

Four Nations Ministerial Group on Child Poverty

November Readout

KEY POINTS	
	• Emphasis on meaningful collaboration and on this forum actively shaping the strategy. Agreement on Terms of Reference. • Need for devolved settlements to be integral to the strategy, ensuring that UK Gov plans do not undermine current initiatives. • Importance of disaggregating data for each nation alongside UK-wide data. This should highlight differences on the factors and the experiences of poverty and better measure outcomes of initiatives for tackling poverty. • Key priorities raised include reconsidering the two-child limit, pursuing wider social security reform, and introducing a social tariff. • Need to increase incomes is vital, as higher employment does not necessarily equate to reduced poverty. • Consultations with people with lived experiences of poverty, such as children and families, flagged as crucial.

MEETING DETAILS	
Attendees	Chairs Alison McGovern (Minister for Employment, UK Government) Catherine McKinnell (Minister for School Standards, UK Government)
	SWNI Ministers Shirley-Anne Somerville (Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Scottish Government) Jane Hutt (Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Welsh Government) Emma Little Pengelly (Deputy First Minister, Northern Ireland Executive) Aisling Reilly (Junior Minister, Northern Ireland Executive)
	Officials (PS to MfSS) (PS to MfE) (Department for Work and Pensions) (Department for Work and Pensions) (Child Poverty Unit, Cabinet Office) (Child Poverty Unit, Cabinet Office) (Tackling Child Poverty and Social Justice, Scottish Gov) (PS to Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Scottish Gov) (PS to Deputy First Minister, NIE) (PS to Junior Minister, NIE) (Tackling Poverty, Welsh Gov) (PS to Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Welsh Gov)
Date	13 November 2024
Time	14:10-15:00
Location	virtual

ANNOTATED AGENDA

Welcome and introductions

MfE led introductions, set out the general importance of the Child Poverty Strategy and how it should deliver for children across the UK.

Collaboration across the Four Nations

MfSS highlighted the opportunity for meaningful collaboration with the Devolved Governments to develop a UK-wide Strategy. JW (DWP) covered approach to collaboration and engagement principles.

Scotland's views (Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice)

- Signalled appreciation for the official-level engagement to date, especially among analytical and policy teams.
- Stressed the need for in-depth understanding of devolution settlements being integral to the strategy work, to avoid unintended consequences.
- Noted the First Minister's support. Referenced previous mixed experiences of four nations meetings. Emphasised working together on a 'no surprises' basis.

Northern Ireland's views (Deputy First Minister)

- Confirmed that the Minister for Communities will take on future engagement on the Child Poverty Strategy.
- Highlighted that Northern Ireland's relative poverty is heavily influenced by the UK-wide economy. Economic fluctuations in other parts of the UK impact child poverty in NI.
- Noted that headline figures often misrepresent the reality. NI is a low-wage economy with child poverty also affecting working families.
- Stressed the impact of poverty, not just as a measure but in terms of its correlation to outcomes. Key challenges in NI include poverty of ambition, education, and opportunity; health inequalities; and affordable housing.
- Noted concerns are cross-party and that broader impacts of poverty are as important as income.

Wales's views (Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice)

- Emphasised the importance of continuing collaborative efforts on the strategy, noting the opportunity to complement, rather than duplicate efforts.
- Noted the importance of benefits and taxation to effectively tackle child poverty – this was in reference to Scotland's work in this area.
- Noted that income maximisation informed by shared data is essential, with DGs working more effectively with DWP to target efforts being a priority.
- Mentioned ongoing engagement with their active and challenging third sector.

Goals and scope of the strategy

MfSS provided an overview of the strategy, its launch document and publishing date. JW (DWP) covered the general strategy aims, noting the four target areas do not encompass all work government is doing in relation to children in poverty.

Scale of the challenge and DG progress

ES (DWP) outlined the scale of the challenge on child poverty across the UK. MfE invited reflections on this.

Scotland's views (Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice)

- In reference to the UK Government's focus, highlighted that increasing employment does not always equate to poverty reduction.
- Strongly stressed the impact of the two-child limit and Scotland's work to address this.
- Strongly stressed the need to introduce social tariffs through the UK strategy, recognising Scotland is unable to do this.

Scotland to provide further views in writing due to time constraints.

Wales's views (Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice)

- Focused on costs, particularly in terms of energy, and the need for a social tariff. Noted their partnership with the Fuel Bank Foundation to support those on pre-payment meters, which previous UK Governments did not explore.
- Stressed the need for social welfare reform and the impact of the two-child limit. Outlined their efforts to increase financial resilience by supporting the credit union movement and lenders. Observed the need for immediate and long-term actions, noting free childcare initiatives in Wales, such as Flying Start.

Northern Ireland's views (Deputy First Minister)

- Highlighted the challenge of the relative poverty metric being based on UK-wide data rather than comparing each nation's rate against its median income. This would add nuance and help explain regional variances.
 - ES (DWP) to investigate options in relation to this point.

Look ahead - strategic framework and policy priorities

MfE introduced the strategic framework, noting that increasing employment is not sufficient without a focus on quality of work. Noted childcare and social security comments and opened discussion on other priorities areas.

Wales's views (Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice)

- Advocated for entitlements and "putting money in people's pockets" through social security reform.
- Highlighted and is keen to share more details on initiatives being developed or already underway in Wales:
 - frees school meals for all pupils
 - school essentials grants
 - streamlining of benefit claims processes
 - basic income pilot for care leavers

Northern Ireland's views (Junior Minister Reilly)

- Strongly emphasised the need to increase incomes and pressures on family budgets.
- Raised the importance of consulting with people on the ground and understanding their lived experiences.

Scotland's views (Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice)

- Highlighted "fair work" as exceptionally important across all areas of the strategy.
- Noted that the Taskforce should review the work of Scotland's Minimum Income Guarantee Expert Group, whose final report is due to be published soon.

MfE reiterated the importance of UK-wide collaboration.

Close

MfSS noted the shared unity of purpose. Committed to looking at disaggregated data for each nation. Requested feedback on ensuring the Four Nations Ministerial Group on Child Poverty is effective.

ACTIONS

1. Explore the option of including disaggregated data on relative poverty measured against each of the nations' own median income
2. Provide a summary of the key points to the Taskforce, ahead of 18 November
3. DGs to reflect on how best to shape four nations session to ensure they are meaningful