



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Social Security Committee

**Thursday 27 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 27 April 2017**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Col.</b>
<b>INTERESTS</b> .....	1
<b>DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE</b> .....	2
<b>CHILD POVERTY (SCOTLAND) BILL: STAGE 1</b> .....	3

---

**SOCIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE**

**9<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:**

Angela Constance (Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities)

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab) (Committee Substitute)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Simon Watkins

**LOCATION**

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)



## Scottish Parliament Social Security Committee

*Thursday 27 April 2017*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:35]*

### Interests

**The Convener (Sandra White):** Welcome to the Social Security Committee's ninth meeting in 2017. Good morning, cabinet secretary; I hope that you are not too out of breath from your arrival. I remind everyone to turn mobile phones and other devices off or to silent mode, so that they do not disrupt the meeting.

Apologies have been received from Mark Griffin. I welcome Richard Leonard to his first meeting of the committee and invite him to declare any relevant interests.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Thank you, convener. I have no relevant interests to declare.

## Decision on Taking Business in Private

09:36

**The Convener:** Agenda item 2 is a decision on taking business in private. Item 6 is consideration of our approach to our timetable for the social security bill and our work programme. Does the committee agree to take that item in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

09:36

**The Convener:** Item 3 is the last of the committee's formal evidence sessions on the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill. I welcome Angela Constance, Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, and her team of officials, who are Gillian Cross, bill team leader, and Paul Tyrer, head of social justice strategy. I invite the cabinet secretary to make an opening statement.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** Thank you, convener, and good morning to committee members. I am grateful to you for inviting me to give evidence as part of your scrutiny of the bill.

I thank all who have given their time and expertise during the bill's development, which has helped us to get to this point. I hope to assure committee members that the bill will provide the robust framework that we need for monitoring, measuring and reporting on child poverty, with four ambitious income targets at the heart of the bill.

We are all aware that the 2015-16 poverty statistics that were published in March showed that child poverty rates in Scotland have increased and that 26 per cent of children were living in relative poverty after housing costs. I know that members will agree that those numbers are absolutely unacceptable. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has projected that child poverty at a United Kingdom level will increase further in the next few years, partly because of welfare changes imposed by the UK Government. On top of its damaging programme of welfare cuts, the UK Government announced in 2015 that it intended to repeal large parts of the Child Poverty Act 2010, including the four UK-wide income targets. The Scottish Government was vocal in its opposition to that.

With the bill, the Scottish Government is making a clear statement: first, that child poverty is neither acceptable nor inevitable—that is why our targets, which are set on an after-housing-cost basis, will be even more stretching than those in the original 2010 act; and secondly, that income, or a lack of income, is central to poverty, which is a view that our stakeholders strongly share and is why the four targets that are at the heart of the bill focus on a range of aspects that are to do with low income.

If passed by Parliament, the bill will establish Scotland as the only part of the UK to have statutory income targets. All of that is in stark

contrast to the approach of the UK Government, which repealed the original income targets, abolished the child poverty unit and removed the child poverty remit from the then Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.

Our consultation on the bill was held between August and October 2016, and a broad range of individuals and organisations responded. They overwhelmingly supported the proposals for statutory income targets and for national and local reporting requirements. The consultation has been complemented by our on-going engagement with stakeholders, many of whom the committee heard from during its stage 1 considerations. Those stakeholders have warmly welcomed the bill and the reinstatement of income targets. They share our vision and bring with them their wealth of experience. We will use that in the development of the associated delivery plans.

When the bill was published, Peter Kelly, director of the Poverty Alliance, said:

"The publication of this legislation is very welcome. Too many children in Scotland have their lives blighted both now and into their future as a result of poverty. By taking a more strategic approach and setting realistic targets, we can ensure that Scotland becomes a leader in tackling child poverty."

The bill will galvanise action across all Scottish Government portfolios, and it will build on a range of work that the Government has under way to tackle poverty and inequality.

The bill is made up of three key elements, which I will set out in turn. First, it places a duty on the Scottish ministers to meet four income targets by 2030. Those targets are ambitious, and they provide a clear picture of the fairer Scotland that I am sure we all want to see.

A key issue that has been raised in evidence is setting interim targets. I am open to that idea. I am interested to hear the committee's views on interim targets and, in particular, on how we ensure that any interim measure is realistic, achievable and effective in maintaining momentum towards our ultimate aim of eradicating child poverty.

