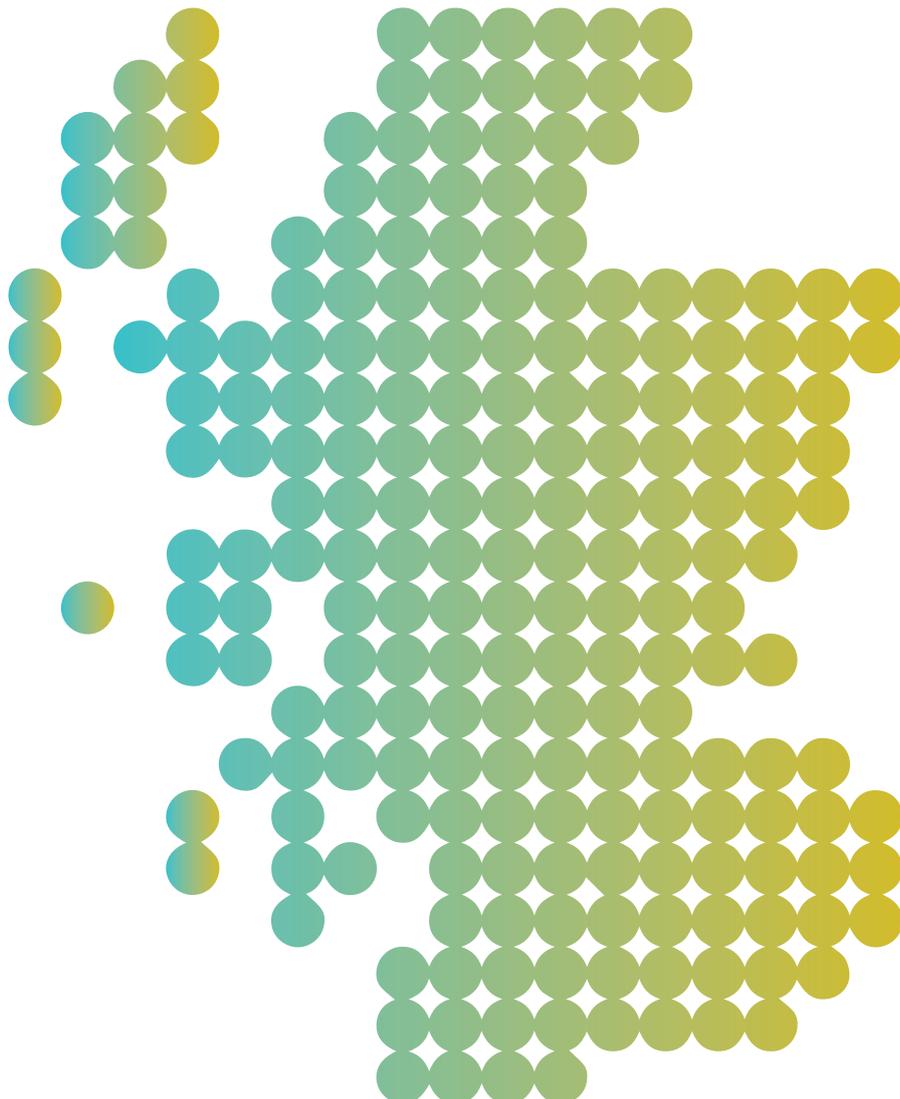




POVERTY AND
INEQUALITY
COMMISSION

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY COMMISSION STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 – 2023



Foreword

In Scotland almost one in four children and one in five working age people are living in poverty. Poverty is particularly high amongst single parent households, households with a disabled person, and minority ethnic households. As the Poverty and Inequality Commission we start from the view that poverty and inequality is not inevitable, and that the choices that we make can transform our economy and society. We believe there is a great deal of commitment across government and society in Scotland to reducing poverty and inequality and look forward to working with partners to achieve this.

In this Strategic Plan we set out the vision and priorities that will guide the Poverty and Inequality Commission's work over the next three years. Our Strategic Plan sets out how the Commission will advise, support and challenge partners to embed the commitment to addressing poverty and inequality and translate it into action. It is underpinned by a set of principles about how we do our work. At the core of our approach is being courageous and honest, ensuring our advice is evidence-based, listening and being accessible, promoting dignity and respect, speaking up for and amplifying the voices of people who are not often heard, and keeping people, their lives, their potential, and their individuality at the centre of what we do.

