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## **Social Justice and Social Security Committee**

# **Annual Report of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee 2024 - 2025**



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# Contents

<b>Infographic Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Meetings</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Legislation</b>	<b>4</b>
Bills	4
Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill	4
Housing (Scotland) Bill	4
Subordinate legislation	5
<b>Inquiries/case studies</b>	<b>6</b>
Case study 1 - Reducing drug deaths in Scotland and tackling drug harms	6
Case study 2 - Lived experience engagement for inquiry into financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship	6
Pre-budget scrutiny	7
Thematic evidence sessions	7
Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)	7
Pensioner Poverty	7
Scottish Child Payment	8
Scottish Fiscal Commission	8
Social Security Scotland	9
<b>Equal opportunities</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Post-legislative scrutiny</b>	<b>11</b>
Post-legislative scrutiny of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017	11
<b>Visit</b>	<b>12</b>

# Social Justice and Social Security Committee

To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice excluding matters relating to housing and tenants' rights.



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# Committee Membership



**Convener**  
**Collette Stevenson**  
Scottish National Party



**Deputy Convener**  
**Bob Doris**  
Scottish National Party



**Jeremy Balfour**  
Scottish Conservative  
and Unionist Party



**Mark Griffin**  
Scottish Labour



**Gordon MacDonald**  
Scottish National Party



**Marie McNair**  
Scottish National Party



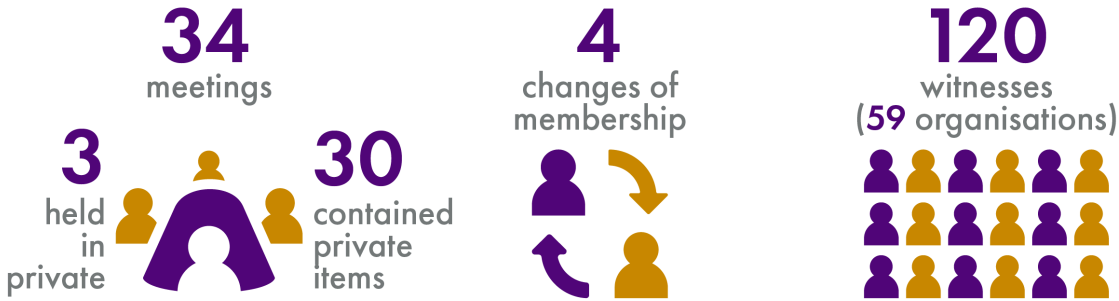
**Paul O'Kane**  
Scottish Labour



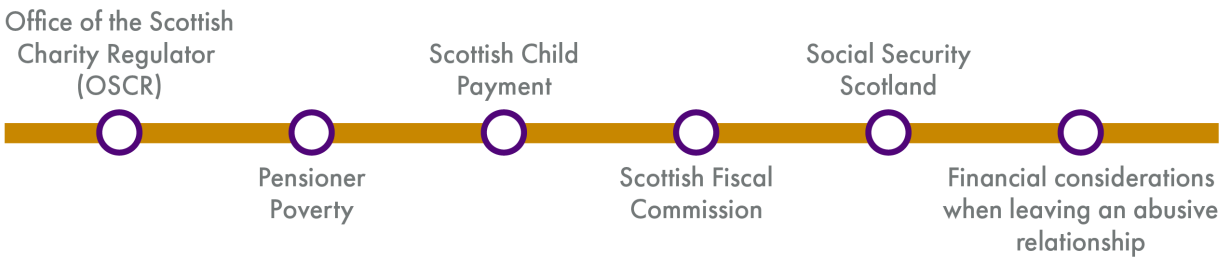
**Liz Smith**  
Scottish Conservative  
and Unionist Party

# Infographic Summary

## Committee Meetings and Engagement



## Evidence Sessions

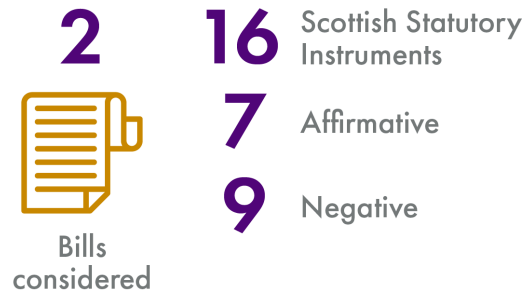


## Inquiries

Post-legislative scrutiny of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017