Secondly, the bill places a duty on the Scottish ministers to produce delivery plans regularly, the first of which is to be published by April 2018. Each delivery plan will clearly set out the measures that the Scottish ministers will take to meet the child poverty targets. Ministers will also be required to report annually on progress towards meeting the targets. As part of the process of developing the delivery plan, we will build on the child poverty measurement framework. The framework was developed with a range of stakeholders and experts, and it covers the wide range of drivers of poverty and impacts that

poverty has on the lives of children and their families.

We have committed to reviewing the framework with a view to including an updated version as part of the delivery plan that will be published in April next year. I know that the subject has come up in the committee's evidence sessions. At last week's meeting, witnesses from Fife and Dundee supported the overall focus on income measures but highlighted the need for a wider dashboard of indicators. I absolutely agree with that assessment, which is why the revised measurement framework will be crucial to the delivery plan's success. I am keen to hear the committee's views on that.

Thirdly and finally, the bill places a duty on local authorities and health boards to produce annual local child poverty action reports that will outline the action that they have taken to reduce child poverty. I will shortly present proposals for an overarching socioeconomic duty that will require public bodies, including local authorities and health boards, to take socioeconomic disadvantage into account when they plan at a strategic level.

The duty in the bill will complement the socioeconomic duty by requiring public bodies to set out the action that they are taking locally to reduce child poverty. The local duty has been the subject of extensive discussions with a variety of stakeholders, including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, NHS Health Scotland and a number of local authorities. It is clear from those discussions that there is an appetite to involve community planning partnerships in reporting and in providing a joined-up local focus to tackling child poverty. We have therefore been working to establish a reference group, which will help to develop guidance for local authorities and health boards on the reporting duty.

We must be ambitious for our children and young people, and we must take decisive action to end child poverty in our country. I am confident that the targets and the robust framework that will underpin them will provide the focus that we need. I am open to hearing the committee's views on how we can work together to improve the bill, which I am sure we all agree is critical. As ever, I am happy to answer colleagues' questions and to have constructive dialogue with the committee.

09:45

**The Convener:** Thank you very much, cabinet secretary. I will start the questions. You mentioned ambitions and challenges. The policy memorandum describes the bill's targets as

"stretching and ambitious, but realistic".

How much of a challenge will it be to reach the targets? Will it be a challenge?

**Angela Constance:** It will be a challenge. The targets are achievable with the right focus, the right commitment and the right policies in place, as reflected in the delivery plan, but that will not be easy. We know from organisations such as the IFS that the relative child poverty rate is likely to rise across the UK to more than 30 per cent. As child poverty is on the increase and is predicted to increase further, it would be wholly unacceptable and a dereliction of duty to downgrade the importance of addressing it by not having statutory income targets.

I point out that, as a Government, we do not have all the resources or the powers that I would like to see. Nonetheless, for a country—and for us as individuals—nothing is more important than children and their future. Our priority therefore has to be to eradicate child poverty.

**Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** I welcome your openness to considering interim targets. As you said, you are aware of the evidence that has been given to the committee on the matter. You said that the bill will provide a robust framework. It is probably not a source of disagreement that the bill will not provide a right of action that an individual could go to court to enforce. There may be reasons for that—namely, that the bill is a piece of framework legislation for Government policy.

In the circumstances, do you agree that it is even more important to set interim targets, so that progress can be reviewed? It is not necessarily a question of asking only whether we have met the targets; we need to review progress towards the targets and the approach that is being adopted. I think that Naomi Eisenstadt gave evidence to the committee that interim targets would and could be useful in that respect.

**Angela Constance:** As I indicated, I am open to revisiting the issue of interim targets and coming back with proposals for stage 2. Interim targets can be helpful in keeping momentum, ensuring that progress is being made, diminishing the risk of drift and helping us to break down the overall ambition. The overall ambition is to meet the very ambitious statutory income targets and to eradicate child poverty. I suppose that interim targets help to identify the milestones, the stepping stones or the interim steps towards achieving that.

On how the interim targets should be framed, they need to be realistic and achievable and need to help us on our way. They also need to be driven by evidence. There is a crucial point about data projections and the trajectory of child poverty. I am open to the principle of the bill saying that we should have interim targets, but we would have to

be careful about setting such targets in the bill, given that the work that we need to do prior to the delivery plan, on understanding the projections and the trajectory of child poverty, is still being done.

