Equal Opportunities Committee

1st Report, 2011 (Session 4)


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Equal Opportunities Committee

Remit and membership

Remit:

1. The remit of the Equal Opportunities Committee is to consider and report on matters relating to equal opportunities and upon the observance of equal opportunities within the Parliament.

2. In these Rules, “equal opportunities” includes the prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between persons on grounds of sex or marital status, on racial grounds or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin or of other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions such as religious beliefs or political opinions.”

*(Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament, Rule 6.9)*

Membership:

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Introduction

Approach

1. Equality is of paramount importance to spending decisions. Global economic uncertainty and the UK Government’s austerity programme frame the Scottish Government’s Draft Budget 2012-13 and Spending Review 2011. It is certain that the budget will reduce in value. Those facing inequality are the most vulnerable. Some fear that spending on reducing inequality could suffer in the need to make savings. Moreover, inequality detracts from economic performance and social well-being.

2. We structured our approach to scrutiny as follows—

   • key equality themes arising from the Draft Budget 2012-13. We planned our work with an emphasis on race and religion, whilst still taking views on any equality issue. This is part of a rolling annual programme in draft Budget scrutiny, whereby we intend to plan our work with a different emphasis each year and to cover all of the protected characteristics over this parliamentary session.

   • review of the former Equal Opportunities Committee’s recommendations on the Draft Budget 2011-12.

   • scrutiny of the Equality Statement, informed by the work of the Equality Budget Advisory Group.

3. We believe that this approach considers key themes arising this year and also provides continuity on the issues identified last year. Scrutiny should be a continuous process helping to inform subsequent study of the Scottish
Government’s budget, rather than a repetitive, short-term annual exercise. We will therefore return to the structural issues raised in this report in a mid-year exercise.

4. In the interests of mainstreaming, we also wrote to other committees involved in budget scrutiny. We asked each to make a short report setting out both the steps they took to consider equalities in draft-budget scrutiny and their findings.

5. Our deliberations were informed by advice from our external, expert adviser, Colin Lee, appointed on 13 September 2011.

6. We submitted our findings to the Finance Committee. Our full report to the Finance Committee was published on 9 December 2011. This report focuses on our findings and indicates where to find the relevant discussion of the evidence.

7. A glossary of acronyms used in the report is annexed.

Evidence

8. We thank all individuals and organisations that submitted evidence to us. All evidence received is publicly available. This includes written and oral evidence from fellow stakeholders, from other committees and from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (“the Cabinet Secretary”).

KEY EQUALITY THEMES

Strategic context

Resource-to-capital revenue shift

9. The Draft Budget 2012-13 proposes to move £200 million per year, over the Spending Review period, from resource spending to capital investment for infrastructure development. This aims in part to off-set a 36.7% capital decrease in the Scottish block grant. We recognise the reasons for the resource-to-capital revenue shift. However, we are concerned that there was no specific EqIA on ethnic minority, disability and gender impact, particularly as those groups are under-represented in the full range of construction-industry jobs. These include developing, civil engineering, demolition, electrical and plumbing installation and finishing. We therefore ask the Scottish Government to do an EqIA specific to this spending decision and report to us on the outcome.

   > Read more in paragraphs 8 to 12 of our full report

Preventative spend

10. We will continue to monitor the impact of preventative spend, throughout the year, on longer-term savings in public expenditure. We will do so by asking the Scottish Government about work and spend allocated to equality groups through the Change Fund for Older People’s Services, the Early Years and Early Intervention Change Fund and the Reducing Re-Offending Fund and any other relevant funds. Our aim is to enable a measurement of the longer-term savings generated.

   > Read more in paragraphs 13 to 16 of our full report
Health, Wellbeing and Cities

Demonstrating how equality groups’ needs have been considered

11. We are concerned about evidence to show the value of EqIAs. Without evidence of their effect, EqIAs risk being reduced to tokenism. We plan to return to this issue during the course of 2012.

