



5th meeting of Scotland's Cross-Party Group on Social Enterprise in The Scottish Parliament

Scotland's policy forum for social enterprise

Tuesday 29 January 2013, 13:15 - 14:45

(external guests please arrive at 13:00 at the latest to get through security)

Committee Room 1, The Scottish Parliament

After a free vote of group members the theme of this meeting is **the impacts of welfare reform in Scotland**.

UK Government welfare reforms are already affecting social enterprises and the people they work with and the full impacts have yet to be realised. Debate the issues affecting you and your organisation, service user impact, unintended consequences and the solutions available. With a new Scottish Parliament Committee on welfare, as well as Scottish Government and local authority initiatives there is much to discuss.

Cross-Party Groups (CPGs) provide an opportunity for members of all parties, outside organisations and members of the public to meet and discuss a shared interest in a particular cause or subject. The Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Social Enterprise in The Scottish Parliament is Scotland's social enterprise policy forum. You can see details of the Purpose of the group, MSP involvement and the external member list etc. on The Scottish Parliament website [here](#).

Agenda

13:00 Arrival at The Scottish Parliament (external guests please arrive at 13:00 at the latest to get through security and to be taken to the relevant room).

13:15 Networking and light lunch.

13:30 Introduction by CPG Convener, Chic Brodie MSP.

13:40 Presentations by each of the speakers: Jim McCormick, Scotland Adviser, Joseph Rowntree Foundation [unable to attend on the day], Michael McMahon MSP, Convener of The Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee, Rhona Penman, Advice Services Co-ordinator, Link Group Ltd.

14:10 Discussion with speakers and group members.

14:45 Meeting ends.

If you need a contact or information after the event please email:

duncan.thorp@socialenterprisescotland.org.uk.

Some background reading:

1 [Preparing for Welfare Reform](#). More information about this research and other important information about changes to benefits can be found on our newly dedicated website on [welfare reform](#). For further information please contact Regina Serpa rserpa@sfha.co.uk

2 Monitoring Poverty report for Scotland: www.jrf.org.uk

3 <http://www.scvo.org.uk/policy-campaigning/welfare-reform/> and are currently carrying out a Scotland-wide mapping exercise to help the third sector deal with the impact of UK welfare reforms. A major part of this is [a survey to capture the sector's views](#), information on who is doing what, intelligence on the effects of this crisis, and ideas on how we can mitigate the impact of welfare reform on people and communities throughout Scotland. You can take the survey via the link and other ways to engage are listed on their website.

4 The Elizabeth Finn Stigma research

5 SCOWR manifesto

Report from 5th Cross-Party Group on Social Enterprise in The Scottish Parliament meeting.

The theme of this meeting was “the impacts of welfare reform in Scotland”. The report below summarises the main points of the discussion.

Tue 29 January 2013

Chaired By Chic Brodie MSP

Michael McMahon MSP, Convener of The Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee (MM): We will be offering scrutiny of the specific legislation. There are relevant devolved issues such as Council Tax and housing benefit and we have the Scottish Welfare Fund. We are looking for individual perspectives and case studies and evidence from advice agencies. We had a study visit to ATOS and NHS Occupational Health, Safety and Return to Work Service SALUS, Personal Independent Payment (PIPs) and work with ATOS. The role of GP's in the process, though the DWP makes the decisions. Only 50% of relevant GP's forms are returned. GPs can charge if later in the process. Councils are given money then divide it up. DWP not got/not giving the information needed. There are also Scots law complications as part of the process.

Chic Brodie MSP (CB): We need a person allocated from the group to cover the welfare agenda. South Ayrshire and new homeless statistics.

Rhona Penman, Advice Services Co-ordinator, Link Group Ltd (RP): The background is that the DWP were managing advice services, now their focus is on welfare reform. In terms of Link then a staff increase is probable due to the reforms (currently at 400). Welfare reform is the biggest reform since the welfare state was created. The aim of the Act is “to allow people to get back into work”. Universal Credit is no simplification for the individual claimant. 70% of those in social housing receive the benefit. The bedroom tax and the “digital by default” applications strategy of the DWP. We need support to access online. Basic bank accounts issue. DWP will shift from guidance and information to administration only. Who will offer support? RSLs and credit unions are on the list. The RSL has to pass on information to tenants - and also then take the blame. Much research has been done already. Rent arrears increase already happening, as well as Link work on explaining the changes. There is always an impact on business viability and reduced income. Also the impact of the homelessness legislation in Scotland. Adaptation costs and disproportionate impact on disabled people of the reforms. We have the Link Advice Service and we want to share best practice.

Lesley Kelly, Social Enterprise Alliance Midlothian (SEAM): DWP are being unrealistic in terms of voluntary sector role. What happens to childcare issue and aftercare clubs?

RP: DWP says employers know how to deal with reform but this is not the case. There is little information. The role of DWP management partnership teams.

MM: Lack of detail is the big issue. Dunedin Canmore is the pilot organisation for the changes and we have visited them. The emphasis is now on the individual to provide information to the DWP about any change in circumstances. There is speculation about the delays in implementation of reforms.

Kirsteen Currie, Office of Roseanna Cunningham MSP: We were told by the DWP that they will no longer be responding in writing, only by phone. Is that the same for others?

RP: Not heard that before. The mindset of the DWP that “it is up to you to translate our words”.

Kirsteen Currie, Office of Roseanna Cunningham MSP: They see MSPs as “clients”, we’ve sent them a strongly worded letter.

MM: ATOS will be doing communication by phone with an emphasis on weekend targets.

CB: It would be good if you could share the letter with all MSPs.

Bruce Gunn, Delivered Next Day Personally CIC: Those with disabilities. GPs have been great, problem is with ATOS, harsh treatment. Disabled people have to go through the whole application procedure again plus interviews, with associated costs of lawyers and doctors.

MM: ATOS system is final, standard forms on computers, process is appalling. But it's not just ATOS who are part of the procedures.

CB: An issue of communication and who is giving out the information.

RP: Appeals process not changed in many years. ATOS standard process, flawed from the start. Always the decision maker in the DWP - and they can contradict medical evidence. Process is unclear.

MM: GPs contractually obliged to respond to DWP letters.

Lesley Kelly, Social Enterprise Alliance Midlothian (SEAM): Banks and welfare reform. Statistics from cash machines and a role for local retailers etc? Banks not really interested in the client group.

MM: Chaotic lifestyles and rent payments. This is about real life circumstances. Heard case study of an alcoholic who said "£800 in my bank account and I will spend it". Real, practical issues. We have been briefed by Dunedin Canmore on these big issues.

CB: In-work benefits an issue too?

RP: The IT will have to support 8 million claims. Reforms already hitting, single households affected, plus issue of general economic climate. The new Scottish Government £5.4M fund for advice services. Banking and backdated claims issue, including rent arrears. Lack of banking products and services. Credit unions have a role to play.

CB: We can at least communicate and highlight the issues. MSPs are here to listen and represent.