



Poverty and Inequality Commission Annual Report 2023-2024

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Foreword from Chair



It is an honour to be confirmed as the Chair of the Poverty and Inequality Commission, and have the opportunity to work with the other Commissioners to contribute to Scotland's national mission to eradicate child poverty. I'd like to thank the Chair and Commissioners who stood down during the year for their important contribution to the Commission's work. Under their stewardship, the Commission has become an invaluable critical friend to government and established a reputation as a trusted and authoritative voice providing evidence, insight and ideas to tackle poverty and inequality in Scotland.

An important milestone for the Commission over the last year has been the publication of our report on tax. While previous Commission work has focused on the action and spending needed to tackle poverty, this report examined the other side of the equation: how to raise the revenue needed for this work, while also reducing inequality. In a challenging fiscal environment, it is important that the Commission contributes to these discussions. The Commission's work on tax was founded on the principle that taxes are an important part of the relationship between each of us and our democratic structures. Tax is strongly linked to political representation, quality of governance and how much citizens feel part of society. The Commission's report looked beyond slight tweaks to existing levels of tax and called for fundamentally reformed and better designed taxation policies to address the public finance challenges Scotland faces and achieve our ambitious poverty targets.

During the year our first Experts by Experience Panel came to a close, and I would like to thank the Panel members who contributed so much to the Commission's work. Their knowledge and expertise was invaluable in developing our work and recommendations, and their personal commitment to the Panel over two years was exceptional. The Commission has since published a report setting out key learning from the Panel. There was much to celebrate and several useful lessons about how to continue our journey towards sharing power and co-production. I am delighted that we have now established a new Experts by Experience Panel which will be working with the Commission over the next two years. We will use the learning report to continue to strengthen our partnership working. On behalf of the Experience Panel and Commission, I would also like to thank the Secretariat which has provided invaluable and expert support.

Looking forward, the Commission will have a significant membership refresh from the start of July. Our first task will be working with the Experts by Experience Panel to develop a new Strategic Plan for the Commission, setting out our priorities for the next three years. As we get closer to 2030, when Scotland needs to meet its child poverty targets, the urgency of the progress required only increases. The Commission's advice and scrutiny work will focus on the measures necessary to meet these targets.

I am very grateful to the many organisations and individuals who have supported the Commission's work over the last year, including those who contributed to our tax working group and participated in the workshops which have informed our 2023-24 child poverty scrutiny report. The knowledge, experience, insight and challenge they brought has been vital to our work. I look forward to continuing to work with all our partners over the coming year, and to extending the range of those with whom the Commission engages. It is only by working together that Scotland will meet the shared aims of reducing poverty and unjust inequalities, and the Commission will do everything that it can to continue to support that endeavour.

Professor Stephen Sinclair
Chair, Poverty and Inequality Commission

1. About us

The Poverty and Inequality Commission was established 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 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

We sometimes call these three different types of work that we do advice, scrutiny and advocacy.

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

- Provides advice to Ministers on Child Poverty Delivery Plans
- Comments on annual progress towards the 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.

