



Meeting of the Poverty and Inequality Commission

Thursday 1 February 2024

10:00 – 12:30 pm

Virtual meeting - Microsoft Teams

Commission attendees

Professor Stephen Sinclair

Katie Schmuecker

Alex Cobham

Yvonne Blake

Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick

Tressa Burke

External Attendees Scottish Government (Item 1)

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP

Julie Humphreys, Deputy Director, Tackling Child Poverty & Financial Wellbeing

Chloe Bain, Deputy Private Secretary

Elaine Paterson, Financial Wellbeing Unit

Secretariat attendees

Katherine Hudson, Secretariat Manager

Rory Morrison, Analytical Manager

Órlaith McAree, Senior Participation Officer

Michele Barr, Secretariat Administrator

1. Welcome and apologies

Stephen welcomed everyone to the meeting. Commissioners introduced themselves to the Cabinet Secretary.

2. Discussion with Shirley-Anne Somerville, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice joined the meeting along with Scottish Government officials. The Cabinet Secretary thanked the Commission for their time and noted the importance she placed on hearing from the Commission.

The Commission and the Cabinet Secretary discussed the Commission's approach to its child poverty scrutiny this year. The Cabinet Secretary requested that the Commission provides Scottish Government with its Child Poverty Scrutiny Report by no later than 10 May. A formal letter to the Commission from the Cabinet Secretary will be sent shortly with this request.

A discussion followed on Commission and Scottish Government priorities between now and June 2024. Some of the areas covered in the discussion were:

- The 2024/25 Scottish Government Budget and its consequences for poverty reduction aims and the child poverty targets.
- Affordable housing supply and homelessness. The Cabinet Secretary offered a follow-up meeting between the Minister for Housing Paul McLennan and the Commission to further discuss these issues and the actions the Scottish Government is taking.
- Funding for key commitments such as employability, childcare and transport.
- The Scottish Government's interest in ideas from the Commission and others including the Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel to deploy resource like the Pension Age Winter Heating Payment in a different way.
- Longer term transformative action that will be required to meet poverty reduction aims and the revenue raising policies that will be needed, including reform and replacement of Council Tax.
- Deduction of Students Loans from Universal Credit. It was agreed that the secretariat would follow-up with the sponsor team and relevant SG officials on this issue.

The Cabinet Secretary and Scottish Government officials left the meeting.

3. Review of Commission recommendations

Rory Morrison and Michele Barr introduced the paper on the review of previous Commission recommendations to Scottish Government. Michele Barr provided a brief introduction on the process and Rory Morrison updated on the internal work the secretariat has done so far on the review of recommendations, and its main limitations and conclusions.

Commissioners discussed the options outlined in the paper and provided reflections on the process, findings, and next steps. Commissioners agreed that the next step for this work would be to group recommendations by theme, and with reference to drivers of poverty. Once this is complete, the secretariat will circulate a revised version by correspondence that highlights potential priority recommendations to the Commission for further comment by Commissioners. The secretariat highlighted that there would not be involvement with Scottish Government officials to provide updates on recommendations at this stage, though this would be necessary before coming to a final assessment on whether recommendations had been met or not.

4. Recommendations from Scottish Government review of circumstances that led to PIC resignations

Katherine Hudson talked through the recommendations from the Scottish Government's review of the circumstances that led to the Commission resignations, which had been circulated to Commissioners prior to the meeting. The covering

paper set out some of the recommendations which are for immediate action, including on performance management and induction. Commissioners discussed how the Commission might take forward these recommendations and what form performance management should take in the period till June 2024. The secretariat would prepare a proposal based on the discussion to be circulated to the Commission by correspondence. Katherine highlighted that a copy of the report has been shared with the Scottish Parliament Social Justice and Social Security Committee and that publication of it on the Scottish Parliament website would be expected in near future, timing to be confirmed. The secretariat would agree with the Chair any media lines required in response to any further media interest in the issue following publication by the Committee.

5. Update on Child Poverty Scrutiny

Katherine Hudson provided a verbal update on the progress on the Child Poverty Scrutiny work following the more detailed outline approach that was circulated to the Commission for comment. The secretariat will contact organisations to organise workshops with parents from priority family types and will provide funding for them to run workshops with parents on behalf of the Commission. Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA) was identified by the secretariat as one of the organisations to approach. Tressa Burke, as a short-term Commissioner and CEO of GDA declared a potential conflict of interest if GDA was approached. It was noted that Tressa would not be involved in any decisions about which organisations would be invited to run workshops.

The Commission has been asked to provide its scrutiny report to Scottish Government by 10 May at the latest so that the Scottish Government can incorporate the Commission's views into its annual progress report.

6. Update on recruitment of Experts by Experience Panel

Órlaith provided a verbal update on the recruitment of the new Experts by Experience Panel. The application packs will be ready to go out in early February. The intent is for the selection process to be completed by the end of February with panel members starting in March. Online workshops have been organised to speak with people interested in applying, subject to demand, and the secretariat will also have shorter online meetings with individual organisations where appropriate.

Stephen Sinclair and Tressa Burke offered to attend the workshops. Órlaith will contact them in due course to organise.

7. Updates from Commissioners

Commissioners were invited to briefly share relevant updates from meetings and engagements they had attended on behalf of the Commission. Stephen Sinclair updated that he has a meeting organised with Matt Cole, Chair, Scottish Fuel

Poverty Advisory Panel. Katie Schmuecker provided an update on the launch event of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report UK Poverty 2024.

8. AOB

- The next Commission meeting will be on 14 March 2024.
- The secretariat circulated prior to the Commission meeting details of possible media training for Commissioners and asked Commissioners to respond by email if interested.
- Michele Barr circulated an invite to a UN House Scotland event on ending child poverty at the Scottish Parliament on the evening of Wednesday 21 February (6pm to 8pm). If anybody wants to attend on behalf of the Commission, they were asked if they could let Michele know by the end of the week.