

Cross Party Group on Social Science

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2017
Scottish Parliament, Room TG.20-21

Attendance

Present:

- Jackie Baillie MSP (JB)
- Graham Simpson MSP (GS)
- Andy Wightman MSP (Chair) (AW)
- Fiona Barlow, Communications & Impact Officer, AQMeN (FB)
- Nick Bibby, Board Member, Campaign for Social Science (Secretary) (NB)
- Prof Glen Bramley, Professor of Urban Studies, Heriot Watt University (GB)
- Prof Kenneth Gibb, Professor of Housing Economics, University of Glasgow (KG)
- Fraser Gilmore, Engagement & Development Manager, Housing Options Scotland (FG)
- Emily Gray, Managing Director, Ipsos MORI Scotland (EG)
- Nohad El Hajj, MSc student, University of Edinburgh (NEH)
- Anna Marcinkiewicz, Researcher (Social Attitudes), ScotCen (AM)
- Ciaran McDonald, Researcher, Scottish Parliament (CM)
- Des McNulty, Deputy Director of Policy Scotland, University of Glasgow (DM)
- Courtney Peyton, Senior Consultant (Energy and Sustainability), Changeworks (CP)
- Dr Madhu Satsangi, Snr Lecturer (Housing Studies), University of Stirling (MS)

1.0 Introductions

Those present introduced themselves and their organisations or projects.

2.0 Minutes of Previous Meetings

The minutes of the meetings of 28 February 2017 and 27 June 2017 were agreed without amendment.

3.0 Presentations & Discussion

3.1 Prof Glen Bramley

The political and policy climates for addressing poverty and housing pressure are better in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. Prof Bramley welcomed recent legislation reintroducing child poverty targets in Scotland, however, he said that definitions of poverty that exclude housing costs are problematic. Fuel poverty can be seen as a 'sub-set' of housing poverty and, in this context, demonstrates the problems with post-housing cost definitions. Prof Bramley has recently been invited to join a panel addressing fuel poverty, which is likely to recommend a minimum-income standard – drawing upon work done previously by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

This raises the question of why governments do not produce projections around homelessness. GB currently working on a complex needs assessment but this is at a UK level and the data set is different for Scotland. Improved linkages between datasets is increasingly being addressed by the funding councils however, the bulk of research is funded by charities.

3.2 Prof Ken Gibb

Policy errors, such as the bedroom tax, have coincided with a reduction in analytical capacity in government. This is especially true in Whitehall but has also happened to a lesser extent in Scotland.

There is a shortage of available evidence across policy areas but this is particularly true in housing. In response, and over three or four years, the idea of CaCHE emerged and that has now been supported by the ESRC. The aim is to use rigorous evidence to inform policy at all levels in the UK.

CaCHE is explicitly interdisciplinary and methodologically pluralist. It involves territorial 'KE hubs' and will use a Tobin process generated by those hubs. It will not hold or create data but will help people navigate the existing data.

4 Questions and Discussion

- 4.1 DM: CaCHE will be based at the University of Glasgow's Olympia Building, which houses its social research activity.

Graham Simpson MSP joined the meeting

- 4.2 AW: MSPs have big questions to ask around questions such as affordability & others that involve this policy area. How can CaCHE feed into frontline politics and policymaking?

KG: Explained that CaCHE is working on ways of engaging with policy, however issues such as affordability are incredibly hard to define.

MS: Mentioned that a discussion from the Resolution Foundation today suggested that today's inequalities are going to be magnified.

EG: Stressed the importance of taking an intergenerational view – cf Generation X and Millennials and the likelihood of them living at home at the age of 27. She also highlighted that there is some robust work taking place around the changing demographics of housing occupancy.

- 4.3 JB: How proactive will CaCHE be in prompting policymakers and 'pushing' policy ideas?

KG: Will be a balance between the two but will aim to provide a balanced perspective.

- 4.4 GS: Flagged up the Local Government Committee's inquiry into homelessness.

KG: CaCHE would be able to feed into that.

GB: There is existing research conducted with Crisis, which is available at the moment.

DM: Stressed the importance of housing policy joining up with other areas such as infrastructure building.

4.5 AW: Raised the issue of protecting tenancies in the case of, especially, vulnerable tenants. What options are there for bespoke solutions 'in a system that's flawed'?

GB: *Housing Solutions* was an attempt in the mid-2000s but it's unclear where the budget is now (it's fallen by 60% in England) now the option of 'housing first' is being mooted.

JB: Raised the issue of whether 'housing first' works or whether support needs to be in place first.

KG + GB: Stressed the need to focus on outcomes rather than process.

4.6 DM: Wondered whether housing associations act as 'triaging agents' directing people to other agencies.

GB: The issue of personal debt is likely to become more significant as universal Credit is rolled out.

4.7 AW thanked both speakers and others for their questions.

5 New Members

It was agreed without objection that Kezia Dugdale MSP should join the group, similarly Mark Duffley as an individual members and AQuMeN as an institutional member.

6 Social Science Parliamentary Reception

Members were reminded that the reception would be held in the Somerville Room on 8 November and would form part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science.

7 Future Meetings

The next two meetings will be held on 13 December 2017 and 7 March 2018.

8 AOCB

None.