



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP,
Cabinet Secretary for Social
Justice,
Scottish Government

Social Justice and Social Security Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Via email only

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14 September 2023

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Poverty and Inequality Commission: Reappointment of Members

Thank you for your letter of 14 September on the new round of public appointments to the Poverty and Inequality Commission. I note that in that letter you ask the Committee to advise on the level of scrutiny it wishes to adopt for this process.

However, before the Committee considers this, it would first like return to previous correspondence the Committee has received on the issue.

In your letter of 11 August, you noted that the Committee had written to the Commissioners proposed for reappointment on 6 July and was awaiting a response to these letters before considering the reappointments at its meeting on 7 September.

Further to this, you informed the Committee that the Chair and Commissioners recommended for reappointment had written to you to tender their resignations and that the appointment process would now have to be expanded as a result. You also noted that the Scottish Government would need to seek approval from the Ethical Standards Commissioner to make interim appointments to ensure the effective operation of the Commission until new Commissioners are in place.

Subsequently, the Committee received letters (18 August) from Commissioners Linda Bamford, Lindsay Graham and Shona Stephen, which outlined their reasons for resigning their appointments as Commissioners.

These letters mention the Commission's Sponsor Team:

"After several subsequent meetings with our Sponsor Team, and due to the professionally compromised and untenable situation we were put in, my fellow commissioners and I tendered our resignations to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice the 9th of August 2023."

Given the scrutiny the Committee has now been asked to undertake in the next phase of the Poverty and Inequality Commission's appointments process, it would like more information about the Sponsor Team and its interactions with the Commissioners. Specifically, we are interested in the support and advice provided to Commissioners by the Sponsor Team, whether Commissioners raised any issue with the Sponsor Team regarding the effectiveness and operation of the Poverty and Inequality Commission and whether the Sponsor Team themselves raised any concerns about the Poverty and Inequality Commission.

The Committee recognises the importance of the independent Commission's role in monitoring and commenting on the progress of Scottish Ministers in alleviating poverty and inequality in Scotland. It would be helpful if your response could highlight whether, following the recent situation, any issues have arisen that require to be addressed in relation to the 2020 [Framework Document between the Scottish Government and the Poverty and Inequality Commission](#), which underpins the governance arrangements in place, or which might lead to a revised framework document.

It is vital that the Commission is able to carry out its important work effectively. The Committee, therefore, also seeks assurance from you that any issues are identified and a clear plan is in place to resolve them, ahead of any interim or new appointments being made.

Due to the importance of this matter, the Committee requests your response by **Wednesday 20 September 2023**. After this point the Committee will be able to advise the level of scrutiny it wishes to adopt for the new round of public appointments.

Yours sincerely,

Collette Stevenson MSP
Convener
Social Justice and Social Security Committee