## Legislation



Source: Scottish Parliament

# Introduction

1. This report outlines the work of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee ("the Committee") during the Parliamentary year from 13 May 2024 to 12 May 2025.
2. The Committee looks at subjects such as:
  - the Scottish Government's policies on welfare, poverty and homelessness
  - the social security system in Scotland
  - violence against women and girls and domestic violence
  - refugees and asylum
  - social justice (looking at ways to create a fairer Scotland)
  - the third sector including social economy and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).
3. There were several changes to the Committee's membership during the Parliamentary year:
  - On 18 June 2024, Kevin Stewart replaced John Mason as a member of the Committee.
  - On 10 October 2024, Liz Smith replaced Roz McCall as a member of the Committee.
  - On 13 November 2024, Gordon MacDonald replaced Kevin Stewart as a member of the Committee.
  - On 15 January 2025, Mark Griffin replaced Katy Clark as a member of the Committee.

# Meetings

4. The Committee held 34 meetings over this period. One meeting was held entirely in public and three meetings were held entirely in private. There were 30 meetings where some items were taken in private. The reasons for taking business in private were to consider the Committee's work programme, draft reports or letters, or to consider the evidence heard earlier, in public, during the same committee meeting.
5. The Committee also held a joint meeting with the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and the Criminal Justice Committee on 14 November 2024, and a joint meeting with the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee on 20 February 2025. Both joint meetings were held partly in private (to review evidence heard, in public, earlier in the meeting).
6. The Committee heard from 120 witnesses. These witnesses represented 59 different organisations.

# Legislation

7. The Committee has considered two Bills and 16 items of subordinate legislation during this reporting year.

## Bills

### Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

8. The Committee published its [Stage 1 report](#) on the [Social Security \(Amendment\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#) on 14 May 2024. The Committee supported the general principles of the Bill.
9. The Bill was introduced on 31 October 2023. Its purpose was to amend the framework legislation for Scottish social security established by the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018. The 2018 Act sets out the over-arching principles, the types of benefits that can be created and much of the administrative detail.
10. The Committee completed Stage 2 consideration of the Bill on 26 September 2024.
11. Stage 3 proceedings took place on 3 December 2024 and the Bill became law on 23 January 2025.

### Housing (Scotland) Bill

12. The [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill](#) was introduced on 26 March 2024. The Bill makes changes covering protections for tenants, preventing homelessness, and other housing matters.
13. The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee was designated as the lead committee for Stage 1 consideration of the Bill, with the Social Justice and Social Security Committee designated as a secondary committee. The Committee considered Part 5 and sections 48-50 in Part 6 of the Bill.
  - Part 5 makes provision about homelessness prevention including duties of relevant bodies and assessment of housing support services and tenants affected by domestic abuse.
  - Part 6 makes provision about other housing matters including mobile homes, fuel poverty and disclosure of information to the new homes ombudsman. The Committee scrutinised the social justice aspects of the provisions related to fuel poverty.
14. A joint consultation on the Bill ran from 19 April to 17 May 2024. The Committee took evidence on the Bill in June and September 2024.
15. The Committee completed Stage 2 consideration of Part 5 and sections 48-50 in Part 6 of the Bill on 24 April 2025. The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee is considering the remainder of the Stage 2 amendments.

## **Subordinate legislation**

16. Consideration of regulations forms an important part of the Committee's work. The Committee considered 16 Scottish Statutory Instruments during this reporting year (seven affirmative, nine negative).

