



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Social Security Committee

**Thursday 20 April 2017**

**Session 5**



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot) or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

---

**Thursday 20 April 2017**

**CONTENTS**

<b>DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE .....</b>	<b>Col. 1</b>
<b>CHILD POVERTY (SCOTLAND) BILL: STAGE 1 .....</b>	<b>2</b>

---

**SOCIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE**

**8<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2017, Session 5**

**CONVENER**

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)

\*Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green)

\*Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con)

\*Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

\*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

\*Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Peter Allan (Dundee City Council)

Dr Margaret Hannah (NHS Fife)

Robert McGregor (Fife Council)

Professor Andrew Russell (NHS Tayside)

Bill Scott (Inclusion Scotland)

Emma Trottier (Engender)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Simon Watkins

**LOCATION**

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)



**Scottish Parliament**  
**Social Security Committee**

*Thursday 20 April 2017*

*[The Deputy Convener opened the meeting at  
09:31]*

**Decision on Taking Business in  
Private**

**The Deputy Convener (Pauline McNeill):** Good morning. I welcome everyone to the eighth meeting of the Social Security Committee in 2017 and ask everyone to turn off their mobile phones, as usual. I have received apologies from Sandra White and Mark Griffin.

The first item on the agenda is consideration of whether to take several items in private. Item 4 is consideration of our response to the budget process review group, item 5 is consideration of our approach to our annual report and item 6 is consideration of nominations for expert support for our work. Is it agreed that we will take those items in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill:  
Stage 1**

09:31

**The Deputy Convener:** Agenda item 2, which is the main item of business, concerns the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill. This is the second of the committee's formal evidence sessions on the bill, and we have two panels of witnesses. I thank all the witnesses for their attendance and their written submissions, which have been very helpful.

I formally welcome the first panel. Peter Allan is the community planning manager for Dundee City Council; Professor Andrew Russell is the medical director and deputy chief executive of NHS Tayside; Robert McGregor is the policy manager for Fife Council; and Dr Margaret Hannah is the director of public health in NHS Fife. It is a powerful panel, and I thank you all for coming along.

Why do you think that child poverty legislation is needed? Or do you think that it is not needed? Any one of you can kick off.

**Dr Margaret Hannah (NHS Fife):** The legislation is welcome, partly because it focuses minds on a difficult issue that has ramifications throughout society. With the dropping of the target from the United Kingdom Government's agenda, it feels appropriate that we are doing something in Scotland to address the issue. As a nation, we want to do something about it and feel very committed to addressing child poverty in the round. I am supportive of the idea.

**Professor Andrew Russell (NHS Tayside):** Before I took up my current role, I was a general practitioner for nearly 20 years in some of the poorest parts of Dundee. I therefore understand the importance and significance of the legislation, and I recognise that, in the absence of the type of structure that the bill describes, we have had years of aspiration but limited evidence of delivery. The opportunity to see targets in the way that you describe gets us into a different territory around delivery, and I am personally very supportive of that.

**Peter Allan (Dundee City Council):** If we are genuinely committed to reducing inequalities in the country, we must address child poverty as a fundamental question of social justice. Some people may misguidedly believe that people choose poverty or that their poverty is their own fault, but no one ever suggests that children who are born into poverty made a choice to live in poverty. That gives us a platform that everyone will support.

The other reason is that it gives us a chance to have a commitment that is not only positive but sustainable. Often, policy priorities come and go, but child poverty is not something that anyone would ever be willing to accept.

**Robert McGregor (Fife Council):** It is an area that most local authorities and their partners have been working on for a number of years, but perhaps not all to the same extent. Anything that raises the profile of child poverty so that it becomes a “must do” rather than a “good to do” is a good thing.

**The Deputy Convener:** Thank you. That is very helpful in setting the scene. I will now call on members to ask questions. Witnesses should not feel that they have to answer every question, but if they wish to answer they should indicate to me.

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** Thank you for being here and for your written evidence. It was particularly helpful to see spelled out a number of the things that your partnerships are doing to tackle poverty. I want to explore a little bit how the bill will help with that and will not just add extra reporting or extra work that will not actually deliver results for the people that we are trying to help.

**Peter Allan:** I do not know whether there will be specific questions about the shape of the reports, and the contents or the value of them, but would that be a reasonable place to start?

**Ruth Maguire:** Yes, that would be helpful.

**Peter Allan:** The reports are interesting, in that everybody is going to have a story to tell about what they are doing about child poverty. I hope that, in developing local outcome improvement plans, the relevant people across the country would explicitly make a commitment to that and say what they are going to do. I am not absolutely confident that that would be the case, so, with any luck, the bill will reinforce the need for that.

On reporting, there are a few interesting questions to ask. There is the “So what?” question: “There is an annual report on child poverty from the Scottish Government or from Dundee City Council and its local partners—so what?” Another question is whether we know what “good enough” looks like in relation to local delivery on child poverty. Further, who will tell us what the report should include and whether it is good enough? We could have a report in which performance against all the long-term targets is going down even though we have done incredible things; or, vice versa, we could have a report in which performance against those targets is going up even though we have done nothing very much about them.

The issue and the factors that contribute to change are so complex that properly reporting on reasonable progress will be really hard. However, it is crucial that organisations are held to account to demonstrate the specific action that they are taking to reduce child poverty. There probably needs to be more of a discussion about what targets would look like and how we would frame positive local short-term action. If you want, we can talk a bit more about that later.

**Professor Russell:** From a health perspective, targets are always a challenge because there is a fine line between something that is a reasonable aspiration and something that is unachievable. We need to ensure that we frame targets within the context of the things that people should be doing anyway and use measures of things that people and systems are doing anyway.

The opportunity to produce integrated children’s service plans is emerging across Scotland. We could see some of the outcome measures that might be described within the bill as being legitimate and quite useful ways of measuring improvement within the context of those integrated children’s service plans. To pick up on Peter Allan’s point, it is important that we do not get into a model that reports solely for the purpose of reporting.

