

# Cross-Party Group on Poverty

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> December 11.30-12.30

## Minute

## Present

### *MSPs*

Paul O’Kane MSP (POK)  
Monica Lennon MSP (ML)  
Alex Rowley MSP (AR)

### *Invited guests*

Isla McIntosh – The Poverty Alliance  
Greig Inglis – University of the West of Scotland

### *Non-MSP Group Members*

Ana Vuin, Andrea Ma, Aaran Goodfellow, Claire Donnelly, David Stewart, Derek Rankine, Elaine Crawley, Florence Burke, Jenny Marra, Judith Mabelis, Kate Robison, Keith Robson, Laura Thomson, Leah Duncan-Karrim, Lisa Weylandt, Maria Marshall, Michael Conway, Nikoleta Atanasova, Peter Kelly, Ralph Hartley, Renxo Cardosi, Ruth Boyle, Richard Lister, Sarah Rogers, Stacey Cuthbertson, Susan McKellar, and Taliah Drayak

## Apologies

Andrea Bradley, Beatrice Wishart MSP, Ben Macpherson MSP, Janet Haugh, Pam Duncan Glancy MSP

## Agenda Item 1: Poverty-related stigma

The Convener Paul O’Kane (POK) welcomed attendees and MSPs to the meeting, and indicated that Beatrice Wishart is intending to attend the second half of the meeting, depending on Committee business. Following housekeeping relating to the online meeting, POK introduced the first item related to poverty-related stigma.

POK indicated that we were returning to the topic of poverty-related stigma, which the CPG on Poverty last focused on in its 2023 inquiry, to cover new developments in the area. One of the recommendations in our inquiry related to utilising work from the Universities of Strathclyde and the West of Scotland, the Poverty Alliance and Mental Health Foundation to develop a measurement on stigma. This work has now been developed and we thought the CPG would be keen to learn more.

POK handed over to Ilsa McIntosh, the Senior Communities and Networks Officer at the Poverty Alliance, to provide an overview of the Poverty Alliance's work relating to stigma and benefit take-up.

Ilsa McIntosh (IM) introduced work by the Poverty Alliance related to a citizen panel, commissioned by the Scottish Government, looking at the impact of poverty-related stigma in benefit take-up. IM noted that we wanted to have panelists here today, but sadly they were tied-up in another session funded by Edinburgh Council to develop stigma training – one of the recommendations of this report.

The Citizen's Panel was made-up of 16 individuals from across Scotland, with the over-representation of individuals from groups most at risk of poverty. The Citizen's Panel met six times and made nine recommendations to the Scottish Government. The key finding of the report was that stigma around social security exists on every level and creates powerful barriers to accessing entitlements. There is a generational aspect, and stigma can also drive isolation within families – not being able to be honest about your financial situation.

Participants reported that they put off claiming to the point of destitution because of stigma, and did not want to reapply for their full entitlement because of wanting to avoid “rocking the boat” or a “fear of retelling your story”. Participants also noted the burden of “constantly having to prove that you're disabled enough, ill enough, poor enough” and the shame of being disbelieved. Housing was a key area where people experienced stigma, particularly when trying to rent privately.

IM also outlined the overlap with other forms of stigma and discrimination, including ableism which has been impacted by political and media rhetoric of benefit 'scroungers' and 'fraudsters'. This feeds directly into negative attitudes encountered in communities, families and services.

Stigma can change over time. The majority of participants thought the cost of living crisis has exacerbated stigma, especially tensions between those in in-work poverty and those claiming out of work benefits. There have also been positive developments relating to the operating practices of Social Security Scotland compared to DWP. Participants believe the contrast is “night and day”, including practical changes such as swapping to white from brown envelopes.

IM finished by running through the nine report recommendations, including action to invest in advocacy; better linking systems to reduce the number of times people have to retell their story; creating an awareness campaign; and greater awareness of domestic abuse.

POK thanked IM for her contribution, noting it was extremely useful and then introduced Greig Inglis (GI), Lecturer in Psychology at the University of West Scotland. GI's research interests are in public health and mental wellbeing. His recent work has focussed on the extent to which people living on low incomes

experience poverty stigma across the UK, and how poverty stigma affects mental health and well-being outcomes.

