

Scotland's Poverty and Inequality Commission: A chance for progress?

UWS-Oxfam Partnership Policy Forum event

More than 80 representatives of a wide range of organisations attended the Policy Forum event at the Lighthouse in Glasgow on the afternoon of Friday 30th June, 2017.

Opening Presentations

Chik Collins, Professor of Applied Social Science at the University of the West of Scotland, introduced the event, the outline for the day, and the work of the [UWS-Oxfam Partnership](#). He also 'chaired' the event as a whole.

Jamie Livingstone, Head of Oxfam Scotland, outlined the context of global and UK inequality before outlining: Oxfam's recent [research](#) looking at trends in poverty and inequality in Scotland; recent political and public momentum on this issue; the powers of the Scottish Parliament to address inequality, and the way in which the forthcoming Commission could be designed for maximum impact. He also discussed the political dynamics in relation to the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill. Jamie's Prezi is available [here](#).

Paul Tyrer, Head of Social Justice Strategy with the Scottish Government, outlined the Scottish Government's vision for the forthcoming Commission, including the need for the Commission to be:

- *independent* – with the chair selecting commissioners (8 in total) and workstreams;
- *expert* in different fields, including lived experience, and with analytical support;
- *connected* – to the Ministerial team;
- *inclusive and engaged* – including with disadvantaged groups;
- *open and transparent* – sharing findings even when challenging to government and others; and
- *sharply focussed on poverty*.

Paul said the Commission would be set up for an initial two year period and would look at using devolved powers to the fullest. It could have a role in monitoring the recommendations of the Scottish Government's Poverty and Inequality Adviser, Naomi Eisenstadt. For its first 8 to 9 months it would also have a key role advising on the first child poverty plan. Paul said that what happens after its first two-year period is dependent on Stage 3 consideration of the Child Poverty Bill, given MSPs' Stage 2 vote for the Commission to be in statute.

Post-script: The Scottish Government have now announced the establishment of the Poverty and Inequality Commission. This [paper](#) sets out the form and remit of the Commission, and appointments made to date.

'Design principles' identified from the table discussions

Following the opening presentations, participants were asked to reflect on what they had heard, focussing on how the Commission should be designed (design principles) and the policy areas it should focus on. Though not comprehensive, below are the key issues, themes and questions that emerged around design principles:

- What would success look like in 2/3 years?
- Can we gain momentum on one or two issues that fundamentally address inequality and change power dynamics?
- How do we better align competing 'silos'? Holistic approach needed – drawing in discussions in other areas.
- The convening role of the Commission is critical. Commission should 'join up collective change-making'.
- Needs a collective analysis of the problem focused on long-term causes: 30+ years of outsourcing, privatisation, public service cuts, tax cheating (neoliberalism).
- Commission needs 'big ears' – should be good at listening.
- Commission needs to have teeth. How do we ensure enforcement? Legally? Scrutiny? Call-in powers?
- Should have some democratic principles in setting it up – drawing on the 'wisdom of the crowd'.

- Bottom-up design important - move away from typical design proposed by Government.
- Needs to engage people beyond 'usual suspects' of experts. Experience-led.
- Short and focussed commission vs long-term Commission? 2030 timeline? Or more – 25 years?
- What should be the focus? Families not children? Place not poverty? Low-income workers with children?
- Commission should be statutory AND with a wide remit to focus on inequality. Not mutually exclusive. We need to find a way of squaring the circle – there should be a way of doing this in legislation. Could scope of the bill be broadened by looking at material deprivation target?
- Credibility rests with Chair and Government gets to choose the chair. How do they ensure it is independent? And perceived to be?
- Should be an active Commission – don't wait for outcome/final report – share developments and views more regularly.
- How can we ensure the Commission isn't ignored? Political buy-in upfront important – i.e. to implement recommendations flowing from the Commission.
- Should have action and reflection cycle – links to improvement agenda?
- What will Commission do that is unique? Needs to be radical if it is to affect change.
- There is a need to support engagement of people with experience of poverty – e.g. travel expenses on the day, reimbursement for their time and expertise.
- Involving people with lived experience of poverty is crucial, but this is complex. Needs to be about power as well as voice. Not convinced that a 'panel at the side' is the best approach.
- Where do the Scottish Government's social security experience panels fit in – do they?
- Should comment on Scottish and UK policy issues as both impact on poverty and inequality in Scotland.
- Needs resources to do these things.