**Robert McGregor:** To pick up on that, one of the risks around what I see written in the bill is that it appears as though we are being asked simply to report activity. If that is the case, there is a risk that we will just continue to do what we are doing and what we have always done around all that. It is not absolutely clear to me what we are being asked to do over and above what we currently do, or whether the bill, when enacted, will eventually provide a great deal of scrutiny and support around sharing learning and so on.

**Dr Hannah:** The other thing is that, in order to make sense of the actions that we are all taking locally, everything needs to be joined up. Our work is not just between the national health service and the council; it involves a wider partnership effort to address poverty in the round. Of course there are specifics around children and families, but if we are called to account on only one specific target, there is a risk that we will not address the issues as effectively as we could.

Part of the challenge is conceptual. A target can be something that you aim for—the bull’s-eye to the arrow—but it can also be an attractor to mobilise effort towards a goal. I think that that is what this target is about because we all want to mobilise societal efforts to address poverty for children and families and, if we see it in that light, it will have more meaning for us at the local level.

**Ruth Maguire:** I am interested in hearing how you are currently measuring the outcomes of the work that you are doing on poverty, specifically around children and families. You have detailed quite a lot of work in your submissions so it would be good to hear about outcomes.

**Dr Hannah:** I will comment on some of the health statistics. Stillbirth, low birth weight, infant mortality and maternal mortality all have a strong social gradient and we are keeping a close eye on that and are considering what mitigating factors we can introduce.

**Peter Allan:** If you view the outcomes in terms of the long-term income and poverty targets, we have very little to show us what marginal incremental change we are achieving each year. I think that it is more important to have some kind of logical approach where we can work back from the long-term outcomes and ask, "Reasonably, what actions can we take now that would have the biggest impact over the longer term?" and set really stretching targets around those. It might be the number of kids who are getting their uniform grant, the level of income maximisation, or the number of people who are being supported to do social prescribing.

We need to have a range of practical measures and put all our efforts into doing as much as possible on those, on the basis that everyone would have faith that those were the right things to do to achieve support over the long term. In Dundee, we are focusing less on the long-term outcome that is really hard to reach and more on what we can do this year and next year. We need to demonstrate a logical connection between what we are doing and the long-term outcome and then put all our efforts into making the short-term stuff happen and doing that really well.

**Robert McGregor:** One of the interesting things for me is that both Dundee and Fife have recently had fairness commissions, and one of the challenges that came from the work of those commissions concerned outcomes, measures and targets. Certainly, from a Fife perspective, we are therefore looking to refresh our approaches to how we measure success in light of the challenges that came from those commissions. The work of the commissions will be heavily reflected in local outcome improvement plans. If any legislation comes through on child poverty, we will also need to consider how to reflect that within those plans.

**Ruth Maguire:** Thank you.

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** Our job as a committee is to focus our scrutiny on the bill as introduced and to think about ways in which it might be improved. I want to ask a range of questions with that task in mind.

The four income-related targets are the centrepiece of the bill. It is notable that the targets are all income related. My first question to panel members is whether it is sufficient—we probably agree that it is necessary—to measure child poverty by reference to income alone.

09:45

**Peter Allan:** When we discuss this in Dundee, we always say that it is not all about money, but it is definitely about money. One phrase that drives me crazy is "worse than income poverty is poverty of aspiration". No. The poverty of having no money and sending your bairns to bed cold with nae food—that is poverty.

Whatever else the approach is about, it has to be about the money, but we know that the issue is not just about money. That is my quick answer.

**Professor Russell:** I tend to agree. Understanding the way in which the statutory sector targets its resources as a consequence of that approach is an element that needs to be captured somewhere.

**Adam Tomkins:** Do other members of the panel want to answer that question before we move on?

**Dr Hannah:** A potential addition to the process could be an inequality measure such as the Gini coefficient, which could be used to look at the distribution of income across all income groups in society, rather than targeting the measurement only on levels of poverty in childhood. A lot of evidence suggests that social gradients contribute to such outcomes as poor health.

Questions of wealth and debt can also leave people disabled with regard to their income. It is not just that their income is inadequate; they feel really stuck, and that can have huge consequences, particularly for mental health.

**Peter Allan:** When measuring income, we tend to talk about the lives of parents, because the income comes from them. That is crucial: if we want to change income, we must focus on families and parents. However, those targets do not say a lot about the experience of the child, and what the child's life is like. We make presumptions about the child's life based on the possibility that there might not be a lot of money in the house, but it would be a positive step if we had progress targets that measure improvement in the lives of children who experience poverty.

**Robert McGregor:** I agree with Peter Allan that we need to be clear about what outcomes we want for our children, particularly those from low-income families. We presumably want them to be safe and healthy and to be able to aspire towards their potential. How do we put in place measures and

targets that relate to all of that? Income targets are essential, but as part of a wider dashboard.

**Adam Tomkins:** Let me give examples of the sorts of things that some of us have considered adding to the bill, which we discussed with the last panel of witnesses in our first stage 1 session, which took place just before the Easter recess. John Dickie of the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland was enthusiastically in favour of my proposition that the bill should include the attainment gap in education as a measure of child poverty, and a requirement to take steps to reduce it.

Given that John Dickie is in favour of that, what does this panel think about such a measure being included in the bill? We know that there is a relationship between educational under-performance, educational attainment gaps and child poverty. There are also relationships between child poverty and wealth, debt and health, as Dr Hannah said. The question is whether a statutory duty specifically requiring ministers to take steps to close the attainment gap should be added to a bill that is focused on trying to reduce and eventually eliminate child poverty in Scotland.