While we have expertise as a Commission, we know that those who experience poverty and inequality are also experts and that their knowledge, insights and partnership in designing policies are vital if we are to be successful in eradicating poverty in Scotland. That is why we have put working with experts by experience and amplifying their voices at the heart of our Strategic Plan. We will be developing our approach over the coming year, working and learning with experts by experience, and sharing our learning to inspire others.

When we started to develop our Strategic Plan we had no idea of the challenges that Scotland was going to face as the result of COVID-19 and the impact that this would have on poverty and inequality. We can be under no illusions; the pandemic is likely to increase poverty and inequality in Scotland and this makes it all the more important that transformative action is taken in response. One of our strategic priorities therefore focuses on advocating for a response to COVID-19 that addresses the structural causes of poverty and inequality.

Throughout our Strategic Plan we try to identify ways in which we will know if we are making progress. It is important that we are clear about the impact we want to have and how we will know if we are making progress. This will help us assess what we are doing and make any changes that we need to make. We welcome ongoing feedback on our Strategic Plan and the progress we are making in order to strengthen our work.

Bill Scott
Chair, Poverty and Inequality Commission

What is the Poverty and Inequality Commission?

The Poverty and Inequality Commission was established through the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 and came into being on 1 July 2019. It is an advisory non-departmental public body which provides independent advice and scrutiny to Scottish Ministers on poverty and inequality.

The Commission's responsibilities and powers are set out in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017.

The Commission's role is to:

- Advise Scottish Ministers on any matter relating to poverty or inequality in Scotland, including the impact of policies and the use of resources in reducing poverty and inequality
- Monitor progress in reducing poverty and inequality in Scotland
- Promote the reduction of poverty and inequality in Scotland

The Commission has specific responsibilities in relation to child poverty where it:

- Provides advice to Scottish Ministers on the Child Poverty Delivery Plans which the Scottish Government has to produce every four years
- Comments on annual progress towards the child poverty targets and what further progress is needed to meet the targets

The Commission responds to requests for advice from Scottish Ministers, but also develops its own work programme to scrutinise progress and to promote the importance of particular issues in reducing poverty and inequality.

In order to do its work the Commission can gather evidence, carry out research, and publish reports.

Our vision, mission and principles

Our vision

The Commission wants to see a Scotland where no-one lives in poverty, or is diminished by inequality, and everyone is able to live with dignity and thrive.

Our mission

We will work to strengthen policy, legislation, and practice to reduce poverty and inequality in Scotland, by engaging with experts by experience, advising Scottish Ministers, scrutinising progress, and advocating for action.

Our principles

The following principles set out how we will work as a Commission. We will be:

Courageous and honest

- Say what is right, not what is easy
- Drive progress and change by providing constructive challenge

Evidence-based

- Use evidence, from statistics and from people's testimony, to inform, scrutinise and monitor progress

Listening and accessible

- Be visible, accessible and available
- Listen to those who wish to be heard, especially those with expertise and direct lived experience of poverty and inequality

Promoting dignity and respect

- Tackle the stigma and discrimination associated with poverty

Vocal

- Speak up for and amplify the voices of people who are not often heard

Person-centred

- Keep people, their lives, their potential, and their individuality at the centre of what we do

Context

When the statutory Poverty and Inequality Commission was established in July 2019 and began work to think about its strategic plan, none of us would have imagined the very different context we would find ourselves in by the time the plan was being finalised. The challenges that we face in reducing poverty in Scotland have increased as result of COVID-19, and work to do so has become even more vital.

Some of the Commission's work is set out in law, in particular the requirements for the Commission to advise on action and scrutinise progress towards the child poverty targets. The Commission also has a particular role in advising Scottish Ministers on reducing poverty and inequality. In addition to this the Commission has a wider role in monitoring progress and promoting the reduction of poverty and inequality in Scotland. This means that while some of the Commission's work is driven by statutory requirements, or is responsive to requests from Scottish Ministers, the Commission also has scope to identify and work on issues that it thinks are important.

Since the establishment of the Commission we have carried out work that reflects all aspects of the Commission's role. One of the first pieces of work that the Commission undertook was to scrutinise the first round of Local Child Poverty Action Reports at the request of the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government. The Commission has subsequently scrutinised progress towards the child poverty targets during 2019-20 and, at the Cabinet Secretary's request, formed the Social Renewal Advisory Board's Addressing Low Income Policy Circle.