Policy areas identified from the table discussions

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| • Not just child poverty | • Social care |
| • Structural inequality – land/property & wealth | • Inclusive growth |
| • Income inequality | • Pay ratios |
| • Gender inequality | • Insecure work & low-wage economy |
| • Tax and redistribution | • Occupational segregation & unpaid care |
| • Basic income | • Local empowerment/community regeneration |
| • Social security | • Public services |
| • Housing | • Attainment gap |
| • Public health | • People AND place. |
| • Mental health | • Access to justice |
| • Food poverty | • Transport |
| • Fuel poverty/climate action | • Attitudes – need to address a perceived & pervasive 'underclass' issue |
| • Childcare, early years & pre-early years | |

Themed presentations

Following the table discussions, five speakers broadened the discussions out through short, themed, presentations.

Caroline Kennedy from the Poverty Truth Commission spoke about her experience of the Poverty Truth Commission. The informal space makes her feel welcome. She has built her confidence in public spaces and is now holding Ministers to account for failed promises. Poverty and stigma has a big impact on people – lack of money can mean children not participating in physical activity and it can mean parents going without for their children. It can lead to feelings of worthlessness and shame. The Poverty Truth Commission takes the time needed and make 'nothing any trouble'. Caroline concluded that the process has made a real difference to her and her community.

Gerry McCartney from NHS Health Scotland outlined how health inequalities in Scotland were the worst in Western and Central Europe. It had not always been like this, but is caused by inequalities in income, wealth and power. This leads to significantly different life expectancy among groups. Thankfully, health inequalities are avoidable. We know what policies work in terms of reducing poverty and inequality and therefore the forthcoming Commission represents an opportunity to address health inequalities by tackling poverty and inequality. In doing so, it can do a 'huge service' to future generations.

Amanda Turner from Close the Gap emphasised the gendered nature of poverty. Women are twice as reliant on social security as men and yet more than 80% of social security cuts since 2010 have come from women's incomes. The gender pay gap remains high, with women's employment being concentrated in low-paid professions and unpaid domestic work still disproportionately carried out by women. Two thirds of low-paid workers are women and there is an ongoing issue with a lack of female representation on boards. By addressing women's poverty we are addressing child poverty too.

Carla McCormack from the Poverty Alliance spoke about the need for a comprehensive, all-ages, anti-poverty strategy encompassing: the child poverty bill, the fairer Scotland action plan, and the social security bill. There is a need for a Commission in statute that highlights good areas while challenging the Government in other areas. The Child Poverty Bill represents an opportunity to do this and is crucial given 1 in 4 children in Scotland are growing up in poverty. The Commission should perform the role of the Child Poverty and Social Mobility Commission at a UK level. A statutory underpinning would allow it to speak freely and independently. Carla concluded that the scope of the amendments passed at stage 2 allow the Commission to have a wider role to look beyond child poverty.

Gail Irvine from Carnegie UK Trust spoke about the learning that can be shared from the 31 Fairness Commissions that have taken place across the UK. These are generally led by Local Authorities, but engage stakeholders and citizens in ways to tackle poverty and inequality and make recommendations. Within these commissions there are a number of tensions or trade-offs to consider, including: prevention vs mitigation; short-term vs long-term; consensus based vs creative tension; working together vs diffusion of responsibility; local authority-led vs wider ownership; micro/local focus vs macro/national focus; expert opinion vs lived experience; and influential supporters vs empowered citizens. While it is easy to be cynical about these initiatives, the local leadership displayed can be a strong signal that we recognise and claim some power.

Key learning from the second set of table discussions

- Need for a strong contextual analysis and common understanding of the problems and underlying drivers of inequality and poverty.
- Commission can be an agenda-setter. Build a movement around key policy areas/changes that change balance of power (for example between labour and capital).
- A narrative that can build momentum is therefore important.
- Commission should challenge employers as well as Governments.
- Commission can be helpful as the small size of it – and convening power – means it can break down silos.
- We already have a very strong evidence base. What we need are actions and policies. Commission should be a 'delivery vehicle', not 'evidence gathering'. Commission should synthesise what is out there and propose hard recommendations.
- Perhaps worth focussing on 5 things that can be done/achieved (within timescales, e.g. targeting 2021 election)?
- Commission should have role in monitoring Government and ensuring existing policy mechanisms deliver.
- We need evidence-based policy but we also need to consider whose evidence is privileged.
- Expert vs lived experience is complementary not competitive. Lived is expert.
- Lived experience is about more than poverty – also those on the margins through other factors including gender, race, citizenship status, disability, health conditions, prisoners, and more.