**Peter Allan:** I do not know whether it should be added to the bill, but I described earlier the logic modelling that we do, with which we think about what the biggest contributory factors are and how we can take early action to change them. Attainment issues will be one of those factors. Strong targets associated with those would be more meaningful than waiting for five or 10 years to see whether the income measures have changed.

That approach helps us with making policy choices. When John McKendrick spoke to our fairness commission in Dundee, he said that difficult choices might have to be made in tackling poverty and that we might not be able to do everything for everyone. We believed that attainment was one of the biggest priorities, and our fairness commission recommended that, rather than improving attainment for everyone in the city of Dundee, we should close the gap by improving the performance of the kids who are getting the poorest results. That is a different strategic approach. It is difficult to argue across the population that we will focus help on the people who need it more, rather than do everything for everyone.

**Dr Hannah:** Peter Allan makes a good point.

For me, the target of addressing child poverty is an indicative target to mobilise us as a country towards something more ambitious on what is an intractable or difficult challenge. The challenge has many dimensions: educational attainment is one

and health is another, and a third dimension is ambition for children living in poverty and the availability of opportunity for them in their surroundings. How much can we achieve on reducing food deserts and improving the green environment and play spaces for children? To my mind, those elements are all part of the target. I have a broad view of it.

I am not sure about including additional targets in the bill, however. The devil will be in the guidance and in how we report on our progress. For example, we will need to think carefully about the impact of housing. We have a very big housing programme under way in Scotland, which will make a difference to child poverty because it will maintain or peg housing costs, which are an important part of household costs. One of the reasons why Scotland has lower levels of child poverty compared with those in the rest of the UK is that housing costs are relatively low here. The housing programme is a huge contribution to achieving the target. I feel that the issue is the motivation and the spirit of the bill, if you like, rather than the specifics.

**Adam Tomkins:** That is helpful. I have a quick follow-up question before other members come in. The written submission from the Fife partnership says that you believe that the bill provides a good opportunity

“to use rich data and evidence—much of it held locally—to consider new approaches, reconsider targeting and how we can do much more work on early intervention to prevent child poverty and to break cycles.”

That is an interesting contribution. What in the bill will enable us as a country to do that? If the bill does not do enough to enable us to do that, what should we add to it to ensure that the ambition is realised?

**Robert McGregor:** I am not absolutely sure whether that issue needs to be written in the bill, but it would be helpful if there was reference to it in the guidance. Quite often, the devil is in the guidance rather than the bill. We were referring to the point that, through the administrative data that we hold on many different things, we understand a lot about families and children, but we do not as yet make enough of that kind of information or consider how we join everything up between the various partners.

I can give some examples of that, although this might be leaning too much on the deficit side of things. We know who accesses things such as crisis grants, who applies for discretionary housing payments, who seeks debt crisis support and who uses food banks. We actually know a great deal about the families in our areas, but we need to do much more to develop understanding of their circumstances and characteristics, to enable us to



target the action that is needed to reduce child poverty.

**Professor Russell:** The health service has a long history of using data to reflect on past harm, and it is moving in various parts internationally and across Scotland and the United Kingdom into the territory of using those data to anticipate future harm. There is an opportunity through the alignment of health and social care to bring the local authority and other partners into that conversation and into the discipline around the way in which we collectively use data, and we can see real opportunities against the background of that agenda.

**Dr Hannah:** One of the fairer Fife commission's recommendations was to take that opportunity and use it in a much more co-ordinated way.

There is a wider comment to make, which echoes partly what Peter Allan said earlier. Michael Marmot has written widely about the whole agenda and has talked about proportionate universalism. The idea that we have universalism in our public provision, but that a proportionate element of that is necessary to reduce the gradient across society might be quite a helpful way of seeing how we can address the issues together.

**Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** Good morning. The Minister for Social Security, Jeane Freeman, has talked about a human rights-based approach in the area. The committee has received a number of submissions on the bill as drafted, including from the Law Society of Scotland, which said that laying annual progress reports before Parliament would

"encourage progress, scrutiny and oversight however, we are concerned that these measures alone will not secure the success of the Bill's aims. It is unclear to us what the consequences, if any, would be if the targets are not met. We question whether the Bill, in its current form, is justiciable and are concerned that it could prove largely unenforceable and therefore ineffective."

In using the word "justiciable", one is probably considering the question of an individual's rights to enforce anything before the courts, which is what one would normally understand human rights to be in effective form or in respect of an individual's situation. Will members of the panel comment on that?

**Peter Allan:** We have not considered the matter specifically from a human rights perspective. My reading of the bill is that it is a good-faith thing and that the Government will expect local authorities, their partners and the other bodies to act in good faith to reduce child poverty. However, I have not looked into that matter in more detail than that. I am sorry.

**Professor Russell:** I have a similar view. My expectation is that the bill will be something that is

perceived to be facilitative and supportive. There is always an anxiety that we will get into the territory of sanction in anything that we put in statute. Experience of the sanction-based model in other areas is that we do not get into sustainable solutions with that. We quite often get into models of temporary improvement that seek to offset the potential of a sanction, but we do not get into the territory of sustainability. The bill presents the opportunity to take us into sustainable solutions.

**Robert McGregor:** I agree with that position.

**Peter Allan:** There are two issues that we might want to separate: one is human rights and whether the bill is justiciable; the other is the level of scrutiny and who would scrutinise the reports, which is absolutely crucial. In previous sessions, members have asked about the role of the ministerial advisory group. Scrutiny might be a role for such a body. Who will look at all the reports that are produced, the delivery plan for the Government, or the local plan and say whether they are doing enough: going far enough and fast enough to seriously reduce inequality? I would be interested to know what that would be based on.

10:00

The notion of a broader outcome framework for child poverty might be helpful. I know that you are thinking about a range of measures as well as the income target.