12. We are also concerned about NHS boards’ performance in demonstrating improved clinical services to ethnic minority communities. NHS boards have been gathering statistical data on ethnic minority access to frontline services but there is inconsistency between NHS boards. Further, there is little evidence of statistical data use as a baseline for improving, for example, patient satisfaction with interpreting provision or improved clinical service outcomes, such as diabetes. Research has shown higher rates of diabetes in some ethnic-minority communities. So we recommend strongly that there should be increased accountability to the Scottish Government regarding NHS boards’ ethnic-minority reporting. We believe that all NHS boards should record a valid ethnic group code on acute in-patient day-case records and out-patient appointment records in at least 75% of cases. Three NHS boards already reach or exceed this standard. They should also show that data gathered has been used to improve services and patient satisfaction over that period. We call on the Government to identify a suitable way of achieving a 75% compliance standard over a suitable, specified timescale. We also ask that the Scottish Government make regular progress reports to us on this matter.

13. As mentioned above, research has shown higher rates of diabetes in some ethnic-minority communities. So we suggest using diabetes as a case-study example to show how the understanding of the condition’s prevalence and its sufferers’ demographic profile changes as data gathering improves and how this follows through to policy decisions and clinical outcomes.

> Read more in paragraphs 17 to 25 of our full report

Mental health

14. £6m is allocated to mental wellbeing and £16.2m to mental health legislation and services. The Cabinet Secretary told us—

- this supported the implementation of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003
- Support has also been put in place for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender centre for health and wellbeing, to assist mental health interventions for individuals in the LGBT community
- NHS Health Scotland has developed a mental health and race equality programme, which is focused on how to improve mental health services for individuals from different groups
- A range of applications is being developed within the funding streams to support individuals from an equalities perspective
15. **We welcome the Cabinet Secretary’s answer.** It is recognised that mental health is an issue in the population at large as well as in the ethnic minority groups. We believe that the outcome of the range of applications referred to by the Cabinet Secretary should be measured.

> Read more in paragraphs 26 to 28 of our full report

**Young carers**

16. We asked the Cabinet Secretary—

- whether the budget for carers and young carers would be retained
- whether investment in short breaks provision by the voluntary sector and carer and young carer identification and support would continue

17. We welcome his responses. **We remain concerned about how the spend from the carers budget is monitored** in relation to equality groups. We shall seek updates on this issue in the future.

**More complex learning needs**

18. Enable Scotland recently produced a report\(^6\) suggesting that children who have more complex needs are being failed by the system. Barriers seem to be put up because of the lack of awareness and training in schools and perhaps even in the pre-school sector. We asked the Cabinet Secretary whether anything could be done to ensure that those with complex needs were not failed when money became tight. Stating that the Government’s commitment for 16 to 19-year-olds was to make sure that everyone in that age group could get access to a learning or training opportunity, he said—

“‘We have to put the learner at the centre. That is the way forward. Why on earth should any individual miss their opportunity to progress through our education system because they happen to have more complex needs than another individual has?’”\(^7\)

19. We welcome the Cabinet Secretary’s stated commitment on this issue. But the Enable Scotland report contained some very disturbing information that seems to show barriers to properly and fully meeting individuals’ needs in the education system. We are alert to concerns about the impact of budget cuts on availability of courses for disabled people and vulnerable groups. We request that the Scottish Government take the issues raised into account in the context of the Draft Budget 2012-13 and report back to us.

> Read more in paragraphs 29 to 34 of our full report

**Equalities budget**

20. We welcome the specific retention of the Equalities budget. But in a time of public spending cuts, **the Equalities budget must achieve huge and demonstrable impact on diverse communities** in line with Scottish Government priorities – not just on direct service delivery, but also on strategic development. **It is imperative that the Government ensure outcome-focused monitoring of equality groups that it funds** in 2012-13 onwards.
21. Further, the Equalities budget should not be the only source of equality spending. The Draft Budget and the Equality Statement consistently highlight that budget allocations across Government and the public sector have considered equality. But there is little evidence of how equality considerations are reflected in the Draft Budget. This is no detail at all, for example, on any amounts allocated to addressing specific equality areas, other than the Equalities budget. We agree that all public bodies should be themselves responsible for mainstreaming but we are aware of the financial pressures that they face and the associated potential consequences for equalities issues. So it would be reassuring for the Draft Budget to demonstrate how it reflects equality considerations with firm examples in each portfolio section. The Government should also ensure, nationally and locally, more stringent monitoring and reporting processes that substantiate progress towards addressing inequality.