**Gordon Lindhurst:** Are the bill's scrutiny provisions sufficient? As some witnesses have pointed out, there might be more appropriate or stricter scrutiny provisions at a parliamentary level. I am not suggesting judicial scrutiny—there are different forms of scrutiny—but could the bill be improved with regard to how Parliament is involved in the scrutiny of interim progress or in the requirements that it sets out, which you referred to as duties that are to be placed on the Scottish ministers?

**Angela Constance:** We will lay an annual report before the Parliament. It will be up to Parliament, Opposition parties and parliamentary committees to make of any annual report what they wish and to use the means that they have to hold the Government to account.

We want to produce the annual reports and the overarching delivery plans in the style of co-production. We will want to produce draft delivery plans for consultation, and the reports will be produced annually, so they will be regular. We are not sweeping the child poverty agenda under the carpet; we are bringing it to the Parliament, to parliamentary committees and to wider civic Scotland. I do not doubt that the Parliament and the committees will scrutinise the resulting act and, in due course, how we will meet its aims.

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** I welcome the bill and I am interested in exploring with you ways in which we might be able to work to make it even stronger. You said in your opening remarks that the bill has provisions for monitoring, measuring and reporting on child poverty, and I agree with you that that is important. However, do you agree with me that what is even more important is tackling and reducing child poverty?

**Angela Constance:** Yes. That is the goal. However, we need to have a process and a way of tackling such a huge problem, so we need to have a mechanism that keeps us focused and evaluates throughout our journey what works, what is less effective and where our priorities should be.

**Adam Tomkins:** Tackling child poverty is even more important than monitoring, measuring and reporting on it, but the bill does not contain any provisions that enable or, indeed, require you or the Scottish ministers generally to tackle or reduce child poverty. All the targets are focused on income, not statutory duties that you and the Scottish ministers must undertake in order to achieve the ambition of reducing child poverty in Scotland. Is that right?

**Angela Constance:** There are two aspects to that question. I would contend that the Scottish ministers having a duty to monitor, measure and report on child poverty provides very important foundations for achieving our ambitions. I know that the bill is described as a technical, framework bill, but it is laying very important foundations. As parliamentarians, we all know that legislating is rarely sufficient in itself—I think that we are all mature enough as parliamentarians to agree on that—but the bill puts cornerstones in place, because it is about getting the foundations right. The bill does indeed place duties on ministers.

I will speak about policy and delivery plans, but the important point about the targets is that we have a small number of focused targets on income. There is broad agreement about the importance of income and, in many ways, poverty is defined by income. There are many aspects of poverty and it has multiple drivers, but at its core is lack of income. We can, of course, debate why poorer families have lower incomes, but at poverty's core is that lack of income, which we need to focus on. However, the measurements in the measurement framework are broader and we know that our work must be placed in the wider context of the economy. None of us has a crystal ball for what will happen between now and 2030.

I did not want to mention the B-word, but Brexit will unfold, so it is important that our delivery plans are flexible and responsive to changing needs. There are opportunities—the 2010 UK act, for example, listed areas that could be covered. I am not averse to the bill listing areas that the delivery plan should address or cover. To be transparent with the committee, I say that my only concern would be that the list would be too narrow; we want to be able to respond to the evidence and to emerging need.

**Adam Tomkins:** But it could be an indicative list not an exhaustive list of matters that delivery plans must, by law, include. Would you be open to that?

**Angela Constance:** It could be an exemplar, yes.

**Adam Tomkins:** Would you be open to going even further and adding targets to the bill in addition to income-related targets? For example—this is an issue that I have explored with a number of witnesses, and John Dickie from the Child Poverty Action Group said that he is enthusiastic about this and others have echoed that—we all know that the First Minister has made it the Government's defining mission to close the attainment gap in Scottish schools and we also all know that one of the many underlying drivers of poverty is educational underattainment. Would you be open to adding some kind of duty to the bill stating that ministers must take steps to close the attainment gap as a means of tackling and



reducing child poverty in Scotland? If not, why not?

**Angela Constance:** I can forgive Mr Tomkins for that question, because he was not around in the previous parliamentary session. However, some members of this committee sat on the Education and Culture Committee in session 4 and will have followed and indeed contributed to the passage of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. That act places duties on ministers and on local authorities to address and reduce the attainment gap. A lot of the work that underpins how we will do that is in and around the national improvement framework, so I contend that those duties already exist.

To lay it out in a broader sense, the overarching duty will be the socioeconomic duty. Four strands will underpin the duties on ministers and local authorities, three of which already exist—the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, the important Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, and the landmark Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, through which ministers and local authorities have duties, not least for looked-after children. The other cornerstone will be the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill.

