

CPG on Children and Young People
Thursday 16 May 2013
13:15 – 14:30
Committee Room 2, the Scottish Parliament
Chair: Marco Biagi MSP

Welfare Reform

Attendees

Marco Biagi MSP
Kezia Dugdale MSP
Michael McMahon MSP
Davina Adamson, CCPS
Jeni Bainbridge, Children in Scotland
Laura Bennison, Children in Scotland
Sara Collier, Children in Scotland
Jen Drummond, Children in Scotland
Helen Davis, West Lothian Youth
Action Project
Brandi Lee Lough Dennell, LGBT Youth
Scotland
Jennifer Drummond, Children in
Scotland
Jacqui Dunbar, Barnardo's
Nancy Fancott, CCPS
Fee Ferguson, Children in Scotland
David Ferrier, Includem
Maurice Frank, Personalised Education
Now
David Gaughan, Ypeople
Margot Gillon, City of Edinburgh
Council
Hugh Hall, STA Scotland
Alison Hardie, Young Scot
Louise Hill, CELCIS
Nico Juetten, SCCYP
Lesley Kelly, Centre for Research on
Families and Relationships
Richard Knott, Salvation Army
Cath Logan, Big Lottery Fund
Nancy Loucks, Families Outside
Sara Lurie, Fostering Network
David O'Neill, COSLA
Chris McConnell, Fife Council
Jim McCormick, Joseph Rowntree
Foundation
Paula McLeay, COSLA
Michael McClements, COSLA
Lesley McNab, CHAS
Carrie Manning, Prince's Trust
Louise Marryat, Glasgow University
Lisa Marshall, Children 1st
Rebecca Middlemiss, RCPsych in
Scotland
Karen Mountney, CRFR
Jennifer Mowat, Enable
Paul Mullan, Quarriers
Agnes Mullen, Church of Scotland
Alison Newlands, SCIS
Eloise Nutbrown, Save the Children
Sarah Paterson, Youthlink Scotland
Mags Powell, GYP Borders
Katie Rafferty, National Deaf Children's
Society
Helen Reilly, BMA Scotland
Caryn Robertson, Prince's Trust
Scott Robertson, Quarriers
Tracy Rodger, CLIC Sargent
Saffron Rohan, CELCIS
Barbara Schuler, Youthlink Scotland
Andrew Shoolbread, SOSCN
Clare Simpson, Parenting across
Scotland
Connie Smith, NSPCC Child Protection
Research Centre/University of
Edinburgh
Bob Stewart, Four Square
Kay Tisdall, University of
Edinburgh/CRFR
Diane Thomson, Alcohol Focus
Scotland
Kyle Thornton MSYP, Scottish Youth
Parliament
Lesley Warren, Children in Scotland
Linda Whitmore, Enable Scotland

Lynn Williams, SCVO
Jane Wilson, Alcohol Focus Scotland

Apologies

Joan McAlpine MSP
Kim Atkinson, Scottish Sports
Association
Margaret Barclay, Alliance
Salena Begley, Family Fund
Leah Benson, Circle
May Chamberlain, Relationships
Scotland
Mo Colvin, RNIB Scotland
Grant Costello MSYP, Scottish Youth
Parliament
Mairi Ferris, Fife Council
Lorna Goodwin, Carers Trust
Rob Gowans, Scottish Youth
Parliament
Emma Grindulis, Together Scotland
Juliet Harris, Together Scotland
Loraine Herschell, Partners in
Advocacy

Keith Irving, Living Streets
Fiona Jones, CI@n Childlaw
Charlene Kelly, Relationships Scotland
Ruth Kerracher, Article 12
Marion Macleod, Children in Scotland
Sharon McCluskie, Play Scotland
Cathy McCulloch, Children's Parliament
Vicky McGraw, West Dunbartonshire
Council
Felicity Mehendale, Hospital for Sick
Children
Louise Morgan, Carers Trust
Andy Mount, West Lothian Youth
Action Project
Muriel Mowat, SIAA
Calum Munro, Highland Children's
Forum
Eileen Prior, Scottish Parent Teacher
Council
Kim Smith, YWCA Scotland
Keith Robson, ATL Scotland
Christopher Wiles, NHS Grampian
Megan Wilson, Sense Scotland

Marco welcomed everyone to the meeting and acknowledged the apologies we had received. The minute of the previous meeting in March on access to sport for young women was approved and Marco confirmed that the action from the last meeting – a letter from the CPG to the Minister for Sport around the issues raised – had been completed and a response would be circulated within the group as soon as possible. Members were invited to take copies of the original letter.

Marco extended a warm welcome to the speakers.