> Read more in paragraphs 39 to 41 of our full report

Finance, employment and sustainable growth

22. To strengthen economic growth and boost jobs growth, including social enterprise and business support, the Draft Budget allocates £421.2m and £24.5m to Enterprise, Energy and Tourism and to the Third Sector respectively.

Social enterprise

23. We remain concerned about the potential for ethnic-minority groups to fall further behind in social enterprise development as current funding seems geared towards more established social enterprises. The Just Enterprise programme gives capacity-building support to ethnic-minority groups but current funding criteria also need to be accessible to fledging social enterprises. Most social enterprises led by ethnic minority and other equality groups fall into this bracket.

> Read more in paragraphs 42 to 48 of our full report

Impact of job losses on equality groups

24. We recommend that the Scottish Government ensure a mechanism for monitoring the impact of job reductions and no-compulsory redundancy policies on equality groups in the third sector and report the outcome of that monitoring to us. We also recommend that these policies’ impact on equality groups in the public sector is assessed.

> Read more in paragraphs 49 to 55 of our full report

Education and Lifelong Learning

25. We request that the Scottish Government take account specifically of the race and gender issues raised with us in relation to Modern Apprenticeships in its Making Training Work Better review. We await the review report with interest and plan to use it as a starting point for further dialogue with the Government on this matter.
26. We believe that the Scottish Government should take positive action – i.e. steps to encourage applications from people from under-represented groups – in relation to the Modern Apprenticeships scheme. Doing this could also help to improve equalities representation in the construction industry. Examples of possible positive action in this context include—

- targeted promotion, including by careers services, of Modern Apprenticeships (including construction-related jobs) to ethnic-minority communities
- developing mentoring and other support schemes for retention of ethnic-minority Modern Apprentices
- improving statistical data-gathering to ensure solid benchmarking of the impact of these steps

27. We ask the Scottish Government to consider diversity pilots in partnership with unions and employers to ensure that apprenticeships offered are of high quality, open to all and lead on to a job and career progression. Mentoring for young ethnic-minority apprentices in the workplace could also play an important role.

28. We remain concerned about whether people from all characteristics have an equal opportunity to apply for Modern Apprenticeships. We call on the Scottish Government to ensure detailed equality monitoring is collected, analysed and acted on, not just for those applying for and participating in Modern Apprenticeship programmes but also for those completing the training. The Government should also look at any potential for perpetuating or worsening the concentration of any equalities group in – or its exclusion from – particular occupations.

> Read more in paragraphs 56 to 63 of our full report

Justice

29. We asked the Cabinet Secretary about the £3 million allocated to tackling sectarianism in 2012-13, including whether it needed to be extended to cover discrimination and hate crimes relating to other religions. He told us—

“The provisions in the budget document cover a range of elements. For example, in 2011-12, the Government has given direct financial support to a number of organisations that act to counter sectarianism in different ways ... and to organisations that are closer to faith communities ... Of course, the Government provides other support to interfaith communities and other such organisations, but I am not clear from the information in front of me whether it is supported in this particular budget line or in the wider equalities budget lines. The point is that the Government undertakes work in this area through a number of channels; one of those is the anti-sectarianism channel, but the Government will also take forward a number of other equalities measures.”
30. He added that the Draft Budget did not summarise “absolutely everything” being done on equalities—

“Sectarianism issues are very high profile ... but the Government routinely undertakes other work to foster good relationships between different communities in our society and Scotland’s faith communities. We will do all we can to encourage that work and to try to give it greater prominence.”

31. We welcome the Cabinet Secretary’s comments about the Scottish Government’s work towards fostering good relationships between different communities and faith communities. However, we believe that the importance of tackling religious hate crimes and hatred extends well beyond current perceptions of sectarianism. We propose that the Government look at enhancing the profile of all aspects of work on religious hate crimes, in particular to ensure that it is not eclipsed by the sectarianism debate.