I can suggest a good starting point. In Dundee, we based some work on NHS Health Scotland's mental health outcome framework, and we adapted that to deal with issues around fairness and poverty. That has started to form a broader picture of the causes and consequences of poverty, and we may be able to use that as the basis for better scrutiny.

**Gordon Lindhurst:** The Law Society's concern was probably about lack of accountability. Of course, scrutiny can be done through the courts, particularly when it comes to human rights issues. As you say, a bill may or may not have a particular purpose. If I understand what you are saying correctly, you do not necessarily view the lack of any individual rights-based approach in the bill to be a difficulty.

Scrutiny can be done through other means, however, not just through the courts. For example, Inclusion Scotland and the Poverty Alliance have called for the bill to include additional reporting provisions. That would entail that reports are not just laid before the Scottish Parliament but require parliamentary approval, and that reports laid before the Parliament should be scrutinised by the Parliament prior to official publication.

If the panel does not think that it is necessary to have provisions that provide an opportunity for scrutiny through the courts in relation to human rights, which is the normal manner in which human rights are enforced, do you think that the other propositions, which are more parliamentary-scrutiny based, would be a good idea? Would that make up for the lack of the other possibility of scrutiny?

**Dr Hannah:** It goes to the heart of the purpose of the bill whether it takes that rights-based approach to individuals and their circumstances, which would therefore result in matters being taken through the courts and being addressed through that process, or whether it is about our collective ambition as a nation to articulate an aspiration, for which we—or rather, the Government—is prepared to accept responsibility.

I see a parallel with the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. In many ways, addressing child poverty is as complex as addressing climate change. The measures are there to support a process and an endeavour across society to address something that, if we did not have the legislation in place, we would probably put further down the list of priorities.

I am not convinced that we are talking about an individual human rights approach for the bill. I do not think that that is its purpose.

**Gordon Lindhurst:** That was on the first aspect—the first question—but the second question is about the other possibility of scrutiny: having parliamentary scrutiny. Would that be appropriate, given that we are possibly talking more about a societal responsibility approach?

**Dr Hannah:** We need a reckoning against which to judge our progress, and that reckoning needs to happen at the level of the Government, I think. The best way forward would probably be through Parliament scrutinising the Government's collective effort in this regard.

**Robert McGregor:** My understanding from a reading of the bill is that local authorities and health boards would be required to report actions retrospectively. That is quite interesting when it comes to seeking approval or otherwise, because we would be saying what we have done in the past year. That does not tally well with an approval approach.

I can understand the point about the delivery plans and the responsibility that will sit with ministers—that is a different proposition. At present, however, it would not be helpful on the local authority and health board responsibility side of things.

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** We spoke earlier about the

attainment gap. It is interesting that Barnardo's Scotland stated recently:

"It is natural that so much of the debate around the attainment gap focuses on what happens inside our classrooms. However, what happens before and beyond the school gates can be even more important in ensuring every child has every chance to learn."

For that reason, I would like to bring the discussion back to income, although I appreciate the holistic nature of the issue, which Dr Margaret Hannah spoke about.

In that context, I am interested in Robert McGregor's answer to question 2. The final paragraph of the Fife partnership submission states:

"It is ... important to recognise that ... many of the factors and levers to impact on poverty are at UK or international level so income targets set for Scotland have to be caveated."

I will be interested to hear your thoughts if you want to expand on that. I am also interested in your comment that

"It should be explicit that it is not only public agencies that have leverage on income and others should be drawn into the wider partnership discussion—initiatives such as the Living Wage campaign, drawing in business, are key to this."

I would be interested to hear the panel's thoughts on that pertinent point about how income is distributed widely in the economy.

**Robert McGregor:** On the point about business and the living wage, I emphasise that we need a partnership response rather than just a health board or a council response. In Fife, we are keen not just to work with the usual partners but to expand the set of partners that we have at community planning level. That is one of the challenges that came from our commission on fairness. Even if people do partnership work well, there is plenty of scope to expand, do more and bring in other players who hold some of the levers as part of a new strategic partnership to tackle inequalities and poverty.

**Ben Macpherson:** In that mode of thinking, will the bill create useful leadership, initiative, direction and focus—the things that Dr Margaret Hannah picked up on at the beginning of our discussion—in order to create those wider relationships and help to build the networks to tackle the issue in an holistic way across our economy and society?

**Robert McGregor:** It depends on the way the bill is finally written. If it makes specific reference to the contributions of wider partnerships—as long as it is explicit about the additional responsibilities and who can play a part—that will be helpful.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** The bill proposes targets and measures, but it does not go into detail about how those targets can best be

achieved. Does the panel think that the bill could give more direction on that front?

**Peter Allan:** As I said earlier, a logic model or an outcomes framework would be really helpful. If we can agree on what the major causes of child poverty are and what effective action can be taken to address them, we will be able to have targets associated with those actions. That would give us a range of short-term, intermediate and long-term outcomes and measures, which would help.

**Professor Russell:** From a health perspective, we are always thoughtful about how we use measures of improvement and bring that philosophy of improvement into what we do. There is something helpful about having a focused target and guidance that supports the delivery of improvement measures against the background of an evidence base for what we can achieve, so the way in which we produce guidance to support the bill might deal with some of the areas that you highlight.

**Robert McGregor:** There is a good and improving understanding of what programmes and project interventions work in Scotland, but we need to do much more to share learning on that and ensure that those who are less active on the agenda can pick up positively on what works. That should be part of the initial focus.

**Dr Hannah:** I echo what Robert McGregor said. I read the comments from Dundee and was interested to learn what people are doing there in response to the Dundee fairness commission. There is a lot of commonality across our areas and Dundee is just across the river from Fife, but we do not necessarily get a chance to learn much about the detail of what even a neighbouring local authority is doing. If we can find better ways to learn together about what works for us, we will be able to accelerate the pace at which we address the challenge.