- Can we think about ways to minimise barriers to participation. This could include accessible locations, prenatal care, childcare, no penalties for participation (e.g benefit sanctions), opportunity to take time-off, flexible timings. It could also consider ways to encourage digital participation.
- People should be nurtured to be ‘disrupters’.
- Commission needs to focus on ‘hard recommendations’ and build political agreement behind them, by doing so it needs to give ‘permission for political action’.
- Needs to do two things: highlight where progress is made, and where the gaps are (identifying the causes)
- The Commission needs to be ‘for Scotland’, not more narrowly ‘for Scottish ministers’.
- The Commission needs to target areas of disagreement – as that is where the biggest wins may exist.
- Interrelated issues of child poverty, adult poverty and inequality – helping adults helps children
- Expertise on gender is needed – can’t tackle child poverty without addressing gender.
- There are some legislative gaps to be fixed – e.g. in relation to non-binary gender which means non-binary people are excluded from shaping and delivery of policy.
- ‘Pick a stat and change it’ might have value but need to be careful of stats not telling the whole truth. We could look at health as a measure, but with social determinants as the focus?

Key points from the open discussion

- Shared intention needed, but also need to be open and honest about differences.
- Clarity about what success looks like is important.
- Movement building is critical – should reach out to Trade Unions and others.
- Process is important. Needs to be open, transparent and generate a shared consensus. Perhaps worth looking at the Icelandic example of citizen engagement.
- Commission needs to inspire rather than/as well as providing a detailed blueprint.
- Commission should be ‘connecting the dots’ in relation to long-term drivers of poverty and inequality.
- Let’s be optimistic but not naive – that may mean being more explicit/specific about the problems we face. Name neoliberalism as shared problem.
- We know so much already – the puzzle is why this is not translating. Commission is an opportunity to smash some heads together.
- Consider experiments/pilots and testing.
- Words frame action. Poverty and inequality are negative in tone. Should the Commission have a positive strapline?
- Cultures and behaviours are important. Personal agency yes, but macro-drivers too. That is why consideration of ‘place’ might be useful e.g. moving from ‘housing’ to ‘place-making’. Scottish Government’s behavioural change model might be useful to consider roles of individuals, families, Government etc.
- Change will mean looking at budgets and resources. ‘Bend the spend’ towards deprived areas and groups.
- Commission should seek to develop ‘permission for action’ and a ‘price for inaction’. Pave the path forward while also holding to account.
- Independence and wide remit are not and cannot become mutually exclusive.

Attendee List

Chik	Collins	University of the West of Scotland
Donna	Burnett	NHS Health Scotland
Luska	Jerdin	Fair Work Convention
Wendy	Hearty	NHS Health Scotland
Hugh	Foy	Conforti Institute
Twimukye	Mushaka	The PovertyAlliance
Jamie	Kinlochan	Who Cares? Scotland
Margaret	Kane-Dickson	NHS Health Scotland
Laura	Galloway	Edinburgh Business School
Doreen	Grove	Scottish Government
Robert	McGregor	Fife Council