> Read more in paragraphs 64 to 68 of our full report

**Infrastructure and capital investment**

32. The Equality Statement states that the reduction of the Supporting Economic Growth/Housing Supply Budget from £268.5m to £150m average over the spending review period is likely to have some negative equality impacts. We were particularly interested in what contingency action plans the Scottish Government had to address these impacts, particularly given that Registered Social Landlords (“RSLs”) have low tenancy rates amongst ethnic minorities.

33. It is difficult for RSLs to predict the future but we know that the population is ageing and that more people will need assistance to live independently. We believe that RSLs should exercise maximum discretion to ensure optimum benefit from properties fitted with aids and adaptations.

34. We remain concerned about the “likely negative equality impacts”, identified by the Scottish Government, of the reduction of the Supporting Economic Growth/Housing Supply Budget.

35. We plan to request evidence from the Housing Regulator. We will ask how RSLs are assessed, monitored and regulated in relation to equalities and whether the equalities performance standards in the regulatory regime are robust and effective in measuring compliance and improvement, including what actions or penalties are implemented on identifying poor performance.

> Read more in paragraphs 69 to 76 of our full report

**Local government**

36. We call on the Government to look at Audit Scotland’s role in gathering evidence on public bodies’ equalities performance and exploring ways of ensuring demonstrated improvements in this area. This may include looking at putting extra pressure on public bodies that perform poorly in respect of equalities. As a starting point, we draw attention to the Accounts Commission’s report of November 2008, *The impact of the race equality duty on council services*11. This report examined
the impact of the race equality duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 on the 32 local authorities. It concluded that local authorities needed to—

- build a better understanding of the needs of their minority ethnic communities
- mainstream their approach to race equality
- give more priority to race equality in delivering services

37. Incorporating equality measurements in national indicators and targets in single outcome agreements (“SOAs”) will help accountability and reporting from local government to central government. **Local authorities’ performance in relation to equalities should improve.** It remains to be demonstrated how much impact the public duties under the Equality Act 2010 will have. So, in addition to those legal requirements, we contend that the Scottish Government needs to ensure stronger regulation, accountability and equalities reporting from local to central government by incorporating equality measurements in national indicators and targets, in SOAs.

38. This may prove difficult owing to the complex relationship between SOAs and community planning partnerships. If so, the Scottish Government should explore other direct reporting mechanisms on equalities performance to ensure better accountability from local government to both central government and to communities. For example, in England, the Journey to Race Equality is a systematic approach for public bodies to improve outcomes for ethnic minority communities involving ‘self assessment’. In Scotland, the NHS’s Checking for Change toolkit is similar. Either example is transferable across equality strands and/or sectors. **The Scottish Government should establish one, universal self-assessment tool to be used by the whole public sector. A national report should then be compiled and published each year.**

> Read more in paragraphs 77 to 85 of our full report

**Welfare Reform Bill in the UK Parliament**

39. There has been a lot of speculation about the implications of proposals in the Welfare Reform Bill currently before the UK Parliament, in particular that they may have a negative equalities impact in Scotland. Examples of possible impacts are the effect on single parents (often women) of housing-benefit changes and on disabled people of the replacement of Disability Living Allowance with Personal Independence Payment. We explored this issue with the Cabinet Secretary.

40. **We note the Scottish Government’s position on the Welfare Reform Bill.** We echo the position agreed, with cross-party support, by the Parliament, in particular **regretting the impact on some of the most vulnerable individuals and families in society and on the local authority and third-sector organisations committed to supporting vulnerable people**. We await further developments with **profound concern**.