Michael McMahon MSP, Convener of the Welfare Reform Committee

Michael thanked the CPG for inviting him to speak. He introduced the Parliament's Welfare Reform Committee (WRC), which was set up over a year ago, the purpose of which was to assess the welfare reform changes as they come through and to avoid disparate approaches to the emerging legislation as different committees respond. The establishment of the Committee has allowed a focal point to look at the impact of the reforms as they are implemented for people and to look ahead to projections for impending changes.

The Committee has looked at the legislation and the powers of the Scottish Government and has taken it upon itself to address the changes and attempt to mitigate the worst impact. It acknowledges that being realistic, the Scottish

Government will never be in a position to get rid of these changes but it is important to highlight the impact and seek ideas from stakeholders about how to improve the situation. The Committee is engaged with stakeholders and individuals as much as possible and they have held a series of meetings to hear from stakeholders and created a portal on their website called 'Your Say' to get an understanding of the picture at a grassroots level. Witnesses have been brought in to explain what has happened or what will happen because of the changes. They have had a wide breadth of evidence and are now focussing on inviting specific evidence to get a more in depth idea of different individual sets of circumstances.

It is estimated that £1.6 billion per annum is being taken out of the Scottish economy through the changes, which equates to an average of £480 per year being taken from every working adult in Scotland. The Committee will also look at the criteria for passported benefits, the eligibility for which there have been recent changes. As regulations are coming forward, they are being monitored by the Committee. So far, by listening and sharing learning, the Committee are putting forward a message to Scottish Government about how to mitigate the impact of the welfare changes in Scotland. They would like to hear directly from children and young people about their lived experiences.

Lynn Williams, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

As a member of the Scottish Government Expert Working Group on as well as working with SCVO, Lynn particularly welcomed the invitation to speak to the CPG. She has recently published some mapping work looking at the impact of welfare reform on the third sector and cited it as 'probably one of the most significant policy challenges we face' which was, incidentally, a view supported by members in feedback. It is their view that the third sector has a very important role to play in mitigating the impact given their unique role in supporting families most likely to be affected.

The SCVO approach began with a large conference looking at welfare reform followed by a sector-wide survey with follow up interviews. Some of the results they found were not surprising but absolutely captured, anecdotally, the challenges people are facing. Key findings included that 72% of respondents had experienced a big increase in demand to support people with welfare reform. Issues included the appeals process and under-occupancy rules. There had been an 87% increase in welfare based enquiries, a number which is expected to double for a staff team of four. Over 88% of respondents expected an increase in requests for support. They noted a gap in the number of services that needed to respond to welfare reform including IT, advocacy and advice and transport.

Lynn signposted the group to the full report available on the SCVO website and stressed that the Scottish Government need to look more strategically at where they fund the third sector to support those facing challenging differences to the welfare they receive. She invited experiences to be submitted via her by email to

SCVO. Lynn went on to advise that they will be reporting back next month from the expert working group on the costs of welfare and transition issues as well as considering potential changes following Scotland's national referendum: what would happen in the events of a 'yes' vote?

Jim McCormick, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

As the Scotland adviser to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), Jim welcomed the opportunity to speak at the CPG. He began by highlighting that in Scotland, a boy born in a wealthy area, lives 14 years longer than a peer living in poverty. Jim provided the context of welfare reform from the perspective of the JRF: in principle, it is neither a good nor bad thing. There is a strong case for reform to prevent people from becoming trapped in poverty. However the changes are being introduced against a backdrop of a growing jobs market but one with a messy bottom end in terms of people's income, skills and prospects. During research recently conducted by JRF, they gathered some vox pops around how people feel about welfare reform and what their main emotions are – these were fear and panic which is not good for social policy reform.

Jim stressed that over the past 15-20 years, there has been a gradual decrease in child poverty but that over the coming years, poverty will rise again as a direct result of welfare reform. Furthermore, the 1% uprating cap on benefit will be the single biggest driver in poverty. People who rely on benefits and tax credits will be worse off because energy and housing costs aren't capped at 1%.

The sanctions for those who are seen to abuse the welfare system will get much tougher: Jim felt that now is the time to engage with Job Centre Plus to ensure that sanctions aren't used and that the impact on lone parents is particularly avoided. He highlighted the need to think and act together about ways to drive down costs that families have, specifically around childcare as this is a big contributor. 75% of new resources from Westminster will go on a vouchers system to better off families and only 20% will go to families who are struggling. Jim advocated for Scotland to mitigate the harmful impact through our early years policies.