Jacqueline	McDowell	NHS Health Scotland (Community Food and Health Scotland)
Matthew	Dutton	Edinburgh Napier University
Ruth	Robin	Shelter Scotland
David	Jack	Skills Development Scotland
Carol	Craig	Centre for Confidence and Well-being
Patricia	Gallagher	Provanhall HA
Amanda	Simpson	UWS
Celia	Tennant	Inspiring Scotland
Donna	Fullerton	Cassiltoun HA
Caroline	Kennedy	Poverty Truth Commission
Carol	Alexander	Poverty Truth Commission
Jamie	Livingstone	Oxfam Scotland
Clementine	Hill OConnor	Glasgow Caledonian University
Cynthia	Fry	Business in the Community Scotland
Kath	Gallagher	NHSGGC
Christine	Cooper	Strathclyde University
Elaine	Cleary	Junior Chamber International
Ezra	Wilson	Students' Association of the University of the West of Scotland
Anne	Gifford	University of the West of Scotland
Helen	Melone	Energy Action Scotland
Cheryl	Gedling	PCS union
Irene	MacKinnon	Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO)
Rachel	Green	Community Development Alliance Scotland
Claire	Niedzwiedz	Mental Health Foundation
Amanda	Turner	Close the Gap
Ann	McGhee	Women's drop-in centre
Ros	McMillan	Women's drop-in centre
Annemarie	McKay	Women's drop-in centre
Anna	Stuart	GWSF
Jamie	Cooke	RSA Scotland
Emma	Bolger	University of the West of Scotland
andrew	stewart	Scottish Government
angus	hardie	Scottish Community Alliance
John	Bone	University of Aberdeen
Marlene	McMillan	NHS Ayrshire and Arran
DAVID	WOOD	Planning and Policy Manager
Peter	McColl	Nesta
Tony	Robertson	University of Stirling
Murdo	Mathison	UCU Scotland
Mark	Langdon	North United Communities
Edward	Harkins	Independent
John	Frank	University of Edinburgh
caroline	mockford	n/a
Lorna	Greene	Royal College of Nursing
Dave	Watson	UNISON Scotland
Colin	Hardacre	SRUC
Elizabeth	McEntee	GCVS
Paul	Brown	L S A
Andrew	Strong	The ALLIANCE
Matthew	Crichton	Friends of the Earth Scotland
Gerry	McCartney	NHS Health Scotland
Rachael	Clark	Mental Health Foundation
Muriel	Mowat	Befriending Networks
Karen	McDonagh	Ardenglen HA
Roseannah	Murphy	MSP Scottish Parliament
IAIN	GORDON	Bethany Chrisitan Trust
Suzi	Macpherson	The Scottish Parliament
Regina	McDevitt	NHS Ayrshire & Arran
Rob	Gowans	Citizens Advice Scotland
Stephen	Sinclair	Glasgow Caledonian University

Karen	Kerr	Skills Development Scotland
Linda	Cameron	Provanhall HA
Alasdair	McKinlay	Scottish Government
Karla	Perez Portilla	Mental Health Foundation
Helen	Flanagan	PCS Trade Union
Graham	O'Neill	Scottish Refugee Council
Nick	Jenkins	University of the West of Scotland
Steve	Collins	UWS
Clive	Mitchell	Scottish Natural Heritage
Frances	Gallagher	Justice and Peace Scotland
Julie	Bilotti	Scottish Government
carlos	Rodriguez	UWS
Arno	van der Zwet	UWS
lesley	Macphee	Ardenglen HA
Dan	Heap	Scottish Greens
Paul	Tyrer	Scottish Government
Eddie	Follan	Barnardos
Carla	McCormack	The Poverty Alliance
Hartwig	Pautz	UWS
Gillian	Kynoch	Fareshare
James	Egan	Glasgow Centre for Population Health
Eurig	Scandrett	UCU Scotland
Michael	Marra	Leverhulme Reserach Centre for Forensic Science
Grant Thoms	Thoms	Ingeus
Gehan	Macleod	GalGael Trust
hayley	bennett	University of Edinburgh
Leona	Seaton	Glasgow Chamber of Commerce
David	Holmes	Scottish Government
John	Downie	SCVO
Jill	Stevens	Mental Health Foundation
Daphne	Vlastari	Scottish Environment LINK
Maureen	Cope	GWSF
Janine	Hunt	SAUWS
Elish	Reid	SAUWS
Dot	McLaughlin	IS
Sarah	Deas	Scottish Enterprise
Alison	More	Skills Development Scotland
Gail	Irvine	The Carnegie UK Trust
Katherine	Trebeck	Oxfam GB
Suzanne	Crimin	Oxfam Scotland
Rebecca	Lozza	Oxfam Scotland
Francis	Stuart	Oxfam Scotland
Andy	Milne	SURF
David	Signorini	Scottish Government
Adam	Lang	Shelter Scotland
David	Somervell	Edinburgh University
Michael	Pickens	UWS