2. 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

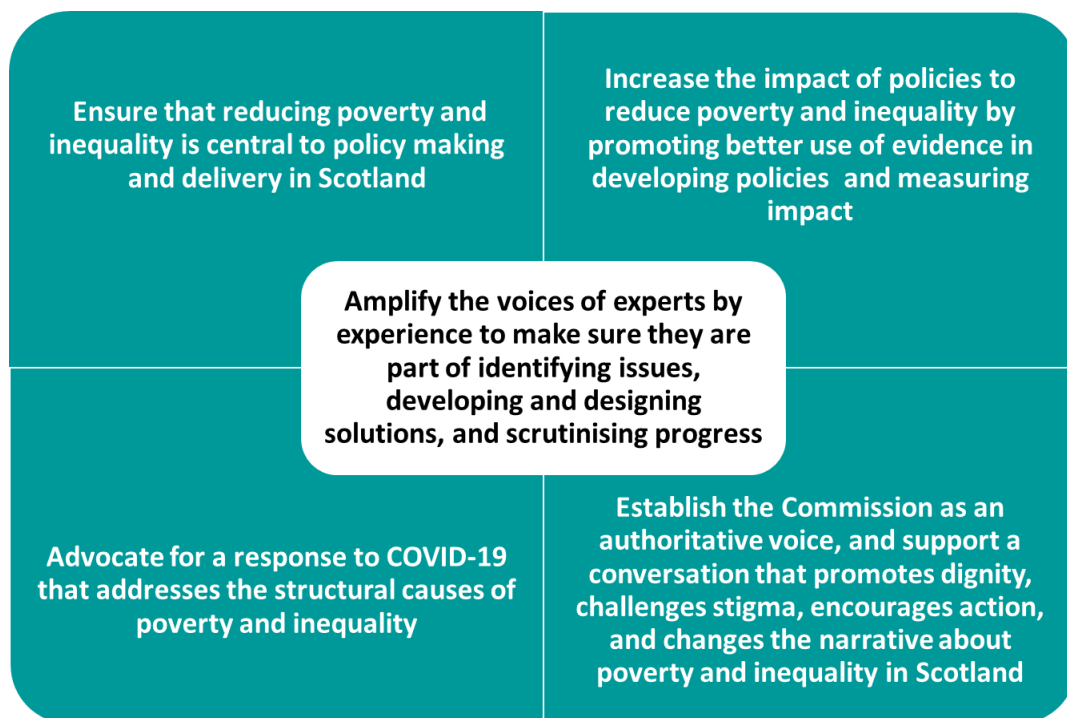
Person-centred

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

3. Our Strategic Priorities

Scotland's [National Performance Framework](#) sets out 11 National Outcomes, and the indicators by which they are measured, along with a Purpose, and Values that together set out a vision for collective wellbeing. The Commission, as with national and local government, voluntary organisations and the private sector across Scotland, contributes to the Outcomes in the framework.

In our [Strategic Plan](#) we identified one overarching priority and four strategic priorities that have guided the Commission's work. Our strategic priorities contribute to realising the National Outcome on [Poverty](#) ("we tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally"). 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.



In this Annual Report we set out the actions we have taken to deliver on our strategic priorities in order to contribute to realising the National Outcome on Poverty. Our advice to, and scrutiny of, the Scottish Government on policies related to poverty and inequality helps create the conditions for effective action to be taken on poverty. Within the Commission we continue to work towards sharing power with people who have lived experience of poverty through our Experts by Experience Panel. Our work also has strong connections to the [Children and Young People](#), [Human Rights](#), and [Communities](#) National Outcomes, among others.

The Commission's Strategic Plan ran until the end of 2023 and we will be reviewing our strategic priorities and preparing a new Strategic Plan in 2024.

