

Minutes of Meeting

CPG Joint Session with CPG Poverty & CPG Disability

29 January 2025, 1pm-2:30pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Paul O’Kane MSP
Jeremy Balfour MSP
Maggie Chapman MSP
Kaukab Stewart MSP
Collette Stevenson MSP
Beatrice Wishart MSP

Invited guests

Karen Wylie, Glasgow Disability Alliance
John McArdle, Black Triangle Campaign
Bill Scott, Disabled People Against the Cuts member

Non-MSP Group Members Heather
Smith

Online

Allan Faulds
Amanda Gordon
Andrea Ma
Alyson Laird
Andela Wheeler
Anne Baldock
Anne Macleod
Bronwen Thomas
Caroline Gould
Cassy Rutherford
Chirsty McFadyen
Colette McDiarmid
Craig Dutton
Derek Kelter
Donna Tomlin
Douglas Ross
Ellie Clark
Fiona Souter

Hugh Foy. Janey
Haug, Judith
Mabelis Kate
Robinson Kate
Thompson
Kimberley Wong
Laura Robertson
Lauren Wilks Liisa
Lehtinen Lynn
Pornaro Marianne
Scobie Mark
Gaffney
Maureen McAllister
Megan O’Hara-Knight
Michael Harrison Kenny
Morton Nicoletta Primo
Paul Spicker Peter
Kelly

Ralph Hartley
Rebecca Curran-
Scarlett
Rianna Price Rory
Hannon Rosyl
Neely Selma
Augestad Sharon
Stevelink Mandy
Sheridan Julia
Shillitto Stephen
Sinclair Tony
Slaven Sophie
Rooney Susan
McKellar Susan
Robertson Terry
Robinson Traci
Kirkland
Victoria Buchanan

In-person

Catherine Purves
Chris Ringland
David Stewart
Erica Young
Frances Harvey
Iain Fraser
Jack Bradford
Jodie Sutherland
Kate Cunningham

Katy Baillie
Kimberley Swan
Maggie Killin
Maria Marshall
Maureen Nisbet
Moirra Vaughan
Paul Fisher Cockburn
Penny Hendrick
Richard Lister

Ruth Boyle
Salena Begley MBE
Sarah Reilly
Stanley Flett
Stephanie Mander
Susana McIntyre
Tara Lillis

Apologies

Angela Moohan
Ben Macpherson MSP
Jenny Miller
Keith Robson
Lisa O'Leary
Maggie Ellis

Maureen Nisbet
Michael Driscoll
Mike Corbett
Miles Briggs MSP
Monica Lennon MSP
Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP

Agenda item 1: Welcome and introduction

Peter Kelly (PK), Chief Executive, The Poverty Alliance

PK welcomed everyone to this joint meeting of the CPG on Poverty and Disability, highlighting the connections between disability and poverty and reason for this meeting.

Agenda item 2: The current picture for disabled people in Scotland

Karen Wylie (KW), Policy and Participation Manager at the Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA) gave an overview of the current picture for disabled people. KW detailed the 'desperate' situation for disabled people and the breadth of the impact of cuts. These impacts have been consistently highlighted in work by GDA, Scope and was visible in the most recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Poverty in Scotland and Poverty in the UK reports.

KW highlighted work completed as part of a GDA engagement exercise which found that disabled people are feeling de-prioritised and de-humanised. GDA survey highlights disabled people are still experiencing worsening poverty. Alongside the quantitative findings, KW outlined some of the qualitative comments within this, including people struggling with heating their homes, accessing mental health support, and accessing social care to meet their needs. Full details of the survey can be accessed here: <https://gda.scot/resources/disabled-people-challenge-poverty-survey-findings/>

Agenda item 3: The attack on disabled people's human rights

John McArdle (JMcA), shared his experiences of work on the Black Triangle Campaign. JMcA explains the campaign has documented hundreds of deaths of people who had been let down by not receiving the support they required. Notes the Black Triangle Campaign, alongside Disabled People Against Cuts and other disability organisations were instrumental in having the UK investigated as being in breach of Rights of People with Disabilities legislation.