**Adam Tomkins:** I have one last question. Is the socioeconomic duty that you have been talking about this morning coming in this bill or in separate legislation?

**Angela Constance:** The duty will come separately. We will introduce proposals on how we will do that shortly. Again, this goes back to the Scotland Act 2016. It is a duty that lay dormant under the Equality Act 2010. We now have some very discrete powers or potential powers in and around equalities legislation as a result of the Scotland Act 2016, so we want to introduce a socioeconomic duty. We will be doing that shortly, and we will hold a consultation because we want to ensure, particularly for local authorities, that we proceed in such a manner that duties are streamlined and people are not overburdened.

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

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary says that there will be a socioeconomic duty, which is to come after the bill. I am a little concerned about that. These are all principles that I would fully support. You said at the beginning that there is a need to focus; I would like the bill to be more focused and I would like some of the issues to be contained within it rather than being in different places.

I am interested in whether you think that there should in fact be a statutory duty to include in the delivery plan a requirement to take specific measures. We all have different opinions about what measures might lift children out of poverty. I

feel that the bill would benefit if it contained a much more powerful statutory duty to include in the delivery plan a requirement to take specific measures. That is a point about the operational side of the bill. I would be interested to hear your view on that.

10:00

**Angela Constance:** I understand the motivation behind your question, but if we want to galvanise activity within and outwith Government, and if we want to be in a position to respond to changing economic circumstances, whether positive or negative, or other big global events, we will need to be flexible. We can include things that should be covered, as was done in the Child Poverty Act 2010. There are commitments that we will not stray from. For example, we know that affordable housing has a contribution to make on all four indicators. Increasing the supply of affordable housing will help us to address all four targets. We know that measures that are designed to target support for people who are unemployed, single parents or people with a disability will help, and there is a body of evidence on the contribution that childcare makes.

There are platforms that could be included as examples of what should be in the delivery plan, but it is extremely important that we are robust in our delivery plans and that we take an evidence-based approach. We know that some measures are effective but that they will have an impact in the longer term; there are other measures that will have a more direct impact on the targets. All of that is in the context of what is happening with welfare reform and the economy. If the bill is too prescriptive, our response to child poverty will be less flexible. Through the poverty and inequality commission, we want the experts in the field to inform us and to help us to develop the delivery plan.

**Pauline McNeill:** Yes, but there is a danger that the bill might not be prescriptive enough. I take your point, which is why I am interested in whether there should be a statutory duty of the kind that I suggested. You gave the example of affordable housing. The building of 35,000 affordable houses is a target in itself. Although it will make a massive contribution in tackling child poverty, that contribution is not quantifiable. There are measures on which there is evidence of the impact that they would have. For example, there is widespread consensus that a £5 top-up in child benefit, which other members of the committee have pursued, is a measure whose effect in taking children out of poverty could be measured. I am concerned that the bill might be too wide.

You mentioned some discussion about a local duty. We have heard from local authorities that are

doing excellent work in Fife, Dundee and my home city of Glasgow, and I have talked to people in Glasgow about that work. What did you mean by that? What relationship do you see there being between the work that those local authorities are doing and what would be included in the delivery plan?

**Angela Constance:** It is important to stress that the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill is a very focused bill. Its focus and purpose have been overwhelmingly supported and welcomed by stakeholders. With regard to housing, our targets on social rented housing, in particular, would have a prominent role in any delivery plan.

Although child poverty in Scotland is way too high, there is a reasonable body of evidence to support the view that one of the reasons why it is lower than in the UK is the contribution of affordable housing and our policies on that. Actually, if we take the three-year average, relative child poverty in Scotland is lower than in any of the other home nations.

However, it is important that the bill is not overcomplicated, and that has come through in some of the evidence from stakeholders. We need focus and a mechanism to help us to tackle a massive problem, which costs the UK £29 billion according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. We should not make the bill unwieldy or unworkable.

That is very important for our partners in local government who, along with our partners in health, will have a duty to produce reports about the progress that they are making locally, while the duty to achieve the income targets will rest with the Scottish ministers. That is all in the context of looking at the overall responsibilities that local authorities have for reducing educational inequalities. As Naomi Eisenstadt said, we want local authorities to report on their progress, but they should have the freedom to be able to do what works at a local level without that being prescribed from the top or, indeed, in the bill.