In preparation for developing our strategic plan the Commission invited a range of speakers to come along to 'evidence sessions' and also commissioned research to inform the Commission's approach and ways of working. We commissioned the Poverty Alliance and the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU) to work with experts by experience to co-produce guidance for the Commission on how the Commission should be involving experts by experience in its work. We also commissioned the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) Scotland to conduct research on intersectional inequalities, looking at what is known about intersectional inequalities in Scotland, and what data and evidence is available in Scotland to support the Commission in taking an intersectional approach to poverty and inequality.

In the midst of this work the Coronavirus outbreak happened and the Commission, like other organisations across Scotland, had to respond rapidly to the impact of COVID-19. The Commission's work began to change significantly as a result. It quickly became clear that the response to the crisis and the subsequent approach to recovery would need to be a major focus of the Commission's work.

People living in the most deprived parts of Scotland were at a much higher risk of catching COVID-19, but also at a much higher risk from the impact of the pandemic on the economy. People on low incomes, women, people from minority ethnic groups, disabled people and carers were hit in multiple ways because they were less likely to be able to work from home, more likely to have caring responsibilities, more likely to be in sectors hit hardest by the pandemic restrictions, more likely to be in insecure work, and less likely to have the digital access needed for education and school.

The early days of the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown threw up immediate issues around access to food and loss of income and the Commission set up a COVID-19 working group to focus on the immediate response to the crisis. That group has published several briefings highlighting issues around food insecurity and the role of the Scottish Welfare Fund.

The longer term impacts of COVID-19, and the actions taken to respond to the pandemic, are now becoming clearer. Even before the Job Retention Scheme has ended, we can see that unemployment is rising in Scotland and there has been a massive increase in numbers claiming unemployment-related benefits. The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and will sweep many more people into poverty.

Yet what the COVID-19 emergency has also shown is that poverty and its consequences are not inevitable and that different decisions can be taken. During the crisis the UK Government has taken action to protect jobs through the Job Retention Scheme and increased Universal Credit by £20 a week. The Scottish Government has provided a lifeline to those who are struggling by investing in food security and community well-being, housing people who are homeless, and providing additional payments to carers.

There have been calls from across society to grasp this as an opportunity to fundamentally reshape our economy and society, rather than trying to go back to how things were. Some have called this building back better, others building forward better, others social renewal. All are focused on the idea that poverty and inequality are not inevitable and that we can redesign our economy and society in a way that addresses the structural inequalities that lead to poverty and create a fair and sustainable economy.

It is therefore inevitable that COVID-19 has had an impact on the Commission's strategic plan. While the fundamental issues of poverty and inequality have not changed, the context in which we are working has. That is why one of our strategic priorities relates specifically to how we ensure a recovery from COVID-19 that addresses the structural inequalities that underlie poverty.

Our Strategic Priorities

We have identified one overarching priority and four strategic priorities that will drive the Commission’s work in the period up to the end of March 2023. Each of these priorities is inter-related. Our overarching priority is to amplify the voices of experts by experience – people with lived experience of poverty and inequality – and this should be seen as central to all the strategic priorities.



Under each strategic priority we set out what the Commission plans to do in order to deliver it and how we will know if we are making progress.

Overarching priority: Amplify the voices of experts by experience to make sure they are part of identifying issues, developing and designing solutions, and scrutinising progress.

The Commission’s principles commit us to amplifying the voices of those who are often not heard. We know that people with lived experience are experts because of their experience and bring knowledge and ideas that are needed to successfully tackle poverty. Scotland needs their expertise at the centre of work to reduce poverty. Amplifying the voices of experts by experience is an overarching priority for the Commission. It does not stand alone but threads through our work on all our other priorities.

We know that it is important that we involve experts by experience in our work in a meaningful way and that is why we commissioned the Poverty Alliance and Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit to co-produce guidance for us with experts by experience looking at how we should do this. This guidance emphasises the importance of taking a person-centred approach, putting people and relationships first, and making sure people are kept informed and their contribution recognised. Over the period of this strategic plan we will prioritise developing our approach to involving experts by experience and ensuring that they are part of developing solutions and scrutinising progress on tackling poverty.