JMcA details a book by John Pring, '*The Department: How a Violent Government Bureaucracy Killed Hundreds and Hid the Evidence*' and that activists crowdfunded enough money to send the book to every member of the UK Parliament.

JMcA describes that he gave evidence to the judicial review, alongside Ellen Clifford, which has declared that the consultation relating to disability benefit was unlawful on grounds it was unfair and didn't give disabled people enough time to contribute. The judge found it was fundamentally dishonest.

JMcA details the position of the Black Triangle Campaign at present and the intention to take the current UK Government to court over breaching disabled people's fundamental human rights. He stated that it has been 'crushing' to have campaigned tirelessly only for the situation to have got worse. He describes the effect of proposed cuts to disability-related social security being "lethal" - a matter of life and death.

JMcA shared the news that he lost his mother two days previously and was here to speak in her honour. He finished his remarks calling for the need for organisations and campaigners to unite to campaign against these policies which are "fundamentally wrong".

Agenda item: DWP policies and disabled people

PK outlined that Ellen Clifford was unable to join us today due to ongoing judicial review work. However, Bill Scott (BS), Disabled People Against the Cuts member, a long-time anti-poverty campaigner and policy consultant had very kindly agreed to step in and provide an update on this work.

BS started his contribution drew attention to Ellen Clifford's portfolio of work in advocating for disabled people, most recently in the judicial review as mentioned by previous speakers. BS also noted that JMcA's mother would have been extremely proud of his contribution.

BS reiterated points made by JMcA regarding the consultation and how it was found to be misleading and dishonest. He also reiterates the difficulties faced in completing the consultation for disabled people, specifically that it had to be completed in its entirety in one sitting due to the format of the consultation. This consultation response took BS multiple hours, and he is used to working on consultations through

his work. He noted the failure of the UK Government to undertake equality impact assessment processes prior to cuts being proposed and enacted.

BS discussed where we stand currently including with regards to cuts to disability payments and who will be affected. It has been extremely concerning to disabled people and disabled people's organisations that the UK Government have re-committed to the £3bn worth of cuts to disability benefit proposed by the last Government. This intention has been reiterated by the Chancellor and Prime Minister in recent months.

BO outlined challenges for the Scottish Government where potential changes to work capability assessments and PIP could come into place, as this will impact ADP claimants. If entitlement to PIP becomes the gateway/passport to the health related component of Universal Credit then if Scottish Government does not change the entitlement criteria for ADP it will not only face unfunded additional costs.

Under the Fiscal Framework it would also be liable for the costs to the DWP of the additional sick and disabled people who qualify for the health related component of Universal Credit. A double financial whammy when Scottish Government finances are already under severe strain.

BS reiterates need to mobilise and work collaboratively to reject proposals which come forward during the Health and Disability Benefits process.

Agenda item 5: Q&A and discussion

PK thanked the speakers for their contributions and for powerful testimony that those presentations included. PK notes that we have spent so long trying to find cuts to an already inadequate system, and we need to think about how we look forward for dignity and decency for disabled people. PK opened the floor for questions and discussion.

Question regarding the implementation of self-directed support and when is that going to change – including eligibility and making it fairer. Jeremy Balfour (JB) MSP states that the conclusion parliamentary Committees have come to is that the legislation is good, however implementation is the problem. A reason given is that those being asked to deliver are not doing so the way the legislation details. Attendee responded that they agreed with this analysis. Experience in local authority is there is a disconnect between what Government is asking for and what Local Authorities are being asked to deliver. Local Authorities are making cuts, and cutting self-directed support budgets.

PK refers back to contributions of speakers and asks if anyone has any comments regarding tackling stigma and discrimination faced by people. JMcA responded, discussing recent experience of hearing disabled people being called “parasites” by a popular media commentator. While JMcA and BS used Scottish hate crime legislation to report this comment, it was not taken seriously. Issue of hate speech leads to disability hate crime, and further dehumanises disabled people.