Paula McLeay and Michael McClements – COSLA

Paula and Michael highlighted that there isn't much within welfare reform that Local Government won't have to deal with. It will affect them on several levels:

1. They will need to prepare for operational change, passported benefits and housing benefits.
- 2, There will be a reduction in income to local government.
3. There will be an increase in demand to local government for services and a changing nature of demand.

They are concerned about the changing nature of welfare provision and are currently collectively dealing with all of these issues.

They acknowledged the increased vulnerability for families as a result of welfare reform, specifically through the single household payment and conditionality for this. Whilst there will be exemptions for some families, COSLA remain concerned about the power dynamics at play in certain households as a result of hidden risks, gambling, debt and alcohol and drug abuse. They stressed the importance of focussing on the evidence and getting our priorities right. Employment is one of the priorities behind 'making work pay' and COSLA feel that their challenge will be balancing the shift in demand and resources. They anticipate that they will be fundamentally challenged in how they do business and arrange support.

Group discussion

Following a quick, informal poll within the Committee Room, Marco established that many in attendance work in the 3rd sector and all envisage an increase in demand for their services. He invited comments and shared experiences.

Sarah Lurie, Fostering Network in Scotland shared that they had done a lot of campaigning at Westminster and that they believe that foster carers should be exempt from the bedroom tax. This is partly due to the tremendous impact it has on who can offer their services as foster carers. So far, the campaign has only been successful for foster carers who have one bedroom, but Sarah highlighted that we need to consider the impact on foster parents of multiple children and young people. Michael MacMahon shared that the work programme for the WRC going forward will include medical conditions and pensioner contributions. We are yet to see the full impact of the bedroom tax.

Bob Stewart, Four Square, welcomed the fact that the Scottish Parliament had put together the WRC and called for Scottish Government to also look at this issue. The sanctions for homeless people under welfare reform, many of whom have addictions, learning disabilities and mental health issues are draconian and causing huge issues for their service users. Many of these homeless people are already not great at life's bureaucracy and going to meetings etc. The result will be a huge increase in people having their benefits suspended and turning to food banks.

Single payments were identified as particularly problematic for this group because monthly payments are no longer being made directly to social landlords and large sums of money going directly to people who lead chaotic lives can be disastrous. Increase in homelessness is anticipated due to a loss of tenancy when many recipients inevitably spend the money under the new system.

Single bedroom houses have dried up so there is no social housing for those who have a single bedroom requirement. Bob asked that the Scottish Parliament look into house building in line with the welfare reform changes. Marco responded that Edinburgh have started using money to build new one bedroom houses but there's still a big gap to bridge.

Richard Meade, Barnardo's Scotland, expressed concern around sanctions for care leavers under the new system. He pointed out that there is a difference between local authority areas and how they will bring the sanctions in. Under the CYP Bill, there will be a duty for local authorities to respond to requests for support from a young care leaver but should we be looking to that legislation to help mitigate the impact of welfare reform on young care leavers? We also need to consider how existing Scottish legislation will interact with the CYP Bill.

Michael McClements, COSLA, agreed that welfare reform and the bedroom tax in particular, is a key point for many local authorities. There are many efforts trying to address homelessness but the Westminster legislation cutting across Scottish efforts. COSLA are concerned also about the impact on the public purse; they are concerned about the reforms will be wasteful of public money. Michael stressed that welfare reform is wide reaching and will impact on UK ministers and DWP officials. COSLA will be obliged to adjust their services in response to this.

Lynn Williams – highlighted that this issue is something which drives through every part of policy in Scotland and that we are currently missing a cross cutting impact assessment. The Welsh Government did this and we urgently need to look at what are we dealing with and how can we work collectively across the sector.

Micahel McMahan stressed that welfare reform Act prevents Scottish Government or local authorities from directly stepping in if people are sanctioned. He reminded the group of the need to be clever in how we mitigate the impacts because regulations limit the Scottish Government's and local authorities' ability to step in.

Alison Johnstone MSP identified the single payments as a particular problem: Dunedin Canmore ran a pilot which found that without a lot of personal support it was crystal clear that there would be problems for tenants.

Linda Whitmore, Enable Scotland, shared that there is fear and panic among members of Enable who have been frightened by letters from the DWP which are incomprehensible. Families are frightened of being pushed further into poverty: research – 'Counting the Cost' by Contact a Family - shows that families of CYP with disabilities have experienced a rise in poverty. Enable called for families to be able to know where to turn in their local communities if they are worried and for all communications to be clear and comprehensible. They would like to see accessible information and signposting to local support so that families are not made to feel alone and isolated.

Tracy Rodgers, Clic Sergeant, drew the group's attention to the vulnerable families of CYP with cancer and the additional costs of cancer treatment. The stress level on these families will be huge and we need to consider whether they have the capacity and resources to cope as well as considering how best to support families that are already stressed and vulnerable.

