

# Cross-Party Group on Poverty

28<sup>th</sup> April 2023 10am-11am

Minute

Present

MSPs

Pam Duncan Glancy MSP, Beatrice Wishart MSP

Invited guests

Catherine MacNeil, Catriona Mallows, Polly Chapman

Non-MSP Group Members

Ashley Mclean, Ruth Boyle, Glen Nixon, Jill Marchbank, Susan Lyons, Ruth Wilkinson, Anne McCormack, Jayne Jones, Florence Burke, Leah Duncan-Karrim, Raheel Ashraf, Taegan Lewis, Mairi McCallum, Susan Murray, Zoe Meldrum, Lucy Higginson, Cassy Rutherford, Selma Augestad, Rob McDowall, Caroline Hastings, Debbie Horne, Eilidh MacDonald, Jo McGilvray, Ellie Wagstaff, Susan McKellar, Lucy Miller, John Halliday, Gemma Richardson, Felicia Szloboda, Rhiannon Sims, David Stewart, Mike Corbett, Michael Marley, Lindsay Graham, Kimberley Somerside, Paul Spicker, Tilly Robinson-Miles, Lucy Daniels, Stacey Cuthbertson, Caroline Berry, Snow Curtis-Kolu, Cllr Nairn McDonald, Jane Callaghan

Apologies

Monica Lennon MSP, Miles Briggs MSP, Eileen Cawley, Keith Robson, Andrea Bradley, Emma Jackson, Bill Scott

Agenda item 1: Introduction and Overview of Inquiry

**Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP (PDG)** opens the call beginning by calling praise to for the stigma enquiry noting interest from SSJS committee and the Presiding Officer's team.

Opens the enquiry on rural poverty. Notes that poverty is often assumed to be an urban phenomenon, so this enquiry is welcome. The energy crisis in particular was acutely felt by people living on low incomes in rural communities.

**Ruth Boyle (RB) from The Poverty Alliance** provides an overview of the inquiry. Notes that rural poverty was an issue that members felt necessary to cover. Defined rural as 'settlements with a population of less than 3000 which is the current working Scottish Government definition.

RB explains that for this enquiry, the CPG will be holding 5 evidence sessions featuring experts which will create a written report. Focus on public services and a lived experience panel.

PDG hands over to first speaker, Polly Chapman, Co-Founder of Impact Hub Inverness.

## Agenda item 2: Polly Chapman, Co-Founder of Impact Hub Inverness

Talking about work on rural poverty in 2019-21.

Extensive study focusing on Harris, Blairgowrie East Perthshire and North Tyne Valley. Included literature review, interviews with organising and individuals with experience of rural poverty.

Explored systems of support available to people in rural areas facing poverty and how they were supporting those facing financial hardship: markets (employment, housing etc), voluntary sector, state (housing, welfare etc) and friends and family. .

Key findings:

Rural economies are changing.

- Industries from land based to tourism,
- commuting to higher paid, secure professional jobs, transport became issue through this.
- Jobs were often seasonal, low pay.
- Limited choice of employers so a lot of self employment through necessity.
- Links to housing, childcare and public transport.

The welfare state in rural areas.

- Multiple jobs, seasonable work not interacting with social security system well.
- Centralization of job centres and welfare services.
- Increased visibility and stigma due to comparative wealth of people and surrounding communities.
- Real issue in Harris where workplace accessibility centres not on island so if you go to attend a workplace accessibility appointment, you're deemed able to work, but if you don't go then you have to wait 6 months for a visit and this entire time involves no support from state to do this.
- Big links to debt and delays of universal credit on Harris.

## Voluntary and Community organisations

- Provide significant support in both avoiding financial difficulty and helping to lift people out of it- often first point of call for folk facing financial difficulty.
- Budget cuts and shift to competitive tender causing issues for rural orgs.

## Family, friends and neighbours.

- Important source of help but important how help is offered.
- Issues for more remote residents who may not have any family close by.

Overall, we need to better rural proof policies and consider how they work in practice for people living in rural locations.

## Agenda item 3: Catherine MacNeil, Senior Research Manager, Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Research on how rural poverty presents itself in the highlands and islands called *My life in the Highlands and Islands*. Notes that the highlands has higher proportion of low paid work; only half of respondents are in receipt of living wage.

The level of part time workers is higher in H&I region – highest in remote areas and the self-employed.

An acceptable minimum income standard is higher in rural areas linked to higher transport, housing, and off-grid energy costs. In 2016 living costs were measured to be 10-33% higher compared to urban areas.

Transport- high reliance on cars so cars are perceived a necessity not a luxury.

Fuel poverty – considerable higher in H&I than other parts of Scotland, most remote most disadvantaged. Even before the energy crisis over half residents felt their homes were expensive to heat. Quality of housing stock contributes to this.

Opportunities emerging - investment in infrastructure is key to tackling rural poverty such as more efficient transport, better quality housing and increasing digital connectivity.

Data on rural poverty needs to improve, funding mechanism (e.g., levelling up very urban focused)

## Agenda item 4: Catriona Mallows, Campaigns and Communications Lead, Scottish Rural Action

SRA seeks to life voices of people who live in rural and island communities. Our view is on better framing and strictures around rural poverty. SRA are very connection focus and these are crucial in helping people when struggling financially or otherwise.

SRA talking today about how we can better frame rural poverty and highlighting some of the broader structures impacting it.

When we think of rural and highland Scotland, we look at it through an idyllic lens: long golden beaches, blue skies, lots of tourism - which is true - however child poverty, isolation, lack of connectively and homelessness are just as present.

Any policies introduced to tackle rural poverty needs to recognise how these strong social connections engage with these structures and policies.

Electricity is 3-4 times more expensive than gas which leads people to disconnect and only heat one room. This is more unjust given how energy rich H&I is as a region providing 12% of energy yet a third of households in this area considered to be in extreme fuel poverty.

Childcare – lack of access is a driver of child poverty. Services are lower compared to urban due to lack of provision – this has particular impacts on a parental employment and women’s work in rural areas.

Closes by stressing that we need to tackle rural poverty through a rural lens utilising community resilience and moving away from ‘rural idyll’ paradigm. Praises the rural delivery plan by 2026 – poverty must be seen in an intersectional, cross-cutting way, building on the strengths of what already exists in these places in the face of hardship.

## Agenda item 5: Q&A

### **PDG moves onto Q&A**

**Beatrice Wishart MSP** – Commented to note the high level of wages in Shetland and calls attention to the high level of fuel poverty in Shetland.

**John Halliday (Community Renewable Trust)**– Survivability of community and voluntary organisations and their ability to grow and survive?

Polly – key finding of our research was the vulnerability of the third sector – big differences between urban third sector and rural; the sector looks very different. This vulnerability is becoming greater due to the growing pressure from the cost of living crisis.

Catherine – In remote island communities, notes big crisis amongst social care and also highlights significant fatigue in volunteers after covid and now cost of living crisis.

Catriona – Lots of third sector organisations have their own community spaces and buildings and the cost is becoming too high to be able to heat these spaces.

**Councillor Nairn McDonald:** How would any of the speakers suggest we balance rural poverty with urban poverty?

Catherine – One place to start is through partnership working with organisations such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

**PDG closes.**

**Notes that next meeting will be on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> June at 10-11 online. Meeting links to follow.**