The Commission will:

- Develop our approach to involving experts by experience, using the guidance we have commissioned. As part of this we will develop a new panel of experts by experience to be partners in the Commission’s work.
- Continue to build relationships with organisations and community groups across Scotland in order to hear from a wide range of people with different experiences.
- Develop an intersectional approach that recognises the importance of reflecting the complex natures of people’s identities, the multiple inequalities that they can experience, and the structural inequalities that lead to this, and reflect this in how we use expertise from experience.
- Integrate evidence from experts by experience with other forms of evidence and expertise in our work.
- Provide feedback to experts by experience on what the Commission has done with their input and what impact the Commission’s actions have had.

How will we know if we have made progress?

The Commission will have made progress in delivering this outcome if:

- Our advice and scrutiny reflects the views and experiences of experts by experience, and this leads to action by Scottish Government.
- Experts by experience are established as credible, valued participants in discussions with Scottish Government and other decision makers.
- Experts by experience tell us that they feel valued and that their work with the Commission has been worthwhile and had an impact.

Strategic Priority 1: Ensure that reducing poverty and inequality is central to policy making and delivery in Scotland.

The Commission has a unique role in advising Scottish Government on how to reduce poverty and inequality and in scrutinising the progress that it makes. This includes specific statutory responsibilities in relation to the Scottish Government’s child poverty targets. Over the next two and a half years the Commission will focus on ensuring that reducing poverty and inequality is central to policy making and delivery. It will work to ensure that this goes beyond policy areas that are traditionally focused on social justice to include all areas that have a contribution to make.

What will we do to deliver this priority?

The Commission will:

- Scrutinise progress towards the Child Poverty targets, identify where more action is needed, and advise the Scottish Government on its annual progress reports.
- Advise the Scottish Government on what it should include in its next Child Poverty Delivery Plan in 2022 in order to reach the child poverty targets by 2030.
- Provide advice, on request, to Scottish Ministers on issues relating to poverty and inequality.
- Prepare an annual scrutiny report which looks at the progress Scottish Government is making in reducing poverty and inequality and identifies where more action is needed.
- Identify and investigate issues across different policy areas where action is needed, make recommendations, and advocate for action by Scottish Government, local government and partners.
- Review Local Child Poverty Action Reports, as part of its scrutiny work, and provide recommendations and challenge to strengthen local action towards meeting the child poverty targets.
- Ensure that the views and ideas of experts by experience are heard by the Scottish Government when policy is being developed, delivered and scrutinised.
- Develop an approach that embeds intersectional analysis in our advice and scrutiny for Scottish Government and encourage Scottish Government and other partners to do the same.
- Engage with partners to ensure that the Commission’s advice draws on knowledge and expertise from across the third sector, local authorities and public bodies, universities, think tanks, businesses, community groups and beyond.
- Engage regularly with Scottish Ministers and officials across Scottish Government and challenge where we do not think enough progress is being made.

How will we know if we have made progress?

The Commission will have made progress in delivering this outcome if:

- The Scottish Government’s Child Poverty progress reports and the next Child Poverty Delivery Plan reflect the Commission’s advice on the things that will make the biggest contribution to reducing child poverty.
- The Programme for Government each year has reducing poverty and inequality at its centre.
- New areas of government begin to take action to contribute towards reducing poverty and inequality.
- The Commission’s work is regularly cited in policy documents and strategies.

Strategic Priority 2: Increase the impact of policies to reduce poverty and inequality by promoting better use of evidence in developing policies and measuring impact.

There is a clear commitment in Scotland to reducing poverty, and particularly child poverty, but it is not always clear why the actions being taken have been chosen and what scale of impact they are expected to have on poverty, or how they are expected to impact for different groups of people. Over the period of this strategic plan the Commission will focus on promoting the use of evidence to identify what policies and practice are likely to have the greatest impact in reducing poverty and encourage Scottish Government and partners to be clear about what the scale of the impact is expected to be and how they will know if a policy or programme is having the intended impact.

What will we do to deliver this priority?