**Alison Johnstone:** How confident is the panel that the data that we have is robust and accurate enough? Are you confident that we are measuring child poverty accurately?

**Professor Russell:** Dr Hannah is better placed than I am to offer a view on that but, from a public health perspective, I think that we are measuring the right things. However, I am not sure that we are as sophisticated as we could and should be in our ability to understand the impact of some of the interventions that we can collectively offer.

In Tayside, we have embraced the integrated children's services plan with our local authority partners, the police and the voluntary sector in a way that will help us to define a different suite of measures against the background of our children's services provision, a subset of which will focus on poverty. I do not think that we are there yet, but

the focus that the bill will bring will give people an opportunity to describe the problem in a slightly different way.

**Peter Allan:** The more information that is available at local authority or individual data zone level, the better, especially if the Parliament wants us to be able to chart progress in local areas. There is a need to improve the Scottish index of multiple deprivation because, as terrific as it is—it is really helpful—the information on some of the factors in it tends to lag behind quite a bit. We use the SIMD so much that the better it is, the more influential it will be.

I firmly believe that it is not the data that is preventing us from doing something about child poverty. Everyone knows what the issue is and what the factors are, and everyone knows that we should be doing something about it. It would be tragic if we waited for a better statistic to come along and tell us what we should be doing. The issue is not a lack of data, although data helps us to measure progress.

**Dr Hannah:** Alison Johnstone asked about the accuracy of the data. The data that we have are pretty good—they have gone through an in-depth methodology. We are just using what was previously done with the UK Government's methodology. I can assure the committee on that. We are dealing with very big numbers, so the likelihood of variation is real rather than apparent.

I have welcomed the addressing of the issue in addition to SIMD. We have become almost habituated to SIMD, so our thinking is about clusters, with an area-based approach. What is proposed is a slightly different way of representing our challenge, which I think gives us a bit more ambition to make a difference to families' lives. Robert McGregor's point that we could use our local data to make an impact is important as well. It is not just about the target that is set; it is also about what we will do locally, using an intelligence-led approach, to address the challenge.

**Alison Johnstone:** May I ask—

**The Deputy Convener:** No. I am sorry, but we do not have time.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** It is lucky that my question follows on from Alison Johnstone's line of questioning—that has worked out for us.

I am a former councillor, and I have heard all the talk about sharing information and doing things together. I do not doubt that great work is happening on child poverty in the 32 authorities throughout Scotland, but there has always been a problem with the sharing of information. Dr Hannah said that, although she is across the water, you are all listening to each other. You are

all here today, after all. Does the bill give us an opportunity to focus on and create such dialogue? Does the targeting help with that?

10:15

**Dr Hannah:** Very much so. Annual reporting on the agenda will keep it alive, and we will have events and a lot of learning. I anticipate that that is how we will want to go forward.

**Professor Russell:** I absolutely agree with Mr Adam on the focus. An important part of this is that we develop a common understanding of what good looks like.

**George Adam:** Various issues keep coming up. Peter Allen talked about good faith and local authorities working with everyone else, and Robert McGregor spoke about joined-up thinking. We get bogged down in the SIMD figures, but the bill gives us an opportunity to broaden our scope. Is the point of the bill not exactly that—for us all to sit here and ask whether we can do other things? We already do the work, but can we find a way to get the thinking together and ensure that we put it through? It is a simple question, but is that not the main point of the bill?

**Dr Hannah:** That is right.

**Robert McGregor:** I agree. On partners, and on sharing information and working collaboratively, one of the challenges for us is how we bring the Department for Work and Pensions to the table.

**George Adam:** We definitely do not have time to discuss that. [*Laughter.*]

**Robert McGregor:** The DWP holds rich data, too. We have begun to establish a positive relationship with the DWP at the most local levels, but we still have difficulty with timeously accessing from it good, strong information that will help us with our planning.

**George Adam:** We had three academics at our meeting in Glasgow, who, in that lovely academic way—God bless them—fell out with each other very politely about whether we have the data. Being academics, they wanted to know exactly where all the data was, but they could not say. We all agree that the bill will be a step closer to a situation where the academics will be able to go off and study the data.

**Dr Hannah:** Yes, I think so.

**The Deputy Convener:** I have to confess that I sometimes struggle with one aspect of the bill. I do not want to underplay the need for unique data to work on, but we need to boil that down and ask ourselves what we would expect any Government to do. I think it was Peter Allen who asked whether we can agree on the major causes of poverty. I am not sure that there is agreement about that.

Perhaps more work needs to be done so that we have a broad consensus. As someone said, if we just spend the next 20 years looking at the data and recording poverty, we might not provide the boost that is needed.

Will each of you briefly tell me one or two measures that you think would make the biggest difference? If the bill was to contain a duty on the Government to implement specific measures, what should they be?

**Peter Allan:** I am not going to be terribly helpful. The thing that we need to focus on most is the stigma and how we change perceptions and how people are treated. I do not know how we could turn that into an indicator, but it is an enormous issue in the lives of people who are poor.

**Professor Russell:** I agree. It is critical that we address the associated poverty of opportunity in order to provide people with different life chances.

**Robert McGregor:** Mr Tomkins made an interesting and relevant point about educational attainment. A continued push on that would take us some way towards addressing child poverty in the longer term.

**Dr Hannah:** I am looking at the graph in annex A to the Scottish Parliament information centre briefing, which shows how relative poverty has levelled off. Is it potentially now getting worse again? There have been tax credit reforms and a lot of changes to welfare and so on, and the extent to which those can be reversed is a political issue.

The living wage is important. We want to make Fife a living wage region and Scotland a living wage country. Those are aspirations, but they are things that could be considered.

Increasing child benefit is a fairly obvious measure. One of the responses to the committee's consultation states that adding £5 a week to child benefit would lift 30,000 children a year out of poverty. Some simple things could be done involving fiscal and benefit measures.