## Inquiries/case studies

### Case study 1 - Reducing drug deaths in Scotland and tackling drug harms

17. As part of a joined-up approach to [tackle drug harm](#), the Criminal Justice, Health, Social Care and Sport, and Social Justice and Social Security Committees have met jointly since February 2022, to consider the efforts being made to reduce drug deaths. This approach reflects the need to consider aspects of the criminal justice system, as well as health policies and wider social and economic matters such as poverty, unemployment, unstable housing, and family breakdown.
18. Members of the three committees commissioned a People's Panel to consider the question 'What does Scotland need to do differently to reduce drug related harms?'
19. The Convener of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Collette Stevenson MSP, attended one of the Panel's meetings to explain the purpose of the cross-committee work on tackling drug deaths and drug harm and how the Panel's recommendations could inform that work.
20. The Panel members met in October and November 2024 and published their findings on 21 January 2025. Some of the Panel members gave evidence at a joint meeting of the committees on 20 February 2025. The Scottish Government agreed or agreed in principle all of the People's Panel's recommendations.
21. On 6 March 2025, there was a joint committee debate in the Chamber on the People's Panel report. Members expressed support for the Panel's work and welcomed the opportunity to debate its findings.
22. This demonstrated the value of commissioning a People's Panel to consider an issue which touches the lives of people throughout Scotland.
23. Some Members visited the safer drug consumption facility in Glasgow, The Thistle, prior to its opening to hear about how it was to operate and what it hoped to achieve.

### Case study 2 - Lived experience engagement for inquiry into financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship

24. The Committee's work on its [inquiry](#) into financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship began in December 2024 and is ongoing. The Committee expects to publish the report on its findings in June 2025.
25. As part of its inquiry, the Committee met with members of Scottish Women's Aid's Survivor Reference Group (SRG) on 26 March 2025. This meeting was an opportunity for Members of the Committee to discuss the call for views on the

inquiry with the SRG, and to consider the specific questions participants thought were most significant. Key themes from this discussion were [published](#) and will help inform the Committee's findings.

## Pre-budget scrutiny

26. For the Committee's [pre-budget scrutiny 2025-26](#), members focussed on third sector funding principles and how the Scottish Government's approach to fair and efficient funding can contribute to the continued effectiveness of the third sector.
27. The Committee asked the Scottish Government to ensure three-year funding as the default for the third sector and to consider adopting a more flexible, unrestricted core funding model.
28. In its [response](#) to the Committee's [report](#), the Scottish Government confirmed that it was to increase the number of multi-year funding agreements to the third sector in the coming financial year, as part of a 2-year funding pilot.

## Thematic evidence sessions

### Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)

29. The Committee [took evidence](#) from representatives from the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) on 6 June 2024. As the independent regulator and registrar for Scottish charities, OSCR oversees the compliance and governance of charitable organisations in Scotland.
30. The evidence session examined OSCR's operational framework, funding, staffing, and corporate governance, detailing the organisation's efforts to regulate and support over 25,000 registered charities in Scotland.
31. It also covered the amendments made through the Charities (Administration and Regulation) Scotland Act 2023 introduced during the legislative process aimed at refining charity regulation and compliance mechanisms. Key themes included the introduction of a review and appeal process for disputes, the treatment of income from endowments, and the clarification of charity constitutions.
32. The evidence session also considered OSCR's strategic priorities for 2024-2026, focusing on public access to information, regulatory compliance, and the provision of guidance and support to charities, as well as reviewing OSCR's performance, addressing any concerns, and ensuring that the regulatory framework continues to support the charity sector's resilience and positive impact on society.

### Pensioner Poverty

33. At its meeting on [9 January 2025](#), the Committee agreed to hold a roundtable evidence session on the causes of pensioner poverty and the actions required to be

taken to mitigate or overcome these issues.

34. The Committee held a roundtable evidence session on [6 February 2025](#). The session covered pension age income trends, cost of living issues, issues for different groups, demographic change and working age policies.
35. Following consideration of the evidence, the Committee agreed to schedule an evidence session on the impact of digital exclusion on poverty levels amongst pensioners, the reasons for this, and how they might be addressed. The session took place on [13 March 2025](#).
36. At its meeting on [8 May 2025](#), the Committee discussed what further action it could take. Members agreed to recommend in its Session 6 legacy report the scrutiny of the refreshed Scottish Government digital strategy and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) digital action plan.

