

Meeting of the Addressing low income policy circle

Thursday 3 September 2020

10:00 – 12:00

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
Alex Cobham, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Shona Stephen, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Lindsay Graham, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Douglas White, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Emma Ritch, Executive Director, Engender
Satwat Rehman, Director, One Parent Families Scotland
Professor Jennifer Davidson, Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures, and Co-chair, Scottish Leaders Forum Child Poverty Group
Anna Ritchie Allan, Executive Director, Close the Gap
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
Katherine Myant, Analytical Manager, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Michele Barr, Secretariat/Administrator, Poverty and Inequality Commission

In attendance

Tam Wilson, Better than Zero, Scottish Trades Union Congress
Oscar Prentice-Middleton, Better than Zero, Scottish Trades Union Congress
Morag Watt, Scottish Government, Regional Economic Development Division
Stephen Boyd, Scottish Government, Economic Policy and Capability Division
Emma Congreve, Fraser of Allander Institute, University of Strathclyde

Apologies

Katie Schmuecker, Poverty and Inequality Commission
Lynn Williams, Full-time carer & part-time policy co-ordinator with a charity
Dawn Abell, Social Security Policy, Scottish Government

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Bill Scott welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were given for Katie Schmuecker, Lynn Williams and Dawn Abell. Introductions were made and Bill Scott thanked the expert by experience from Better Than Zero, Scottish Trades Union Congress and speakers for joining the meeting.

2. Feedback from experts by experience about the impact of COVID-19

Tam Wilson introduced the expert by experience from Better than Zero, Scottish Trade Union Scotland, Oscar Prentice-Middleton who spoke about his experience of how the Covid-19 emergency has impacted on those in low paid and/or precarious employment. The pandemic had brought a focus on the differences between directly employed and agency staff that had felt more abstract until then. In particular it highlighted issues around:

- Lack of clarity about who was responsible for agency staff when it came to furlough.
- Lack of support and information for agency staff.
- Agency staff losing shifts in the period leading up to lockdown which then impacted on furlough wages.
- Why staff were being employed via agencies for long term roles rather than being directly employed.

Other points raised in the discussion included:

- Covid-19 has made precarious work more prominent.
- Issues with the Furlough scheme becoming more prominent as the scheme comes to an end.
- People on zero hours contracts are being taken off furlough once employers have to pay a contribution, but are not being offered hours.
- Lots of people are being asked to sign reduced contracts and the state of the jobs market and precariousness of work means that there is a lack of confidence to challenge employers or raise health and safety issues.
- It is hard to use the Fair Work Framework toolkit for those in precarious work.

3. Reflections on Scottish Government's response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery recommendations on education, training and employment

- Morag Watt, Scottish Government, Regional Economic Development Division and Stephen Boyd, Scottish Government, Economic Policy and Capability Division
- Emma Congreve, Fraser of Allander Institute, University of Strathclyde
- Anna Ritchie Allan, Executive Director, Close the Gap

Speakers provided their reflections on the Scottish Government's response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery recommendation and invited questions from the policy circle.

4. Discussion: To what extent does the Scottish Government's response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery address poverty and inequality?

The policy circle discussed to what extent the Scottish Government's response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery addressed poverty and inequality. The circle identified some actions that were welcome, including establishing a Centre of Expertise in Equality and Human Rights, but felt that while the implementation plan acknowledged the differential impacts of the pandemic on COVID-19, this was not significantly reflected in the actions. The circle identified there were gaps between high level policies and ambitions and the actions in place. The circle discussed issues around business conditionality, skills segregation and placed based approaches as areas where the circle could focus in future meetings.

5. AOB

- The next meeting will be on the 29 October.
- The circle agreed to discuss unpaid care at a future meeting.