The issue is not just poverty of aspiration; it is about people having lives that are worth living in the 21st century. What environment are our children going to live in? Can we create an environment in which children and young people are encouraged to aspire to something better in their lives regardless of their background? We have a good long tradition of that in Scotland. Many of us have come from working-class backgrounds and are where we are today as a result of education and encouragement. That message should still be there for our young people in future.

**The Deputy Convener:** That is an excellent note to end on. Thank you all for your evidence. I acknowledge, as you asked us to do in your

submissions, the wonderful work that local authorities do in relation not just to poverty but to fairness, which is also important.

I will suspend the meeting briefly to allow the panel to leave and a new panel to join us.

10:21

*Meeting suspended.*

10:23

*On resuming—*

**The Deputy Convener:** I warmly welcome Bill Scott, director of policy at Inclusion Scotland, who has been with us many times before, and Emma Trottier, policy manager at Engender, who has also been in front of the committee before. Thank you for coming. We are under the usual time pressures. We must finish by 11, but that gives us 40 minutes or so.

**Ruth Maguire:** My question is for Emma Trottier and is specifically about women and poverty. You mentioned that a gendered approach in the bill would be helpful. What is a gendered approach?

**Emma Trottier (Engender):** When we looked at the bill we thought that it was important that the gender dimension of poverty should be part of the considerations. What we mean by that is that it is not possible to separate a child's wellbeing from that of their mother. One in four children in Scotland is living in poverty. Cuts to social security, and the wider austerity agenda, will have significant ramifications for families and children, but especially for women. Eighty-six per cent of cuts to social security come from women's incomes. It is a significant sum.

We know that the biggest rise in inequality in the United Kingdom will come over the next decade. When we consider children, we should remember the people who care for them—the women who are mothers in those households—and how difficult their futures look right now. In Scotland, nine out of 10 lone parents are women, and 95 per cent of them support their children through social security programmes.

When we speak of a gendered approach to the bill, we are saying that we must remember the gender dimension of poverty.

**Ruth Maguire:** That is helpful.

**Adam Tomkins:** I have a follow-up question. In terms of the practical consideration of the bill, what amendments would you like to see to be confident that the gendered approach to poverty has been recognised? Does the bill have that approach already?

**Emma Trottier:** In our submission, we make the comment that many changes will hinge on what will be in the delivery plans. When looking at the actions to be taken, we must be sure that they consider gender.

For example, research evidence shows that significant change to alleviate poverty and help women involves significant and meaningful childcare reforms. Will the delivery plans for the policy areas to be considered look at childcare? Will they look at education and the gender stereotyping of boys and girls? Will they look at whether employment strategies are gendered, to close Scotland's gender pay gap?

**Adam Tomkins:** Do you think that there should be on the face of the bill a statutory requirement for the delivery plans to do that?

**Emma Trottier:** Do you mean a requirement for the plans to consider gender, or a requirement for them to consider all those policy areas?

**Adam Tomkins:** Either of the above—the options are open. I am genuinely interested in the extent to which you think that the bill already satisfies the stringent and perfectly reasonable criteria that you have set for it. If it does not meet those requirements, what amendments would you like to see the committee urge upon the Government to improve the bill?

You can come back to the committee in writing, if you want to take that back to the office.

**Emma Trottier:** Yes.

**Bill Scott (Inclusion Scotland):** The bill should include a requirement to address known societal inequalities of wealth between various equality groups, including women specifically. Disabled women are much more likely to be living in poverty than disabled men, again due to caring responsibilities, and family break-ups—many more disabled women than men are lone parents.

A gendered approach would assist disabled women, but an approach that addresses societal inequalities of race, gender, age and disability would see everybody pulled up. As our submission says, the problem is that we can improve things generally but leave certain groups behind; inequalities would grow for those groups because everybody else would do better. We would like to see something on the face of the bill to address the inequalities that are mainly identified in equality legislation.

**Adam Tomkins:** Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Convener:** I have a comment before we move on. The suggestion makes sense, and we have heard from the panel's organisations many times that those are the underlying issues that the Government needs to address in

addressing poverty. However, as I said to the previous panel, there is an issue that I sometimes struggle with and worry about. We will all be happy if we get a good statement on the face of the bill of where we want to go. However, it is worth considering specific measures that would make a difference to tackling poverty. As Emma Trottier said, nine out of 10 lone parents are women. That is a fact, but does that imply that we need to address the needs of lone parents specifically, to take them out of poverty?

10:30

**Emma Trottier:** We have to look at the issue more broadly. To go back to social security reforms, we have to ensure that we are maximising people's incomes, because we know that 95 per cent of lone parents are living with the assistance of social security. We have to look at supporting them through the provision of flexible, high-quality, affordable childcare. How do we use employment strategies, including measures on childcare, to support lone parents into employment where we can? It is not about looking at lone parents exclusively so much as looking at how we fit everybody into bigger policy areas.

**The Deputy Convener:** Would it make sense to place a duty in relation to income maximisation, given that it is so important, in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill, rather than social security legislation? You can come back to us on that. What I am really interested in is how we turn the targets into specific measures.

**Bill Scott:** That should be in the delivery plan; the delivery plan should say how you are going to achieve the targets. The problem with putting something in the bill is that that concentrates minds on the things that are in the bill. That then becomes everything that local authorities, the NHS, the Scottish Government and so on will address. If something is not in the bill, the groups who are not mentioned might find that there is no local or national activity to address the poverty that they experience. You face the problem of how to make sure that everybody is covered. Putting things in the delivery plan would be a better approach, as long as there is proper parliamentary scrutiny of the plan and its implementation.