## Scottish Child Payment

37. The Committee undertook a mini inquiry into the effectiveness of the Scottish Child Payment in March-May 2024.
38. A call for views was issued on 28 March and closed on 6 May and oral evidence sessions were held on 23 and 30 May. The first panel focussed on the perspective of academics while the second panel was made up of stakeholders.
39. To follow up the evidence Members heard, the Committee wrote to the Cabinet Secretary on [27 June 2024](#).
40. The letter covered the key themes arising throughout the inquiry, and covered qualitative and administrative data as well as modelling for the Scottish Child Payment. It also asked the Scottish Government for more information on how it uses data to inform policy for the payment, and whether it was confident that the effect of full implementation would be evident in the following year's statistics on child poverty.
41. A response was received from the Cabinet Secretary on [22 July 2024](#).

## Scottish Fiscal Commission

42. The Committee held an evidence session with representatives of the Scottish Fiscal Commission on [19 December 2024](#).
43. The Committee considered the Scottish Fiscal Commission's [latest forecasts for social security spending up to 2029-30](#). The evidence session informed the Committee's 2025-26 pre-budget scrutiny work.

## **Social Security Scotland**

44. Social Security Scotland plays a crucial role in administering devolved benefits in Scotland, with a mandate to uphold principles of dignity, fairness and respect as outlined in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018.
45. The Committee held an evidence session with Social Security Scotland on [16 January 2025](#) on its performance and operation.

## Equal opportunities

46. The work of the Committee is rooted in equalities. Through its work the Committee looks to hear from those living in less favourable social and economic circumstances than others in the same society, as well as those who represent them.
47. For example, as part of its post-legislative scrutiny of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, the Committee heard from the Poverty Alliance, the End Child Poverty Coalition and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
48. For its pre-budget scrutiny, focusing on the funding challenges faced by the third sector, the Committee heard from a range of representative organisations including the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, Community Woodland Association, Development Trusts Association Scotland, Place2Be, Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, The Poverty Alliance and Youthlink.

# Post-legislative scrutiny

## Post-legislative scrutiny of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017

49. The Committee agreed on [28 September 2023](#) to undertake post-legislative scrutiny of the [Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Act 2017](#). The Act was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 8 November 2017.
50. This parliamentary session, the Committee scrutinised two key areas of the current policy approach to eradicate child poverty. These were the impact of the Scottish Child Payment and efforts to increase earnings from parental employment.
51. During 2024-25, the Committee's [post-legislative scrutiny](#) of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 added to that work by considering the impact of having a legislative framework underpinning policies and consideration of whether there would be different policies and less of a focus on child poverty without a statutory approach.
52. The Committee launched [a call for views](#) which ran from 10 July to 13 September 2024. The Committee received 35 submissions and eight additional written submissions were received after the call for views closed.
53. The Committee agreed its approach to oral evidence taking at its meetings of [3 October](#) and [10 October 2024](#).
54. In October 2024, the Committee sent [a survey](#) to all local authorities in Scotland. The survey aimed to gather further information on the extent of local variation on child poverty policies and governance structures at a senior level. There were nine responses received.
55. The Committee took oral evidence at its meetings of [21](#) and [28 November 2024](#). The Committee heard evidence about the impact of the Act on local policy and delivery and whether the Act has met expectations. The Committee took oral evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Shirley-Anne Somerville, on [5 December 2024](#).
56. The Committee published its report on [31 January 2025](#).
57. The Scottish Government responded to the Committee's report on [3 March 2025](#).

## Visit

58. As part of the Committee's inquiry into financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship, some Members visited Financially Included on 25 April 2025.
59. Financially Included are a partnership project between GEMAP (Greater Easterhouse Money Advice Project) and the Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership. It is funded via the Scottish Government's Delivering Equally Safe fund and administered by Inspiring Scotland.

### Committee Members during the visit to Financially Included - April 2025



Source: Scottish Parliament

60. The staff at Financially Included explained the work they do to support people who experience economic and financial abuse, and the economic impact of gender-based violence. They provided practical examples of the short and long-term impacts of financial abuse and identified some key areas where improvements could be made to support people who are victims of economic abuse.