**Pauline McNeill:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** Did Ben Macpherson want to come in with a supplementary on Pauline McNeill's question?

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** It is on a similar theme, but not on the same question.

**The Convener:** I am sorry—Alison Johnstone wants to come in on that question. I will put Ben Macpherson down to ask a question later.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** First, I will focus again on the issue of scrutiny. In its evidence, the Child Poverty Action Group referred to the need for independent scrutiny. I would like

to understand why you think that the poverty and inequality commission that is proposed in the Government's plan for a fairer Scotland might be a body that would provide that scrutiny. You have obviously not followed the blueprint that was set up by the UK Government with its commission. Why was that decision made?

**Angela Constance:** I have not followed the UK Government's blueprint, simply and bluntly because I do not see any added advantage to that. Despite the fact that the UK-wide commission is a statutory body, a different Government of a different colour came in and fundamentally changed the commission's role and purpose.

We have a manifesto commitment to establish a poverty and inequality commission. The chair of that commission will have to be independent. We will be scrupulous in identifying individuals who will be appointed to that commission on the basis of their expertise. They will have a role in advising ministers. As with other advisory bodies or individuals, such as the poverty adviser, the committee will be able to engage with that body.

I was absolutely clear that I wanted the poverty and inequality commission to be established so that it can help us to develop the first delivery plan. It will have an important role in relation to the annual reports—we expect the commission to be very engaged in that process. However, I did not want to make a pre-emptive announcement about the poverty and inequality commission, because I was conscious that there are stage 1 proceedings for this bill and also that civic Scotland and Oxfam were keen to pull together their thinking to inform the process as well.

**Alison Johnstone:** Is it your view that the poverty and inequality commission will be in a position to be truly independent and as critical of the Government as it needs to be?

**Angela Constance:** It will be full of independent-minded individuals. The commission will be appointed by ministers, as is the norm with bodies that advise the Government. We have a good track record in appointing credible and independent individuals such as Kaliani Lyle, the race equality framework adviser, and Naomi Eisenstadt, the poverty adviser. We have a clear commitment to establishing a poverty and inequality commission and that is a real opportunity for experts, including those with lived experience of poverty, to advise Government and help us to galvanise cross-portfolio work and our team Scotland approach to tackling child poverty. We also need them to take a hard look at the evidence, which should inform what we do, when, and why.

**Alison Johnstone:** There is a lot of evidence to show that the work on income maximisation has

been successful—I will mention the healthier, wealthier children project again. I would like to understand your views on how important income maximisation work is in reducing child poverty and whether you think that there should be a provision in the bill to offer all parents or guardians access to income maximisation advice as a right.

**Angela Constance:** That is being considered under the social security bill. Income maximisation has a clear role to play in addressing poverty and many benefits are underclaimed. Perhaps that is more of an issue for pensioner poverty. I was once very struck by a presentation from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that showed that if we could get all pensioners to claim what they were entitled to, we would almost eradicate pensioner poverty.

Child poverty is somewhat more complex, in that poorer families often claim what they are entitled to, but the issue is their level of entitlement to tax credits as a family.

On the indicative list of what the bill should cover around the delivery plan, there is a role for income maximisation, certainly.

**Alison Johnstone:** Finally, I find myself slightly at odds with Adam Tomkins's assertion that the Child Poverty Action Group suggested that educational attainment should be one of the measures, because its evidence is contrary to that view. However, it is clear about its suggestion that we use social security powers to reduce child poverty. Pauline McNeill mentioned the £5-a-week top-up to child benefit. Do you have a view on that?

**Angela Constance:** I have a view on both matters. Educational attainment is a cause and a consequence of poverty and that is reflected in our current child poverty measurement framework, the broader dashboard that covers literacy, numeracy and exam performance. There might be more sophisticated ways to connect the child poverty measurement framework with, for example, the national improvement framework in education, and we are committed to reviewing the measurement framework to ensure that we have the right measurements.

On the top-up to child benefit, I have gone on the record numerous times as saying that we should indeed be debating these matters. We should be debating the use and application of new social security powers. The proposal to top up child benefit is not a bad idea, but it is not the best idea. I go back to my exchange with Mark Griffin in the chamber a few weeks ago, when I said that topping child benefit up by £5 would also apply to people on incomes of up to £50,000 to £60,000 and would cost £250 million per annum. Seven out of 10 of the children who would benefit from that would not be children who live in poverty. From

the history of child poverty in the UK, we know that there is a place for targeted measures to increase income. My concern about the child benefit top-up is that the vast majority of the money would not be directed at children who currently live in poverty. We need to thoroughly debate and discuss those matters.