> Read more in paragraphs 86 to 90 of our full report
The former Equal Opportunities Committee’s findings on the 2011-12 scrutiny process included—

- a lack of detail, both data and required analysis, to support the equalities tone, in the relevant budget documents
- further evidence needed by way of actual examples of how a commitment to equality was integral to the Government’s economic strategy and how it had thus informed and shaped the spending allocations detailed in the Draft Budget
- lack of clarity about the extent to which the Draft Budget, and the policy decisions in it, was subject to equality impact assessment
- much work yet to be done to transform the budget process to ensure resource allocation decisions were informed and, if required, altered by equality considerations
- a request for examples of proposals put forward but not pursued because they raised equalities issues
- significant concerns about lack of equalities progress by public bodies
- concerns about local authorities’ progress on equalities, including EqIAs – COSLA and the Scottish Government to monitor progress
- a more effective approach to equality mainstreaming across all public sector bodies needed
- all public bodies should prioritise a process of demonstrating progress on implementing measures designed to improve on the approach to embedding equalities in their work, including through EqIAs
- very little detail in the Draft Budget document indicating what measures or resources were being targeted at mitigating the impact on women as low-paid workers in the public sector beyond the £21,000 per annum threshold; the Scottish Government was urged to undertake a robust equality impact analysis of the measure and to publish the results
- a lack of detail in the Draft Budget as to how measures intended to enhance the human capital of the workforce through investment in skills and education would tackle gender-based occupational segregation and thus improve women’s positions within the labour market; a request to the Scottish Government to provide detail of resources allocated to programmes focused on tackling occupational segregation and evidence of how the impact of the public sector pay freeze would be monitored with specific reference to the gender pay gap
Mainstreaming

42. A priority highlighted in the Equality budget is to “take forward the development and implementation of the Public Sector equality duties which will provide a robust framework for the delivery and mainstreaming of equality”. However, it is far from clear what ‘mainstreaming’ actually means and how any achievements can be measured. We therefore asked about Government providing guidance, support and leadership to the whole public sector with a view to ensuring that ‘mainstreaming’ is a measurable and understood process.

43. We remain concerned that mainstreaming is not clearly defined nor is it clear on how it is achieved or measured. This is particularly important as mainstreaming will likely become a public sector duty under the Equality Act 2010.

44. Aside from the debate around definition, we are also concerned about the potential for public bodies to cut funding to equality groups on the supposed justification of mainstreaming that is actually far from being achieved. This is particularly concerning as cutting funding to community organisations in favour of delivering services directly may, at a time of public spending cuts, have greater appeal to public bodies. As a safeguard, the Scottish Government should ensure that such public bodies’ decisions are thoroughly impact assessed. For example, if a local authority cuts the funding of an ethnic minority group and cites in the EqIA that the users of that particular project are able to use ‘mainstream’ services, there should be a 6-month follow-up to that decision, with independent assessment of whether the users from that ethnic minority group are in fact using the identified ‘mainstream’ service and whether the project satisfactorily meets their needs.

45. We urge the Scottish Government to note that mainstreaming does not ultimately rule out any need to retain specific equalities policy work and services – individual needs regarding where and how people access services, such as those provided by specialist groups, are all deciding factors. Achieving fully mainstreamed services – involving truly eliminating discriminatory practice and integrating equalities at the heart of all decision-making in public and third-sector organisations’ systems and processes – is a process not an event and may take many years.

46. We therefore ask the Scottish Government to do more to ensure guidance, support and monitoring of public-sector “mainstreaming” equality processes and outcomes to ensure a measurement for progress and high-quality equality impact assessments in decision-making processes.

47. We look forward to receiving from the Scottish Government the strengthened local outcomes framework that will help to strengthen the approach to “mainstreaming”, referred to in evidence by the Cabinet Secretary.

48. We also plan to seek evidence from a range of public bodies during the course of the year to give evidence on what spend they have allocated to addressing the needs of equality groups. While there is insufficient detail in the Draft Budget to assess the amount of equalities spend in many areas, continuous scrutiny and evidence-gathering during the year should reveal this detail.
Statistical information

49. The former Equal Opportunities Committee\(^{14}\), the EBAG review\(^{15}\) and the Equalities Statement\(^ {16}\) saw a clear need to improve statistical data-gathering on equalities to set a baseline for measuring progress. This issue recurred in evidence to us on the Draft Budget 2012-13. The Cabinet Secretary recognised that the question of improving data had been recurrent over the last 4 years.