The Commission will:

- Focus on evidence of impact when it undertakes its scrutiny role, particularly in its scrutiny of progress towards the child poverty targets and its annual scrutiny report.
- Strongly advise that evidence is better integrated into policy making, that the impacts actions are expected to have are fully identified, and that how those impacts will be measured is specified.
- Advocate for the Scottish Government to collect more intersectional data and evidence, embed intersectional analysis in our advice and scrutiny, and encourage Scottish Government and other partners to do the same.
- Integrate different types of evidence in its own work.

How will we know if we have made progress?

The Commission will have made progress in delivering this outcome if:

- There is evidence of an increase in Scottish Government policy and funding commitments which set out the impact they expect to have and how they will measure this.
- The Commission's analysis and recommendations integrate different types of evidence.
- The Commission's analysis and recommendations demonstrate a more intersectional approach and this is recognised by partners, including experts by experience.

Strategic Priority 3: Advocate for a response to COVID-19 that addresses the structural causes of poverty and inequality.

COVID-19's impact on our economy and our society will be felt for many years. The pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated many of the existing inequalities in our society and the economic fallout is hitting those on the lowest incomes and in the least secure jobs the hardest. We know that people who face existing inequalities because of race, gender and disability are being particularly impacted.

In the early days of the pandemic the Commission focused on action to mitigate the immediate impacts of COVID-19. These included carrying out work looking at access to food and looking at the role of the Scottish Welfare Fund in supporting those in greatest need. Over the period of this strategic plan the Commission will advocate for a response to COVID-19 that redesigns our economy to address structural inequalities.

What will we do to deliver this priority?

The Commission will:

- Form the Addressing Low Income Policy Circle for the Scottish Government's Social Renewal Advisory Board, developing recommendations that focus on social renewal that addresses the structural causes of poverty and inequality.
- Carry out work to look at the longer term impacts of the pandemic on the key levers to address poverty - work and earnings, social security and housing – and make recommendations to Scottish Government to respond to these impacts.
- Work with the UK Social Mobility Commission to jointly commission research looking at the impacts of COVID-19 on young people on low incomes, that can inform policy in all four nations of the UK.
- Ensure that experts by experience are part of all aspects of the Commission's work on COVID-19 recovery and adopt an intersectional approach to our analysis.
- Engage with partners to ensure that the Commission's advice draws on knowledge and expertise from across the third sector, local authorities and public bodies, universities, think tanks, businesses, community groups and beyond.

How will we know if we have made progress?

The Commission will have made progress in delivering this outcome if:

- The Commission's advice and recommendations address the structural causes of poverty and inequality.
- The Scottish Government's policies are influenced by the Commission's recommendations to address the structural causes of poverty.

Strategic Priority 4: Establish the Commission as an authoritative voice, and support a conversation that promotes dignity, challenges stigma, encourages action, and changes the narrative about poverty and inequality in Scotland.

The Commission has a statutory role in promoting the reduction of poverty and inequality and as part of this it wants to promote a conversation in Scotland that increases understanding of poverty and inequality and encourages everyone to play a role in taking action. While part of the Commission's statutory role specifically focuses on the work of the Scottish Government, many different partners have a role to play in reducing poverty and inequality in Scotland. This includes local authorities, public bodies, the NHS, the third sector, businesses, and members of the public. All partners need to be part of the solution to poverty in Scotland and the Commission particularly wants to encourage individuals and organisations that might not usually be part of a discussion about poverty to join the conversation.

The Commission will:

- Use framing language to engage with the mainstream media and use social media in order to share messages about tackling poverty and reducing stigma.
- Involve experts by experience in developing how the Commission communicates about poverty and inequality.
- Develop partnerships with other organisations in order to reach groups who might not usually be part of conversations about poverty.
- Work with partners, for example by participating in Challenge Poverty Week, in order to promote and reinforce shared messages.

How will we know if we have made progress?

The Commission will have made progress in delivering this outcome if:

- The Commission is invited to comment on issues as an authoritative voice by the media.
- The Commission is invited by a wide range of partners to speak at events and contribute to discussions, and partners also offer to contribute to the Commission's work.
- There is recognition of the Commission's role amongst experts by experience.
- The Commission's work is regularly cited in articles, policy documents and strategies.

FEEDBACK AND REVIEWING PROGRESS

We would welcome comments and feedback on our strategic plan and how we deliver the priorities within it. Comments can be sent to Info@povertyinequality.scot

We will review progress on our strategic priorities on an ongoing basis and report on this in our annual report.



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