10:15

**Adam Tomkins:** Will the poverty and inequality commission be statutory or ad hoc?

**Angela Constance:** We have no plans to make it a statutory commission, for the reasons that I outlined to Alison Johnstone. The UK body was statutory, but that did not stop radical changes being made to it by a different Government. Also, if it were to be a statutory body, the timescales involved mean that it would not be established in time for the publication of the first delivery plan, which must be in April 2018.

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** I would like to ask for your views on some local level stuff. The local authorities and partner health boards will report annually on the activity that they undertake, and we have had a few calls in written and oral evidence for there to be a duty on local partnerships to set out their plans for what they will do to tackle child poverty in the future, as well as reporting on what they have done.

**Angela Constance:** We looked very closely at that. In my dialogue with COSLA, there was a shared instinct to look at making duties applicable to community planning partnerships. However, I received very strong advice that that was not possible, because community planning partnerships, unlike health boards or local authorities, are not legally constituted bodies and they do not employ people. With a little bit of regret, we could not pursue that option, which is why the reporting duty is on health boards and local authorities. They will need to exercise their duties in partnerships, which will inevitably bring in and involve community planning partnerships.

**Ruth Maguire:** We heard about lots of good work that is on-going in local areas, but another concern that was raised was about the availability of robust data to measure the impact that the actions are having. What is your view on that? My question is not from the perspective of stopping action and we want to be careful that looking for more and more robust data does not do that.

**Angela Constance:** I agree that we need enough data to inform action. We do not want to tie up everybody from Government to local authority officers on the front line in generating data. There needs to be a proportionate response and it is more about the right data and the quality of the data. Although some local authorities have

reasonable data at a local level, there is an acceptance that they would prefer better local information and we have given a commitment to work with them on that through the reference group, which I referred to in my opening statement.

We have also been doing some very interesting work on the Scottish index of multiple deprivation and how that work could be adapted at a local level to give us more insight into child poverty. We did a pilot project in Orkney on how we could use the analytics of SIMD to tell us more about child poverty there. We could share that with the committee, if members are interested.

**Ruth Maguire:** That certainly sounds interesting. Thank you.

**Richard Leonard:** You mentioned unclaimed benefits. Your estimation was that they are an issue more for the pensioner population than for the population as a whole. That may be true but, as I understand it, in Glasgow, there have been moves to put entitlements to free school meals and school clothing grants in place automatically. The figure that I saw was that, out of 25,000 eligible families, an additional 5,000 or more have now received benefits or grants to which they are entitled that they would not otherwise have got. The barriers to families claiming were the complexity of the forms; the fact that, sometimes, English was not the first language; and a concern that they would lose out on other benefits. Do you see a role for such an automatic approach to entitlements, either locally or nationally?

**Angela Constance:** I do. I do not demur—and I hope that I did not give that impression—from the importance of income maximisation for families. I just think that we need a different approach to how we maximise income for different groups. Although it is always good to have general income maximisation campaigns, they always need a follow-up approach that is more targeted, to families in need, for example, or older people.

There is a space for measures that cut out bureaucracy or stigma. For many families, there is a stigma associated with free school meals, school clothing grants or attending a food bank. That level of detail is not for the bill, although we can encapsulate in the bill the need for income maximisation measures to be reflected in delivery plans.

There is a case for such initiatives at a national or local level, but it is important that we are not overprescriptive with local government.

**Richard Leonard:** Will you develop that and shed some light on your thinking about what you expect to be in those local delivery plans? What measures would you expect a local authority or health board to report on annually?

**Angela Constance:** From the work that we are doing in the reference group, we will produce some guidance on what we expect from our partners in local government. The reference group will be made up of people who are appointed from a range of local authorities, because I am conscious that the nature of child poverty will be different in different parts of the country. That is because, although Scotland is a small country, local economies are different and have different challenges and strengths.

We will set out what we expect from local authorities because some parameters and consistency in reporting are needed. Nonetheless, as democratically elected bodies, local authorities need to have the space to respond to the needs of their own communities.

**Richard Leonard:** Will you expect them to take action to tackle poverty and not simply count the local levels of poverty?

**Angela Constance:** Yes. We will all be needed to take action to eradicate child poverty, but there is an important place for reporting because it is about transparency and creating a shared understanding about the scale and nature of the issue.

We want to develop—I give a personal commitment on this to the committee—more of a consensus about what works so that we all feel that we have a contribution to make towards tackling child poverty and that we can all work together on it. I have some experience of that, given the work that I did a number of years ago on youth employment. When I became the Minister for Youth Employment, there were 113,000 unemployed young Scots and youth employment was at 25 per cent. It was highly politicised, and we had a lot of very robust committee and parliamentary exchanges.

We managed to build a consensus around the work that was produced, particularly on developing Scotland's young workforce. I do not know of any party in this Parliament that is not committed to the developing Scotland's young workforce agenda, and we have seen tremendous progress on youth employment. It is obviously something that is hugely affected by the context of the economy, but Scotland now has the third lowest youth unemployment rate in Europe. That is because local and national government and the third sector worked together and we developed a shared understanding of the issue and of what works. We went forward with a team Scotland approach, with all the arrows flying in one direction. That is what we are going to do in relation to child poverty.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** My question follows on from information that we have already discussed. At our meeting in Glasgow, a number

of academics sat there and fell out with each other in the way that only academics can—in a very polite manner. The one thing that they did agree on was that there was not enough data. The SIMD was the only show in town for them, and they said that there were flaws with that being the only measure available to them.

At the committee's meeting last week, talking to our witnesses from Dundee and Fife was particularly interesting. They said that the spread of water that splits them might as well be the Atlantic Ocean, because they do not exchange a lot of views. Is the point of the bill not about gathering data and focusing on it? The Dundee and Fife witnesses said that being here with each other last week gave them the opportunity to exchange ideas, which was one of the first times that they had done so.

As former councillors, Ms Constance and I both know that great work is happening in local authorities; it is perhaps just a case of focusing both the NHS boards and the local authorities to make sure that they share some of that expertise and try to make a difference.

**Angela Constance:** I am a former social worker and, in my profession, we spoke at length about that old cliché, sharing best practice. We still talk about that in many fields and sectors across the country, and it remains true. The problem should not be insurmountable. We are a small country and where there are barriers to sharing good practice, we just have to find ways to deal with that.

We have unanimity—or consensus—around the importance of the four statutory income targets, but we need to involve people more in reviewing the measurement framework. The issue about data is that, in some areas, there is a lack of Scottish as well as local authority data on the trajectory of child poverty. We know that, across the UK, as of here and now, the trajectory is predicted to go up, but we want to have a better handle on that at a Scottish level so that it informs our actions. However, we want data with a purpose. We do not want to create a complete industry that generates data that nobody reads or uses. It needs to be proportionate. On the work that we will do with the reference group that involves local authorities and the third sector, we are taking a hands-on approach to help local government to get the right analytics and the right data.

**George Adam:** I was very interested in what you said earlier about targets in the bill feeding into various bills that we have had in the past and that will come in the future. You said that the bill is like a foundation stone for that process.

One of the things that you will also have to measure is the impact of legislation that comes from Westminster. The child tax credit situation is a classic example. Data on that would possibly be part of the information, because that will affect child poverty too—no woman worth her salt would fill in that form relating to the so-called rape clause.

Is it not the case that, although we can measure the data and work together, there is still the issue, as you mentioned earlier, that there could be further UK legislation on welfare reform and that problem could still affect us? The bill probably provides a way in which we can get the data and highlight the problem.

10:30

**Angela Constance:** At a basic level, the issue is reporting, measuring and adapting what we do. There is a real role for the proposed poverty and inequality commission in supporting the Government to develop delivery plans based on evidence, because a core part of the commission's role is evaluating the Government's current and new policies. The commission will also evaluate the UK-wide context and the wider impact of the economy and welfare reform.

The challenge is immense, but it is not insurmountable. I would not come to the Parliament with a child poverty bill if I thought that we could not do it and work together to achieve our ambition. However, it is true that some of what we are doing in terms of mitigation is to prevent things getting worse for people, rather than spending a resource to make things better.

The scrutiny of current and new policies will apply to the Scottish Government in the same way that it can and should apply to the UK Government and local government. What matters is what will be effective and what is going to work. There is a substantial body of evidence, but there are knowledge gaps and gaps in the data.

**Ben Macpherson:** You spoke earlier about the complex nature of child poverty, but you also said that it is principally to do with monetary concerns. That is why I support the holistic approach of focusing on income targets in the wider context of the economy.

I would like to ask about delivery plans. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation said in evidence that it supports the publication of a new delivery plan early in the next and subsequent parliamentary sessions, rather than at the end of them. That is in order to support accountability and strategy within each session. As far as I can remember, the foundation suggested that delivery plans should be published on a three-year cycle. What are your thoughts on the delivery plans being flexible and

responsive to need, particularly given that—as you and George Adam mentioned—they will need to take into account the potential negative and prohibitive effects of UK Government policy?

**Angela Constance:** I listened to the stage 1 evidence, in which the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said that the timing of the delivery plans should be tweaked. We will listen to other people's views on that; I am relaxed about it. Annual reporting enables scrutiny, accountability and transparency in ensuring that child poverty is at the forefront of our minds in the political debate and that, in our activities in Parliament, we are always focused on eradicating child poverty.

There are debates to be had about the period that delivery plans should cover. The current child poverty strategy covers a three-year period. Some people say that the period needs to be longer so that we can demonstrate greater change, bearing in mind that although the eradication of child poverty is possible within a generation, the year-on-year changes will be more subtle. Among stakeholders and within the Government, there has been some thinking about the fact that the three-year cycle tends to fall bang in the middle of parliamentary sessions.

I am quite relaxed about the timing of the delivery plans, but they need to cover a long-enough period to give the Government and its partners a run at it. I would consider five years to be about right but, as always, we will listen closely to what others have to say.

**The Convener:** Pauline McNeill wants to come back in.

**Pauline McNeill:** My question follows on from Alison Johnstone's point about automation of benefits, and it relates to the context of Richard Leonard's question about the work in Glasgow that shows that there are many unclaimed benefits. That work has made a dramatic difference, because the data can be used. For example, anyone on housing benefit has certain entitlements, so the cheques can just be sent out.

Would it not make sense to look at bringing the duty that is being discussed for the social security bill into the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill as well? If the bill passes into law, the Government would be required to do the first delivery plan in 2018, so it would bring that focus to the Parliament a bit sooner. I think that that idea is worth considering.

**Angela Constance:** The evidence on automation is really interesting. There are great examples of what can be done on a pragmatic level to cut through bureaucracy and to get to folk in need more quickly.

I go back to what I said about the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill being a focused bill. Therefore, I

think that the place for the provision of more detail on the opportunities around automation is the delivery plan. It might be possible for the bill to include pointers about what should be covered in the delivery plan that encapsulate the use of modern, efficient approaches. I am genuinely concerned that if we are overly specific on the face of the bill, the world around us will change before we know it, and we will be stuck with ways that have become outdated. However, I genuinely think that there is great merit in automated processes and the intelligent use of data.

**Pauline McNeill:** Thank you very much.

**The Convener:** I have two questions: the first is on the back of those from Ruth Maguire and Richard Leonard about local authorities and health boards looking forward rather than backward.

You mentioned the proposed requirement for local authorities and health boards to report on activity. Does that go far enough? Should local partners also be required to set out their intended actions to tackle child poverty?

**Angela Constance:** I think that we have the right balance of duties and responsibilities on local authorities, bearing in mind the overall responsibilities and duties that local government has under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, and the approaches at its disposal under community empowerment. All of that will be encapsulated by the socioeconomic duty. Inevitably, that is an issue for the reference group and the guidance; a progress report is forward looking and backward looking, because evaluating evidence on what works is at its core.

**The Convener:** Thank you. My second question is on the back of George Adam's comments. You mentioned the proposed poverty and inequality commission. Could you clarify the commission's intended remit and role, and its relationship with the current ministerial advisory group?

**Angela Constance:** We hope to say more about the poverty and inequality commission in the near future. I indicated earlier that the role of the commission is about advising ministers, using its expertise to help to ensure cross-Government connectivity and connecting us with the wider world and the wider evidence. We are giving great thought to the future of the ministerial advisory group on child poverty, which I have engaged with prior to today and as part of our work in preparation for the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill. As a minimum, that group will remain in place as the bill passes through Parliament and becomes bedded in.

As far as the future is concerned, we need to be up front and actively question whether we will need a poverty and inequality commission and a

ministerial advisory group on child poverty. That is not a debate or discussion that can be resolved here and now, but I advise the committee that we are giving the matter some thought. In the same way that we need the right range of data, we need the right range of advisory groups and experts. We do not necessarily want to have a cluttered landscape when we are trying to provide focus and drive in this area.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much, cabinet secretary. I thank you and your officials for coming along.

10:40

*Meeting continued in private until 11:31.*





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