Paula McLeay, COSLA, stressed that the cross cutting impact assessment on policy would be very welcome from their perspective. As the welfare reform drives up crises, all efforts in early intervention and prevention are challenged. We need to reassess the current policy and practices and whether they are now fit for purpose post-welfare reform. With regards to LAC, welfare reform raises potential issues for them and their place within a family also. Paula called for non-welfare reform related support services as well as the new support services that will be required to 'get our house in order' in terms of debt management, advocacy, support, good communication etc. We need to consider with the DWP and other partners how we respond to the changes and debt management and how we support people to access and manage universal credit.

Michael McMahon shared that the WRC had met with Dunedin Canmore, who had been part of a pilot of housing associations, providing a support worker from Citizen's Advice Bureau to work alongside people identified as vulnerable to give them an introduction to universal credit. The cost to provide this was huge and the cost implications and the arrears meant that some housing associations might go under. The Committee met with 3 tenants of Dunedin Canmore during the research, including a man who is alcoholic who will soon be receiving £800 directly rather than his social landlord receiving it for rent. He dreads this situation. Ultimately, if people are made homeless, the responsibility will be on the local authorities, not on the housing association. For authorities like Glasgow this will be very difficult.

The point was made that more emphasis is needed on tenancy sustainability and support. COSLA have opposed the bedroom tax and single payments and the DWP have supported some exceptions, however COSLA remain concerned about the impact. People are trying to get their services ready and local authorities and housing associations will do best they can but welfare reform will, unfortunately, have a significant knock-on effect. Local government is picking up the cost of the reforms currently but we need to be realistic about what we ask of local authorities; not everything can be subsidised by them as there is not endless resource at their disposal.

Marco asked what happens if a housing association goes under, to which the response was that there are protections for their financial stability and the Scottish Housing Regulator would step in at that point. If many start to go under, it would start to effect the housing situation significantly. Rent arrears is debt and it does exist as a long term problem to be borne and resolved.

Lynn told the group that the expert working group had picked up on issues of advice and information and would certainly consider this in terms of accessibility.

The group agreed that it can be easy to get involved in party politics around this issue but our plea is that we work together on this challenge collectively across the sector and remain focussed on what is at stake. We need to find a way through this and consider local partnerships.

Councillor, David O'Neill, representing COSLA, reflected on what the group had heard and experienced together as depressing, especially when considering the long term, lifetime impact. He stressed that considering the correlation of income and educational attainment, we are in the process of damaging people's life chances by challenging educational attainment. Irrespective of a 'yes' vote in the independence referendum, welfare should be devolved to Scotland and resources should be brought to the community planning partnership table. The DWP come currently but they bring no resource.

AGM

Office bearers

Kezia Dugdale MSP and Marco Biagi MSP – Joint Conveners

Alison Johnstone, MSP – Deputy Convener

Children in Scotland and Youthlink – Secretariat

All positions were voted on and approved by members of the CPG present.

Lesley Warren, Children in Scotland, drew the attention of the group to a recent campaign run by Children in Scotland and the connections to the impact of welfare reform on education. They have been investigating the effects of the latest public sector cuts. As part of the research they had conducted a survey of their members, seeking their views on the impact of the cuts to education and wraparound care. They had sent out targeted questions to families, local authorities, teachers and those who work with children and young people. Lesley highlighted the fact that the results would be published over the coming months but shared some results thus far:

- **90%** of families surveyed believed that education would either decrease or significantly decrease because of public sector cuts.
- **65%** of teachers surveyed did not believe that they will be adequately resourced in order to deliver local and national education standards in the coming year
- **49%** of local authority personnel believe that investing in the early years through health initiatives, nurseries, community groups and childcare is important to achieve higher educational standards.

Lesley left flyers for members and invited any questions or comments at the end.

Jane Wilson, Alcohol Focus Scotland, shared information about a new app launching on 5 May 2013 to look at chaotic drinking. It has been named 'YPAD – young people affected by another's drinking'. This password protected app has been developed, through a variety of different case studies and stories, to help young people to explore if they are being affected and to adopt some coping strategies. Different features include a self-assessment tool, a walk-in help section with animation and stories and links to a directory of services in local areas and a selection of coping strategies. Jane invited CPG members to get in touch if they want to be added to the directory.

Action points

As the Scottish Government are in a position to increase allocation of money to housing associations and local authorities, Marco will write on behalf of the CPG to explore the potential of this along with consideration of a cross cutting review of impact.

Marco thanked the speakers for their contributions and invited CPG members to return after the summer recess in September 2013.