PK invites Professor Paul Spicker to speak around points made in the online meeting chat around DWP consultation objectives of social care and objectives of disability benefits – they are distinct and serve a different population. *“There's a central confusion in the UK government's consultation between social care and the purposes of the benefits system, which include support for ill health or long-term sickness. Three quarters of people with a disability or long term illness don't think of themselves as disabled. Only about one in six people receiving disability benefits, when last I looked, also receive help with social care. If the distinction is not made, support for one category will be used as the reason to withdraw support in others.”*

Questions from David Stewart, FEDCap Scotland relating to the reports that the disability employment gap is decreasing and problems that GDA and other Disabled People's Organisations are having with funding for their own staff teams and critical work. David Stewart noted that he felt we need to be careful regarding true context of success on headline data, with regards to disabled people perhaps being put into different employment categories. BS responded that UK Parliament has investigated disability employment gap, about half the reduction people already in employment disclosing impairment they have had (for example dyslexia, dyspraxia, mental health issues). Gap has not reduced as greatly as seems. More investment in mental health services required. BS finished his response with a clear message that giving people hope is necessary.

Agenda item 6: Scottish Government remarks

Kaukab Stewart (KS) MSP, the Minister for Equalities in the Scottish Government thanked speakers for their contributions. KS recognised the difficulty in sharing experiences but noted that she appreciated hearing those experiences. Politics can often be about numbers, but we must remember it is about people. KS reiterates the Scottish Government's 'deep commitment' to improving the lives of disabled people and noted the First Minister's national mission of eradicating child poverty.

KS ran through policy change enacted by the Scottish Government, including Free School Meals, the reopening of the Independent Living Fund, and the Scottish Child Payment. KS stated that the Scottish Government are spending £6.9bn on social security, £1.3bn more than allocated to Scottish Government for social security spend. The Minister noted that the priority family approach in the Child Poverty Delivery Plan includes a focus on families with a disabled adult or child. This has been a priority for the Scottish Government.

Agenda item 7: Closing remarks

Paul O'Kane (PO) MSP, Convener of the CPG on Poverty provided some closing remarks. PO states that meetings like today are a good way to show the strength of CPGs and are good way to hear about the challenges and what the solutions should be. PO listened to, and was moved by, testimonies given across the course of the meeting. Noted that a valid challenge for all spheres of governments relates to overcoming the fact people feel that they are not listened to, have been left behind, and are not valued within public life.

PO recognised issues regarding the previous consultation discussed over the course of this meeting, and seeks to ensure that this is not replicated in the next consultation on the UK Government's Green Paper. PO will feed in views from today, alongside testimony from constituents, into conversations with UK Government counterparts. Beyond that consultation, PO noted opportunities in review of Universal Credit and changes to Job Centre Plus.

PO also highlighted some issues which exist within the Scottish context, including self-directed support, residential care charging, and social care charging.

PO completed his remarks by saying that the CPG on Poverty will consider these issues and how we can take these forward through the group.

Agenda item 8: Closing remarks

Jeremy Balfour (JB) MSP, Convener of the CPG on Disability noted that politicians need to hear what people are saying. There is an opportunity for Disabled People's Organisations and other campaigners for people to be getting their policy ideas into manifestos.

JB stated that the critical point is that we need both of our governments to work together. It is positive that Scottish Ministers are saying there is better relationships with the UK Government. However, positive mood music doesn't put money in people's pockets. How do we move to a period of action on these issues? On this, JB noted there will be a conference in Parliament on the 10th of March looking at what social security would look like in 10 years time.

While recognising that it would not be a silver bullet for all of the issues we heard today, JB expressed his disappointment that Scottish Government are not supporting his proposed Disability Commissioner Bill. The testimony today shows that there is a need for someone to advocate for disabled people – while disabled people make up 20% of population, their voice is much smaller. This may be a reflection of the fact it is often so challenging for disabled people to get out of bed in the morning, that those tasks take so much energy, that it is difficult to move beyond that and into campaigning.

Poses the question which could be asked before the next election - what in the last five years has this parliament done to solve some of the disability issues? JB said he thinks that question would be very difficult to answer at present.