50. **We recommend that the Scottish Government continue to improve statistical data collection on equality groups, publish its analysis and use the data to enhance service provision, improve diversity of workforces and inform future budget decisions.**

51. Notwithstanding existing problems with data collection, action should be taken based on data currently gathered. For example, the current ethnic-minority representation of 1% of the public-sector workforce is far too low. This compares with 2.75% of the economically active. We recommend that the Government explore an ethnic-minority workforce target for the public sector for the next 5 years.

52. **We welcome the Cabinet Secretary’s suggestion of collaborating with us on developing ways in which statistical data-gathering can be improved and look forward to taking this further during the coming year.**

53. **We also recommend that the Government take a lead role through introducing equalities-reporting processes for the whole public sector.** For example, the Northern Ireland Equality Commission has developed a mandatory annual progress report form that it disseminates to all public bodies to capture areas such as data collection and analysis, community engagement, and EqIAs.

Equality impact assessments

54. The former Equal Opportunities Committee’s 2011-12 draft budget report highlighted that witnesses had raised concern about the general quality of EqIAs and the process involved in carrying them out. The evidence presented indicated that EqIAs were often conducted after the event as a tick-box exercise rather than as an intrinsic part of the planning and decision-making process. We pursued this concern in the scrutiny of this year’s budget, exploring particularly how EqIAs could be improved to ensure that equalities were truly considered in all decision-making processes, including the setting of Government and public-sector budgets.

55. **We remain uncomfortable about the quality and frequency of EqIAs, including in relation to the Draft Budget 2012-13.** For example, notwithstanding the Equalities Statement and the process underpinning it, the Cabinet Secretary conceded that the Scottish Government had not, for the construction sector, assessed the equalities issues of the £200m resource-to-capital transfer proposal.
56. Therefore, we plan to undertake, during 2012, a sample testing of Scottish Government EqIAs to assess their accessibility, quality, content and accuracy. This is very important as the Government has recognised in the Equality Statement that proper data for some equality groups is lacking. Therefore, we shall look at assessing gaps between data and budget decision and at what action the Government has taken or plans to take in order to address any such gaps in this or next year's budget.

57. Further, we shall inquire into the overall effectiveness of the Government's equality consideration processes. This will include whether and how EqIA processes prompt equalities impact assessors to identify courses of mitigating action when they identify a disproportionate impact on protected groups of a policy that cannot be altered. We also note the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s recent report recognising improvements in Scottish Government EqIA processes but also highlighting that much, necessary improvement remains, such as on formal recording of decisions.

58. We shall also pursue the request for examples of proposals not pursued because they raised equalities issues, made by the former Equal Opportunities Committee.

59. This work will help inform our scrutiny of the 2013-14 Draft Budget.

> Read more in paragraphs 114 to 122 of our full report

**One year on: findings**

60. Many of the issues and recommendations highlighted by the former Equal Opportunities Committee in scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2011-12 remain true after a year. Examples of recurrent issues include—

- concerns about the lack of equalities progress by public bodies, including local authorities
- the quality of EqIAs
- lack of clarity about the extent to which the Draft Budget, and the policy decisions in it, were themselves subject to equality impact assessment

61. This all points towards a continued lack of progress towards equality by statutory, public and Government agencies and makes our recommendations and conclusions for this year even more vital in ensuring that progress is made in coming years. As representatives of the people we serve, we urge the Government and other public agencies to fulfil their public duties, including implementing the actions that we highlight in this report.

62. We shall, during the year, continue to follow up on the areas identified by the former Committee.
THE EQUALITY STATEMENT, INFORMED BY THE WORK OF EBAG

Follow-up on EBAG’s recommendations

63. In its report, Equality Analysis in the Budget and Spending Review 2011 Onwards, the Equality and Budget Advisory Group (“EBAG”) recommended the following improvements to the Scottish Government’s Equality Statement—

- a clear statement that the focus is on how spending contributes to promoting equality and how proposals have considered equality and socio-economic analysis
- the use of case studies where deeper analysis could show how equality has been considered
- the inclusion of the outputs of the various equality workshops held in preparing for the budget
- the Equality Statement should link as far as is possible to the Budget document
- equality analysis and impact assessment, essential for good decision-making, should be at the core of the budget process
- the capacity and skills of officials need to be developed to deal with the new challenges and budgetary constraints including skills on collaborative inquiry and equality analysis

64. We asked the Cabinet Secretary why race, religion, disability, age and LGBT were not represented on EBAG. We welcome his willingness to look afresh at the question of including other perspectives in EBAG. We await more detailed plans.