4. Our work between April 2023 and March 2024

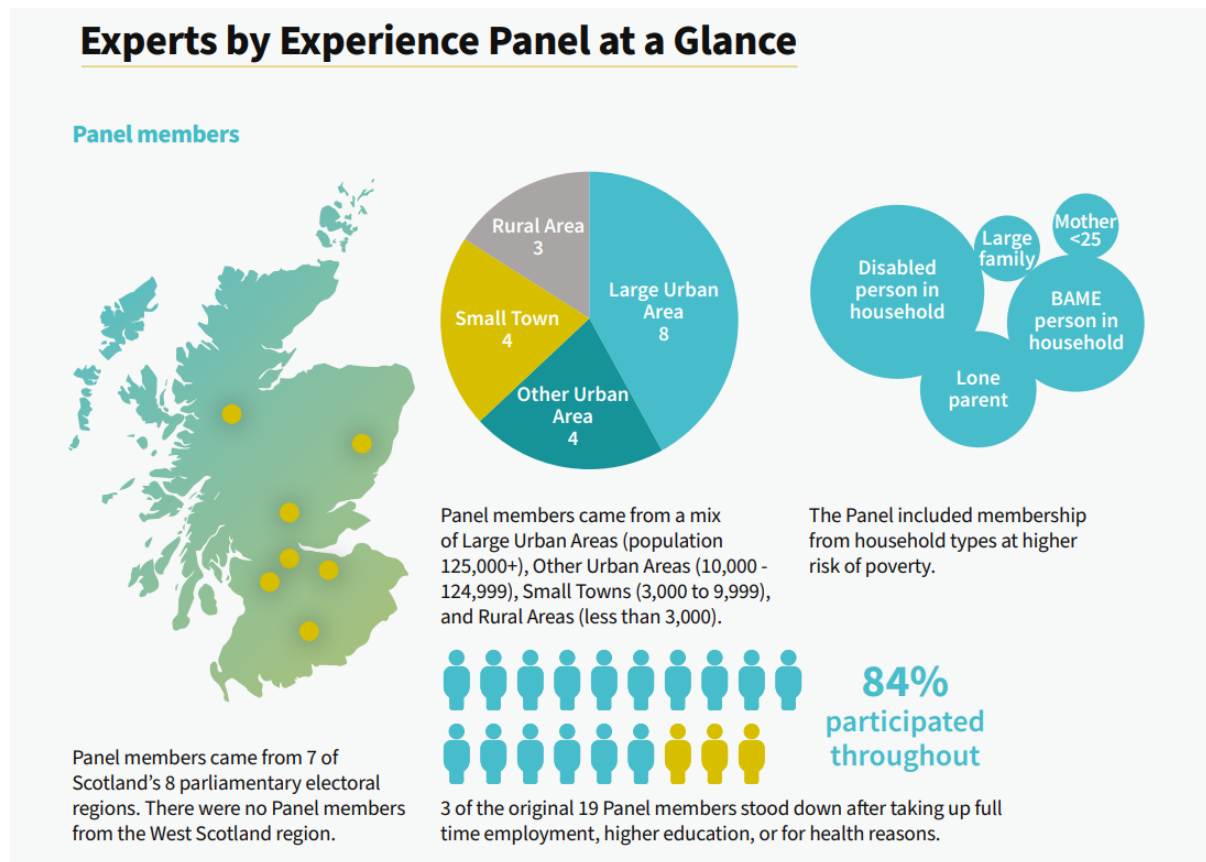
Our Annual Report looks back at the work the Commission has carried out in the last 12 months and how it aligns with the Commission’s strategic priorities.

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.

In August 2021, the Commission established an Experts by Experience Panel made up of 19 people from across Scotland with lived experience of poverty.

The Panel was developed to embed participation in the work of the Commission and to ensure that those with lived experience of poverty were engaged in all strands of the Commission’s work – advice, scrutiny and advocacy. The Panel ran for almost two years, until June 2023.



Panel Activities 2023-24

Between April and June 2023, Panel members:

- Developed, with Commissioners, the Commission's [Child Poverty Scrutiny Report 2022–23](#) (more on this see pp. 38 – 39 of the [Panel Learning Report](#))
- Took part in [Commission's tax working group](#) alongside three Commissioners and external experts (more on this see pp. 39 – 40 of the [Panel Learning Report](#))
- Responded to consultations and calls for evidence, and engaged directly with policy officials and other advisory bodies, including through:
 - a [submission](#) to a request from the Scottish Commission on Social Security about draft regulations on the new Carer Support Payment
 - a [submission](#) to the review of the Adult Disability Payment mobility component
- Worked with a PhD researcher from the University of Glasgow who is using the Panel as a case study on participation in socioeconomic decision-making.

Between April and June 2023, individual Panel members:

- Were invited to address delegates at the Scottish Government's Anti-Poverty Summit in May 2023, urging decision makers to ['Be Brave'](#), and participated in thematic discussions to inform action.
- Contributed to [a blog](#) about the experience of people seeking asylum in Scotland.

Learning from the First Iteration of Commission's Experts by Experience Panel

In December 2023, the Commission produced [a learning report](#) which details the purpose, process and context of the Commission's approach in developing and working with the Panel. The report looks at the impact of the Panel on Panel members, the Commission and Scottish Government and includes reflection and key learning.

Panel Activities 2021 - 23



Published outputs

Panel members contributed to 14 of the Commission's published outputs including advice and scrutiny to Scottish Government, reports, responses to consultations & calls for evidence.



Meetings

There were 27 core Panel meetings during the process, as well as further meetings of subgroups of the Panel and Commissioners, and meetings with Scottish Government and other stakeholders.