GI introduced the stigma measurement tool, funded by the Mental Health Foundation, and how it has been used to generate important information around the prevalence of stigma. The tool was developed with Strathclyde University, the Mental Health Foundation and The Poverty Alliance. The work included a survey of 1,029 adults living in Wales, asking questions about personal and household characteristics. The research focused on received stigma – this relates to individuals' personal experiences of being negatively judged, excluded, or treated unfairly by other because they live on a low income, alongside perceived structural stigma – beliefs that people living on low incomes are treated unfairly by public services, decision makers and institutions such as the media.

The researchers wanted to know:

- How common is poverty stigma in Wales?
- Which groups are more likely to report poverty stigma in Wales?

GI ran through the survey findings relating to how often respondents had experienced received stigma over the past 12 months. The most common response was that 'people make negative assumptions about me because I don't have much money' (17%). The percentage of people who reported that at least one type of received stigma had happened to them 'sometimes' 'often' or 'always' in the past 12 months was 24% of all people and 35% of people with household incomes less than £20,000

When asked about how often, if at all, different forms of perceived structural stigma happens in the UK, the most common response was politicians looking down on people who live on low-incomes (82%) followed by people on low incomes being looked down upon by newspapers (73%). The percentage of people who believe that at least one type of structural stigma occurs 'sometimes' often or always in UK was 87% of all people and 85% of people with household incomes less than £20,000. So the contrast here was smaller.

GI outlined that the research found that younger people; people experiencing food insecurity; people with disability; people who receive social security; or people who rent from a local authority or housing association were more likely to report received and perceived poverty-related stigma.

In closing the presentation, GI said that the key takeaway was that we can measure stigma, and the experience is very common.

### Agenda Item 3: Q&A

POK thanked GI for his contribution and said the work was very interesting and helped to deepen our understanding of stigma. POK then opened up for the Q&A. Questions related to:

- Public polling work being conducted by Save the Children around public perceptions of poverty. Answers pointed to the need to gather more information from people experiencing poverty and stigma to improve the data we have in this area. Also pointed to work by JRF pointing how closely interlinked poverty and stigma is – we cannot tackle one without the other.
- What we can do to tackle this – what are the things that would make a difference? Answers pointed to the need to co-produce solutions with people experiencing poverty, to consider the way we talk about poverty and how this impacts access to services; and Isla directed to the nine recommendations in the Poverty Alliance report.
- Were gypsy travelers factored into this work or involved in the citizen panel? IM outlined that there while people from ethnic minority backgrounds were represented on the panel, there was no input from gypsy travelers but recognized that there would be distinct experiences for this group.
- How has the research accounted for discrimination towards women in the social security system? GI outlined that gendered differences did not come out in the Welsh research but know that women can be more impacted or the experiences can be deeper. Might be a need to look specifically at parents for the gendered dimension to come to the force. POK noted the importance of gendered perspectives.

POK brought the discussion to a close and asked Ruth Boyle (RB) of the Poverty Alliance to summarise next steps. RB said she would write-up the day's discussion and would consider how we factor these findings into the future work of the CPG.

#### Agenda Item 4: AGM

It was noted that Beatrice Wishart was tied-up in Committee and had been unable to attend the AGM, as previously hoped.

POK vacated the chair for Alex Rowley (AR) to elect new convenor. POK confirmed as Convenor with the motion seconded by AR and Monica Lennon (ML). AR handed chair back to POK to elect co-convenor. BW had indicated her desire to continue in her role, and was confirmed as Co-Convenor with motion seconded by AR and ML. Poverty Alliance elected as Secretariat.

To close the meeting, Ralph Hartley, Policy Officer at the Poverty Alliance provided an overview of the work of the CPG since the last AGM.

- CPG published report of inquiry into rural poverty in May of this year.
- The inquiry highlighted the unjust additional costs faced by people in rural Scotland – how this impacts people on low incomes, as well as the wider effects on rural communities.
- In particular, the inquiry highlighted how the core additional costs (and barriers to access) faced by rural communities for transport and energy are at the heart of a whole range of connected challenges – including access to childcare, education and employment and affordable and healthy food.

- It also highlighted the opportunities for policy-making for rural Scotland to be better connected and called for rural policy to be made with an anti-poverty lens; and anti-poverty policy to be made with a rural lens.
- The report received press coverage in the Press and Journal and the poverty alliance have been working to share its messages more broadly with MSPs and partner organisations.

### Agenda Item 5: AOB

RB thanked POK and Beatrice Wishart for their hard work on the CPG and said that the Poverty Alliance were pleased to be continuing to work with both members on the Group.

RB also indicated that the next meeting will be a joint session with the CPG on Disability related to disability benefits. The provisional date is the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, with more detail shared in the new year.

Meeting closed.