**Alison Johnstone:** I read an Engender publication that suggested that, since 2010, of the £26 billion of welfare cuts, £22 billion had impacted on women. I find that staggeringly discriminatory. I do not know what sort of gender impact assessment has been carried out; it would seem that none has been carried out—it clearly does not matter. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that the projected increase in absolute child poverty is entirely explained by tax and

benefit changes such as the ones that we have already seen.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has called for the use of an after-essential-costs focus, rather than just an after-housing-costs focus. Last night, I sponsored an event in the Parliament that was about learning from abroad. One of the issues that we looked at was childcare. Two academics reported back on a study that showed that the cost of full-time childcare in Norway is £190 a month, compared with £920 a month in Scotland. One contributor spoke of childcare costs of more than £1,400 a month for two children. If we are not including costs that are higher than the average mortgage or rent, we are missing something. Will you talk about the need to include more than just housing costs? Should there be a provision in the bill that requires ministers to conduct annual checks to see how effectively the social security system is contributing to reaching our child poverty targets?

**Bill Scott:** We are very aware of the impact on women. Disabled women, especially those who are carers, have been doubly affected, because a lot of the cuts also fall on disabled people. For example, with the introduction of universal credit, 100,000 disabled children have seen the amount that their family is awarded in disabled child tax credits cut by 50 per cent, from £54 a week to £27 a week. When fewer resources are available, there is an impact not just on the child or the mother but on everyone in the family. That is why disabled children and the children of disabled parents are more likely to be living in poverty.

The issue is that some poverty seems to be invisible and is not addressed. For example, the higher rate of the disabled child addition has been raised in the current budget, but the lower rate has been frozen, which will affect people who have already experienced cuts. There has been no publicity about that whatsoever. It was not announced in advance of the budget and there has been no consultation with disabled people's organisations, yet the impact on families with disabled children will be quite profound because their benefit will not rise in line with living costs; it will be frozen.

This—and I include social security—is not all the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government. However, part of it is, and within what we have responsibility for there should certainly be a focus on addressing poverty. What else are the benefits for?

**Emma Trottier:** Alison Johnstone asked about people's income after housing costs. I think that the point was linked to the suggestion in some of the submissions that we should perhaps be looking at the essential costs for families. I agree that we should do that, given the cost of childcare

in Scotland and how difficult it is for families to afford to put their children into childcare, which has a downstream impact on women.

When I was reading the submissions, I was thinking about how we look at targets and household income. One thing that we should consider when we are thinking about women is that access to resources is a fundamental element of gender inequality. If we just look at household income, we miss the dynamics that happen inside the home. Access to resources is not equal. There are power imbalances in households in Scotland, so how do we account for those? It is a tough question but it is one that we need to ask.

**Bill Scott:** Unfortunately, because universal credit rolls up so many benefits into one, there is an increased likelihood that only one person in the household is in control of that income. That person is usually the male claimant rather than the woman with caring responsibilities in that household, which is why we have been very supportive of the idea that, within households, the payment should be split to ensure that at least some of the money reaches the person who is most likely to use it for the care of the child.

**Alison Johnstone:** Thank you.

**The Deputy Convener:** Emma Trottier mentioned the power balances within households. Obviously the bill focuses on income but you make a really important point about the need to look at what that actually means. How could the bill address that point?

**Emma Trottier:** I have looked at UK studies on poverty and women, and there is a study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Oxford University that says that it is really hard to understand women's poverty because of how we collect data, which is done by household. It recommends that we think about how Governments collect data. If we want to start making some big changes to household incomes, we have to think about the women and men who are in those households. The study suggests that Governments should capture and interrogate data that is disaggregated by gender and by race at the individual level, which is an approach that would complement the examination of household incomes as targets for poverty reduction.

**Ben Macpherson:** In your written submissions, you both comment on interim targets. Can you detail your thoughts on them and why you think that they are important?

**Bill Scott:** They are important because they concentrate minds. If a goal is way off into the future, the Government that is held to account for the attainment of that goal might be two or three times removed from the Government that set the goal. Unfortunately, because of that, not a lot

might happen in the meantime. However, if delivery plans are reported on regularly and interim targets are set to measure whether progress is being made towards the ultimate goal, it is much more likely that the minds of planners, officials, politicians at a local and national level and Government itself will be concentrated on what they are doing, how they are going about it and whether they are making the progress that is being demanded of them. Interim targets are a good idea because they set milestones against which progress can be measured.

**Gordon Lindhurst:** My question is for Bill Scott. I think that both panel members heard my question to the earlier panel, so I will not repeat it in full. Basically, it is the question of accountability. I take Bill Scott's point that if we were to start to list specific groups in a bill or an act of Parliament, other groups might not be covered, so it would be better to cover the detail in the delivery plan, the guidance, the policy notes or whatever form that detail takes. However, the question still arises as to how one holds the Government to account on the targets in the bill.

As I indicated to the earlier panel, Bill Scott's organisation, and at least one other organisation, commented that reports should not only be laid before the Scottish Parliament, but be scrutinised by the Parliament and require parliamentary approval. That would, as I understand from one of the earlier panel members' comments, bring in a national element of scrutiny on what is being done. Will you amplify that and indicate how the bill could be amended to take that on board?

**Bill Scott:** The bill could be amended quite easily to require parliamentary approval of the delivery plans, the progress reports—especially those on interim targets—and so on. With that approach, we would at least have scrutiny at a parliamentary level. Also, because the media covers what the Parliament does, there would more likely be scrutiny at a public level of what is happening, with people being held to account by the electorate on whether the targets have been achieved. Without that requirement, the bill lacks teeth.

I was interested to hear your quotation from the Law Society's submission and your point about an individual's rights. We think that those rights exist under the current legislation. For example, the right to an adequate income and so on is guaranteed—supposedly—by human rights legislation and should be justiciable. I think, however, that we would be of the same mind as the previous panel members and say that the bill is about setting a target for Scottish society to achieve over the longer term. We were not thinking about the issue from the perspective of an individual's rights, although human rights are

always part of our approach. It is an interesting thought, however, that the bill could create individual rights.