Events

Panel members presented at 3 events including the Commission's Public Meeting 2022, the 2022 Conference of the Scottish Leaders Forum and the First Minister's Anti-Poverty Summit (2023).

In developing the report, the Commission drew on evidence gathered from a range of sources, including Panel members, Commissioners, the then Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government, and Scottish Government officials and members of the secretariat to the Commission. The report also drew on evidence gathered by a PhD Researcher from the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow, Anna Baillie, who was looking at the Panel as a case study as part of her PhD research on the use of participation in socio-economic decision-making.

The Commission has been clear that in establishing the Panel it was setting out on a journey towards sharing power and co-production, and that this would not be achieved immediately. Learning from the first iteration of the Panel has been an important part of identifying how the Commission can better share power within this context. Throughout the life of the Panel there was ongoing learning and reflective exercises to try to identify what was and was not working, and where improvements could be made in both this and future iterations of the Panel.

Full details of the Commission's first Experts by Experience Panel can be found in the report [Embedding Participation in the Poverty and Inequality Commission: learning from the first iteration of the Commission's Experts by Experience Panel](#).

Recruiting a New Experts by Experience Panel

In January 2024, the Commission began recruitment for the second iteration of the Experts by Experience Panel. The Commission took a targeted approach to the recruitment; between January and March 2024, the Commission invited applications through over 100 organisations and practitioners based in third sector organisations and grassroots community groups across Scotland, most of which work with members of the child poverty [priority family types](#). A new Panel of 15 members was established in April 2024.

Strategic Priority 1:

Ensure that reducing poverty and inequality is central to policy making and delivery in Scotland.

Over the last year the Commission has continued to work to ensure that poverty and inequality is central to policy making and delivery, through its work on child poverty, responding to a number of Scottish Government consultations, and highlighting the ongoing impacts of the cost of living crisis.

Child Poverty Scrutiny Report 2022-23

In June last year we published our [Child Poverty Scrutiny Report 2022-23](#). In undertaking its scrutiny the Commission worked with members of its [Experts by Experience Panel](#) to look in detail at what progress has been made in implementing some of the major commitments in the Scottish Government's second child poverty delivery plan, [Best Start, Bright Futures](#). Commissioners and panel members met with Scottish Government policy officials and analysts to discuss progress in implementing major commitments relating to employability, childcare and housing, amongst others. This was the first time the Commission and Panel had undertaken this kind of joint scrutiny.

The report found that while increasing the Scottish Child Payment to £25 per week undoubtedly represented significant progress in tackling child poverty, less progress had been made on some of the other key actions in the delivery plan. It concluded that more action was required at a greater scale and with greater urgency, or Scotland would miss the 2030 child poverty targets.

Cost of Living Briefing

In July 2023 we published a further [cost of living briefing](#), which had a particular focus on advice services that were directly supporting their clients through the cost of living crisis.

Commissioners and members of our Experts by Experience Panel carried out visits to 11 advice organisations in 10 local authority areas across Scotland between August 2022 and March 2023. The messages that the Commission heard built on themes the Commission reported in its [previous cost of living briefing](#) based on a series of visits with other types of organisations earlier in 2022.

In common with feedback from other organisations, the rising costs of food, fuel and transport, along with debt, were the main drivers for seeking advice. Advice services told the Commission about the particular pressures they were facing in terms of rising demand and case complexity, and the toll this was taking on staff and volunteers. For some clients, staff were running out of support options to offer.

Consultation responses

Over the course of 2023-2024 the Commission and Experts by Experience panel contributed to a number of Scottish Government, COSLA, and Scottish Parliament consultations on issues including council tax, social security and human rights.

These included:

- [Response to Scottish Government and COSLA consultation on Fairer Council Tax](#)
- [Response to Scottish Government consultation on council tax on second and empty homes and non-domestic rates](#)
- [Response to Scottish Government consultation on a Human Rights Bill for Scotland](#)
- [Response to Scottish Government consultation on the Pension Age Winter Heating Payment](#)
- [Response to call for views from the Scottish Parliament Social Justice and Social Security Committee on the Social Security \(amendment\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#)

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.