65. We request that the Scottish Government report to us on progress towards developing staff skills and capacity across government and the public sector to undertake cross-agency/cross-directorate equality assessments. This should include what review has been conducted of the effectiveness of both workshops held and equality resource packs circulated within the Scottish Government in 2010. The impact and effectiveness of any development activities in this area will be relevant when we come to inquire into the accessibility, quality, content and accuracy of Scottish Government EqIAs.

Read more in paragraphs 126 to 133 of our full report

A new approach to scrutinising the Equality Statement

Background

66. Our remit includes considering and reporting on the observance of equal opportunities within the Parliament. This includes the mainstreaming of equalities into parliamentary committees’ scrutiny work. This objective was behind one of our first decisions as a committee: to invite other committees scrutinising the draft budget to submit a short report to us. We asked them to set out—
what steps they took to include equalities considerations in their draft-budget scrutiny
what their findings were

67. Their responses contribute to our cross-cutting view of the impact of budget decisions on equalities groups. Our intention was also to help to raise awareness of committees’ equalities work generally.

68. We suggested that other committees bear the following questions in mind when planning and undertaking their draft-budget scrutiny—

- What budget decisions (to increase, maintain, decrease or refocus funding) would have the most significant impact on equalities? On what evidence was this finding based?
- To what extent were these budget decisions also identified in the Scottish Government’s accompanying Equality Statement?
- Overall, which equalities groups/strands were most likely to be adversely affected (and/or best protected) by budget decisions? What led the Committee to reach this conclusion?

Cross-cutting scrutiny
69. Other committees’ reports showed an especially significant impact on lower-income and deprived groups, with possibly related impacts on disabled people, older people and women. We drew to the Finance Committee’s attention the difficulties of quantifying this impact. We believe that the Scottish Government should undertake an analysis with the aim of significantly improving the objective measurement of the impact of major budget decisions on equalities strands. We asked the Finance Committee to highlight this issue in its own report.

70. Three committees raised fuel poverty, which has a disproportionate effect on senior citizens, on those with disabilities and on those with lower socio-economic status. We will keep a watching brief on this issue.

Read more in paragraphs 136 to 151 of our full report

Mainstreaming of equalities by the Parliament’s committees
71. Nine of the Parliament’s committees, including ourselves, report to the Finance Committee on the draft budget. All committees responded to our request for a submission on the equalities aspects of their draft-budget scrutiny.

72. We note that committees took different approaches from one another, so there was a diversity of response to this Committee. We therefore plan to consider whether any approaches were more effective than others, with a view to providing feedback to other committees. We shall also take account the responses received when considering the next steps to take on mainstreaming in committees’ work, including what guidance to give on scrutinising next year’s draft budget.
Equal Opportunities Committee, 1st Report, 2011 (Session 4)

Appendix

Glossary of acronyms used in the report
BEMIS - Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland
COSLA - Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
CPPs - Community planning partnerships
EBAG - Equality Budget Advisory Group
EHRC - Equality and Human Rights Commission
EqIA - Equality impact assessment
HEAT - Health improvement, efficiency, access to services and treatment
RSLs – Registered social landlords
SOAs - Single outcome agreements
SOLACE - Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers
SWBG - Scottish Women’s Budget Group


10 Registered Social Landlords are independent housing organisations registered with the Scottish Housing Regulator under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.
12 S4M-1008 Nicola Sturgeon: Welfare Reform
13 Annabel Goldie dissented from this paragraph and stated— “I note the Scottish Government’s position on the Welfare Reform Bill. I dissent from the remainder of the conclusion. The cross-party support referred to does not include the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats. I support the Welfare Reform Bill.”
Members who would like a printed copy of this Numbered Report to be forwarded to them should give notice at the Document Supply Centre.