**Gordon Lindhurst:** Scrutiny can happen at different levels; it can also be through the courts. Bill Scott will be aware—as I am as a lawyer—that measures not included in an act of Parliament are potentially more difficult to enforce before the courts, or for individuals to make anything out of, if I can put it in colloquial terms. On that basis, would simply having parliamentary scrutiny be sufficient, if that were added into the bill?

**Bill Scott:** I am not sure that it would be this bill that we would rate that on. If the Scottish Government adopts the social and economic duties under international law that it said that it would, those duties might provide the correct vehicle for individuals to assert their rights to an adequate income and so on. If the Government adopts those duties, I imagine that it will do that through legislation. Perhaps members of the governing party can tell me.

10:45

**Gordon Lindhurst:** Emma Trottier, do you have any further comment on that?

**Emma Trottier:** No, Engender supports Inclusion Scotland's submission.

**Ben Macpherson:** I have a quick point for Emma Trottier and Engender. You made reference to childcare in some of your previous answers. There is a commitment from the Scottish Government to significantly increase the provision of free childcare, and there is a consultation taking place on the flexibility of that provision. What impact might the provision of free childcare have on the reduction of child poverty? Would it be advantageous?

**Emma Trottier:** It would have a significant impact on child poverty. We know that pathways into poverty are different for men and women. The risks for falling into poverty change over the course of women's lives, but there are certain moments in life when women face increased risk and one of those is motherhood. I point committee members to some interesting testimony that has been given to the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee, which is looking at the gender pay gap. Anna Ritchie Allan from Close the Gap and Emma Ritch from Engender appeared before the committee and spoke about what that risk looks like for women.

Childcare and investment in childcare will play a huge role in helping women and in alleviating poverty. There is a bigger conversation to be had about what we mean by flexible, affordable and high-quality childcare, but that might be for a

different committee meeting. Those are crucial elements of delivery plans that need to be talked about and considered.

**Ben Macpherson:** Thank you. It is a holistic issue so it is good to get that on the record.

**Adam Tomkins:** Building directly on what Ben Macpherson was talking about and in the context of what Emma Trottier said about delivery plans—Bill Scott has talked about it, too—the more I look at the bill, the more I realise how critical the delivery plans will be to the bill's success. However, at the moment, all that the bill says about delivery plans is that they should be produced at five-yearly intervals. I can see no statutory requirement in the bill—unless I have misread it—about what should or must be in the delivery plans.

I have two questions. One is about the frequency of the plans and the second is about the things that you would like to be added to the bill to impose requirements and obligations on the people writing the delivery plans with regard to what they have to include.

It has been suggested in oral evidence by a number of witnesses, including Children in Scotland and Citizens Advice Scotland, that delivery plans should be produced at three-yearly intervals, rather than five-yearly intervals, as proposed in the bill. Do you think that that is right? From the powerful and effective evidence that you gave this morning, do I take it that you would like there to be a statutory requirement for the delivery plan to include detail on, for example, the steps that are taken to reduce childcare costs?

**Bill Scott:** We agree with a three-yearly, rather than five-yearly interval, because that would fall within the lifetime of a Government, usually. That would be one step forward. We would also like statutory duties to be placed on local authorities and other community planning organisations about the eradication of child poverty at a local level. Specifically, we would like the issue of child poverty to be included in local outcome improvement plans and children's services plans, so that organisations do not just report on what they are doing, but develop plans to address the issue.

We would argue that the most important thing regarding the delivery plans is that the Government should speak to the people who are living in poverty. They know what it is, and often they could tell us how to get out of it, if we would only listen to them. There is a need to speak to lone parents, disabled people, parents of disabled children, black and minority ethnic groups and so on, because those people are more likely to be living in poverty. They know the stigma and discrimination that they face and they know some



of the things that need to be done to address the problem. In the bringing together of the delivery plans, whether nationally or locally, there should be a requirement to speak to those groups, and their ideas should be incorporated in the plans wherever possible. Otherwise, there will be high-level stuff going on that will not connect to the people who are most likely to face poverty.

I do not think that attainment should necessarily be in the bill, but I strongly agree with Adam Tomkins that it is a huge issue. Disabled children are twice as likely as non-disabled children to leave school with no qualifications, regardless of the type of impairment that they have. There are disabled children with sensory impairments and physical impairments but no intellectual impairment whatsoever who are leaving school with no qualifications. That makes their chances nil in the current job market. Unless we change that, we will not change their future, and when they become parents they will be parents living in poverty, and their children will be living in poverty, so we have to change the cycle. It is certainly possible to address the attainment gap without addressing the needs of disabled children, but it will be much more difficult if we do it that way. We need to concentrate minds: if we are going to have an attainment challenge, it must take into account the needs of those who have been most left behind.

No more than a month ago, I took part in a workshop with Educational Institute of Scotland representatives. I was in one of the six workshops that were going on. Five workshops said that the key issue that was facing teachers and union reps was the lack of support for additional support for learning in the classroom, and the cuts that had been made to the support that disabled children receive in the classroom. As a result, classrooms have been becoming more disruptive, because it is harder to deal with non-disabled children if teachers are devoting their time to ensuring that disabled children are being kept up to speed. Cuts have consequences. We definitely see the attainment gap as one of the key issues that need to be addressed over the longer term.

**The Deputy Convener:** That is a good note on which to end. I thank Inclusion Scotland and Engender for their on-going support of the committee and for their evidence today.

10:53

*Meeting continued in private until 11:12.*



This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

---

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

---

All documents are available on  
the Scottish Parliament website at:

[www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot)

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers  
is available here:

[www.parliament.scot/documents](http://www.parliament.scot/documents)

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact  
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: [sp.info@parliament.scot](mailto:sp.info@parliament.scot)

---



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba