

SPICe**The Information Centre**
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Social Security and Social Justice Committee

**20th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Thursday, 14
September 2023**

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice priorities

Introduction

1. This paper provides background and suggested areas for questioning with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice on her priorities.
2. As agreed at the meeting of 29 June, this session is aimed at following up on the Scottish Government's response to the Committee's letter on social justice priorities. The session will also provide an opportunity to explore any changes to Scottish Government priorities and if this prioritisation includes any additional resourcing or re-targeting of existing funding streams. It will also allow Members to question the Cabinet Secretary on relevant Programme for Government announcements.

Social Justice Priorities

3. In the Vision for Scotland, [Equality, opportunity, community: New Leadership](#), published on 18 April 2023 the First Minister set out its three critical – and – interdependent – missions for the government to be underpinned by refreshed national outcomes:
 - Tackling poverty and protecting people from harm
 - A fair, green and growing economy
 - Prioritising our public services
4. The document noted the challenging context arising from, for example, the recovery from the COVID pandemic and the cost of living crisis and that this would, "mean taking some tough decisions to ensure that we target every

pound we spend and invest in order to get the maximum value, ensuring it reaches those that need it the most.”

5. In [Equality, opportunity, community: New Leadership](#), the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice confirmed what the Scottish Government hoped to achieve by 2026 (see Annex 1) Aims included:
 - Reduced child poverty rates through delivery of our tackling child poverty plan Best Start, Bright Futures, using all available levers.
 - Invested a further £1.3 billion in our game-changing Scottish Child Payment – which is forecast this financial year to lift 50,000 children out of poverty.
 - Built on the successful establishment of our social security system and delivered Scottish Government benefits worth £18 billion to over two million people, treating them with dignity, fairness and respect.

6. The Committee wrote to the Cabinet Secretary on [17 May 2023](#). The Committee acknowledged the First Minister’s commitment to tackling poverty when he announced the Scottish Government’s priorities. The Committee also noted the publication of the Scottish Government’s [“Equality, opportunity, community: New leadership – A fresh start” which sets out the social justice priorities](#). The Committee asked, in advance of the Programme for Government, for more detail on the social justice priorities within the Committee’s remit and how these build on the actions already taken earlier in the session and how they differ from the previous approach.

7. The Committee also referred the Cabinet Secretary to the Committee’s report, [“Scrutinising social justice”](#) which seeks to share learning and harness scrutiny efforts to ensure that policies aimed at progressing social justice are delivering. Though the report is primarily aimed at committees, the Committee noted that it also seeks some further clarification from the Scottish Government on the following areas:
 - Fairer Scotland Action Plan this Parliamentary session
 - Minimum Income Guarantee interim report
 - Transparency on achieving social justice outcomes
 - Action taken to tackle long-standing, cross-cutting barriers to progressing social justice in Scotland

8. [The Cabinet Secretary’s response](#) pointed to some recent developments in relation to cross cutting issues and sought to address the Committee’s specific questions on the Fairer Scotland Action Report and Minimum Income Guarantee

9. The Cabinet Secretary highlighted the publication of the [Tackling child poverty delivery plan: progress report 2022 to 2023](#) was published on the 13th of June 2023. She also highlighted the [Minimum Income Guarantee Expert Group Interim Report](#) that was published on 24 March. The report also sets out early considerations for the Scottish Government which could prepare the ground for a Minimum Income Guarantee. The Cabinet Secretary indicated that the government was already taking action in a number of areas such as childcare costs and looked forward to seeing the full report, due to be published in 2024.

Programme for Government and recent developments

Social Security

10. The focus of the [Programme for Government](#) was tackling poverty. In terms of social security, this is mostly to be achieved by continuing existing policies.
11. As with last year, the flagship policy is the Scottish Child Payment. There was no detail of anything other than inflation linked increases to the £25 payment. The [Child Poverty Action Group](#) expressed “disappointment at lack of further detail on First Minister’s commitment to increase Scottish child payment to £30.” That was a commitment in the First Minister’s leadership campaign to [“push it to £30 per week in his first budget.”](#)
12. There was also an announcement about a social security amendment bill. There was little further detail on what this would cover. The consultation, [Scotland’s social security system: Enhanced Administration and Compensation Recovery](#), may provide some idea of what might be covered. One of the measures consulted on was changing the legislative basis of the Scottish Child Payment which would give the Scottish Government more policy options around eligibility.
13. The Programme for Government restated the current social security timetable including the introduction of [regulations](#) to create a Carer Support Payment – although now with a phased approach to introduction.
14. There was no detail of the timetable and policy for Employment Injury Assistance which the Scottish Government had committed to consult on in advance of delivery. A consultation on this has been expected [since the spring](#).

Homelessness

15. Recently published [annual homelessness statistics for 2022-23](#) show increasing numbers of homelessness and increasing numbers of homeless households and children living in temporary accommodation.

16. On 19 July, the [Scottish Government responded](#) to the recommendations of the [Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group](#). Actions that will be taken include investing at least £60m through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme in 2023-24 to support a national acquisition plan and working with social landlords to deliver a new programme of stock management.
17. In the Programme for Government, the Scottish Government committed to introduce a housing bill including homelessness prevention provisions. This follows the recommendations of the [Scotland Prevention Review Group](#). It also repeated commitments to reduce the use of temporary accommodation and continue to promote Housing First.
18. The [Homelessness Prevention Task and Finish Group published their final report in August 2023](#). It set out the key elements that are needed to ensure implementation of the proposed homelessness prevention duties including cross-sector cultural change and leadership and long-term resourced plans. [The Group warned that Ministers cannot afford to wait](#) until pressures on the system ease and that investment now is critical to the success of future policy.

Members may wish to discuss:

1. In [Equality, opportunity, community: New leadership – A fresh start](#) the First Minister stated that there will be “some tough decisions to ensure that we target every pound we spend and invest in order to get the maximum value, ensuring it reaches those that need it the most.”
 - a. How have these tough decisions affected the measures set out in the Programme for Government? Have you had to change or refocus any priorities?
 - b. How will you assess the potential impact of policies in order to ensure limited finances are focused on those policies likely to have the biggest impact?
2. What is your latest assessment on the impact of the cost of living crisis on families who may be struggling? Are any new measures required to address the cost of living crisis?
3. Recent statistics show continuing increases in levels of homelessness and people living in temporary accommodation. How does tackling the problem of temporary accommodation fit in with your priorities this year?
4. The Scottish Government has still to announce a date for introducing Employment Injury Assistance. A planned consultation has not (at time of writing) been published. When will the Scottish Government legislate for Employment Injury Assistance?

Kate Berry and Camilla Kidner, SPICe
September 2023

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The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP www.parliament.scot

[From the FM prospectus](#)

Annex 1: Extract from Equality, opportunity, community: New Leadership – A fresh start

“As the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, working with my Cabinet colleagues, I commit that by 2026 I will have:

- Reduced child poverty rates through delivery of our tackling child poverty plan Best Start, Bright Futures, using all available levers.
- Invested a further £1.3 billion in our game-changing Scottish Child Payment – which is forecast this financial year to lift 50,000 children out of poverty.
- Built on the successful establishment of our social security system and delivered Scottish Government benefits worth £18 billion to over two million people, treating them with dignity, fairness and respect.
- Transferred the awards of over 700,000 people from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland.
- Worked with partners including Local Government to identify ways to reduce the number of people living in temporary accommodation, taking account of the recommendations of the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group (HPSG) Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group.
- Acted decisively to protect lives by assessing and remediating medium and high rise multi-residential buildings with unsafe cladding and by holding developers to account for their commitments to residents and homeowners.
- Provided sanctuary to people displaced by war in Ukraine, and ensured support is available for those fleeing conflict and persecution to integrate into our communities in line with the New Scots Strategy.
- Delivered world leading Human Rights legislation, subject to the agreement of parliament, protecting economic, social and cultural rights and established an Equality and Human Rights Mainstreaming Strategy across the public sector.
- Established the first independent Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland, recommended by the Expert Reference Group on COVID-19 and Ethnicity, signalling our commitment to anti-racism.
- Progressed Fairer Funding arrangements, including exploring options to implement multi-year funding deals, enabling the third sector to secure the resilience and capacity it needs to support the transformation and delivery of person-centred services for Scotland's people and support our thriving social enterprise economy.
- Supported people and employers to navigate the complex UK immigration system when moving to Scotland, through the establishment of a Talent

Attraction and Migration Service, and begun to address community depopulation challenges, including through tailored, community-driven migration solutions which support local economies and public services, through an Addressing Depopulation Action Plan.

- Continued to press the UK Government to provide further powers to the Scottish Parliament so we can tackle poverty, and make the vital immigration reforms required to meet Scotland's needs, including making the strongest case possible for tailored migration solutions such as a Rural Visa Pilot.”