Promoting the better use of evidence is a key element of the Commission's work, whether this is by drawing on evidence when developing its advice, or encouraging better use of data and evidence by the Scottish Government. Our 2022-23 child poverty scrutiny report, for example, included a recommendation relating to continued improvement of the quality and utility of the Scottish Government's analytical outputs in relation to child poverty. A particular focus for the Commission over the last year has been developing its own intersectional approach.

Intersectionality strategy

The Poverty and Inequality Commission recognises that taking an intersectional approach is critical in tackling poverty and inequality in Scotland. Many of those who are in deepest poverty will experience overlapping discrimination and intersecting inequalities, and by trying to understand and respond to their experiences and needs we are more likely to be able to design policies and actions that meet the needs of everyone who experiences poverty.

The Commission is committed to working towards taking an intersectional approach to developing its advice and scrutiny. It has worked with Talat Yaqoob, an independent consultant on equality and inclusion, who carried out training for the Commission and members of the Experts by Experience Panel on intersectionality, and undertook a review of some of the Commission's previous work.

The Commission then developed and published an [Intersectionality Strategy](#) in December 2023. This strategy sets out how we will go about taking an intersectional approach and what it means for different aspects of our work. We have said that we will review the progress that we have made towards taking an intersectional approach on an annual basis and reflect this in our annual report.

How better tax policy can reduce poverty and inequality

The Commission established [a tax working group](#) to look in more detail at how devolved taxation could better address poverty and inequality in Scotland. This group drew on a range of evidence, hearing from organisations and individuals who had an interest in devolved taxation in Scotland. To inform this work, the Commission also worked with Survation to undertake online [survey questions about knowledge and attitudes to tax](#).

Child Poverty Scrutiny Report 2022-23

As part of the Commission's [Child Poverty Scrutiny Report 2022-23](#), the Commission explored how data, monitoring and evaluation was being used to understand the implementation of [Best Start, Bright Futures](#) and progress towards meeting the statutory child poverty targets. Commissioners and Panel members met with Scottish Government analysts to discuss this. The Commission's report recognised that improvements had been made over time in the range of data and analysis the Scottish Government published to support and monitor progress towards the targets.

The Commission recommended that the Scottish Government must continue to improve the quality and utility of its analytical outputs in relation to child poverty. This included scoping out cost-effective options to try to mitigate the high level of uncertainty within the child poverty data, and the worsening data gaps for the six priority family types at greatest risk of poverty. It also called on the Scottish Government to publish revised cumulative impact assessment modelling, which the Scottish Government subsequently did in its [2022-23 annual progress report](#). It published [a further update in February 2024](#).

Strategic Priority 3:

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

The Commission continues to advocate for action to address the structural causes of poverty and inequality, and not just immediate responses to crises such as COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis. Last year our focus was on how better tax policy could reduce poverty and inequality.

How better tax policy can reduce poverty and inequality

Tax affects us all, and determines much about the society we live in – including through its central role in funding public services in Scotland, and the importance of tax in political representation and democratic engagement. In November 2022 the Commission established [a tax working group](#) to look in more detail at how devolved taxation could better address poverty and inequality in Scotland.

The working group was made up of a number of Commissioners, Experts by Experience Panel members, and two external experts. It heard evidence from a range of organisations and individuals who had an interest in devolved taxation in Scotland.

The Commission published in October 2023 a [report](#) based on the work of the group. It made a number of recommendations to Scottish Government and its partners. These were:

1. Ensure all land and property in Scotland is registered with a current and accurate valuation.
2. Revalue properties subject to the current council tax, and immediately start work to design its replacement.
3. Seek to devolve the necessary powers to set rates and bands of income tax for savings and dividend income for Scottish taxpayers.
4. Improve public understanding of, and compliance with, devolved taxation.
5. Broaden the tax base in Scotland by doing the work required to bring wealth into scope for future tax policy, and implement transparency measures on the profits of multinational companies.

The Commission is continuing to engage with the Scottish Government about how these recommendations can be put into practice.

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.

In 2023-2024 the Commission continued to work to highlight and promote dialogue about issues of poverty and inequality in Scotland. This included giving evidence to the Scottish Parliament, speaking at events and meetings, and engaging with the media.

