



Work and Pensions Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 8976 Email workpencom@parliament.uk

From the Chair

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister

3 March 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

Measuring poverty

You will be aware of the work done by the Social Metrics Commission, chaired by Baroness Stroud, to develop a new approach to the measurement of poverty.

The Commission's overarching aim is one that we all share: to measure poverty in a way that better reflects the nature and experiences of poverty that different families in the UK have, and to build a consensus around poverty measurement and action in the UK.

Our predecessor Committee warmly welcomed the Government's decision, in 2019, to develop new statistics for measuring poverty, drawing on the Commission's methodology. We are, however, deeply concerned that work on this seems to have ground to a halt.

Baroness Stroud described the impact of this to us last November:

"My big concern is this: we are walking through a major pandemic in the dark and we are making Government decisions, some of which are very good, but they are in the dark. We really, really need to decide on what we as a society believe is poverty. We need to measure it; we need to track with it and use it as an early warning system to prevent vulnerable people from being hit. It is a serious matter that we are going into Budgets and Spending Reviews and we are spending £200 billion, but we have no sense at all as to the impact on poverty."

In evidence to us on 3 February, the Secretary of State described this work as something her predecessor had wanted to do. She told us that "it is not my intention to resurrect that yet" and that she did not have "a fixed time at all about restarting."

We understand, of course, that the Department for Work and Pensions has faced unprecedented pressure during the pandemic. It was quite right for this work to be paused temporarily while the Department prioritised the needs of the millions of people making new claims for benefits. Our concern, however, is that the Department appears to have no intention of restarting it.



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We would, therefore, be grateful if you could let us know whether – as we hope – the Government as a whole remains committed to this work, and, if it does, bring forward a timetable for it to restart without further delay.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen Timms".

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Chair, Work and Pensions Committee