the six potential Programme for Government recommendations which had been developed following email correspondence. The Commission made some amendments to the recommendations and agreed to add one further recommendation to those already identified. All seven recommendations will be put forward to the Social Renewal Advisory Board.

In addition to the recommendations the Circle also had some discussion about consistency of support for children from schools, unpaid carers and carers benefit, UK benefits and conditionality, the benefit cap and the two child limit. A small number of action points were identified relating to this:

Action points

- Poverty and Inequality Commission to raise issue of consistency of support for children across schools when it meets with the Deputy First Minister.
- The Circle to hear from unpaid carers at a future meeting.
- Bill Scott to raise the issues around UK benefits with the Financial Security Circle.

5. Next steps

The recommendations will be made to the Social Renewal Advisory Board for consideration at its meeting on 29 July.