“Be Brave” – The Scottish Government Anti-Poverty Summit

In May 2023, the Commission’s then Deputy Chair, Professor Morag Treanor, and Experts by Experience Panel member, Danielle, attended the [anti-poverty summit](#) in Edinburgh.

The cross-party summit was organised by the Scottish Government, and led by the First Minister. The summit included representation from Scotland’s political parties, campaigners, public and private sector leaders, and people with lived experience of poverty.

Danielle was invited to be one of the speakers at the summit and [urged delegates to “be brave”](#) enough to do what is needed to free people in Scotland from poverty.

Events, meetings and media activity

Over the last year members of the Commission met regularly with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice to discuss poverty and inequality issues. Members of the Experts by Experience Panel participated in some of these meetings, including discussing some of the main messages in the Commission’s Child Poverty Scrutiny Report 2022-23.

The Commission’s then Chair, Bill Scott, gave evidence to the Scottish Parliament’s Social Justice and Social Security Committee as part of the Committee’s Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2024-25.

Commissioners presented at and attended various events over the course of the year, including at the Highland Third Sector Interface Poverty Seminar

5. Financial Summary

The Poverty and Inequality Commission was allocated a budget of £366,105 by the Scottish Government for 2023-24. The Commission's budget is held by the Scottish Government and the Commission is not required to produce audited accounts.

The table below provides a summary of the money that was spent on behalf of the Commission between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

The Commission reported a budget underspend this year. This was partly due to Commission meetings and events being held online which reduced costs. A delay in being able to undertake research work resulted in less of the budget being spent on this. The underspend was returned to Scottish Government.

Budget – April 2023 to March 2024	£366,105
Staff costs	£262,484
Commissioner fees & travel expenses	£22,484
Commission meetings and events (including support with costs for people to attend)	£0
Research	£20,416
Communications & IT	£17,829
Administration, training and other costs	£1,822
Experts by Experience Panel	£9,938
Total	£334,973

6. Our work in 2024-2025

A number of our Commissioners are stepping down at the end of their term at the end of June 2024 and we look forward to welcoming six new Commissioners in July, and a further Commissioner in December 2024.

Our new Commissioners are:

- Peter Cawston
- Kim Dams
- Taliah Drayak
- Louise Hunter
- Ross McQueenie
- Rami Okasha
- Paul Fletcher (from December 2024)

Our Chair, Stephen Sinclair, and Commissioner, Suzanne Fitzpatrick, will continue on the Commission, and Commissioner Katie Schmuecker will continue until the end of her appointment in November 2024.

Following the appointments, the Commission will work with the Experts by Experience Panel to develop a new Strategic Plan and Work Plan for the Commission.

7. Membership of the Commission

Current members

Professor Stephen Sinclair (Chair) (appointed November 2023)

Stephen is Professor of Social Policy and Co-director of the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit at Glasgow Caledonian University.

Yvonne Blake

Yvonne is an anti-poverty campaigner, co-founder of Roots to Return and of Migrants Organising for Rights and Empowerment, and a member of the Unity Centre.

Tressa Burke (appointed November 2023)

Tressa is Chief Executive Officer of Glasgow Disability Alliance.

Alex Cobham

Alex is Chief Executive of the Tax Justice Network.

Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick (appointed November 2023)

Suzanne is the Director of the Institute for Social Policy, Housing, and Equalities Research (I-SPHERE) at Heriot Watt University.

Katie Schmuecker

Katie is Principal Policy Adviser at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Members who stepped down during 2023-2024

Morag Treanor (Deputy Chair) (resigned July 2023)

Morag is Professor of Child and Family Inequalities at the University of Glasgow.

Bill Scott (Chair) (resigned November 2023)

Bill is Senior Policy Advisor at Inclusion Scotland.

Lindsay Graham (Deputy Chair) (resigned November 2023)

Lindsay is an independent policy advisor with a particular interest in tackling food insecurity.

Linda Bamford (resigned November 2023)

Linda is Convenor of the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland and previously worked for NHS Scotland.

Shona Stephen (resigned November 2023)

Shona is Chief Executive of Queens Cross Housing Association.