



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Ms Emma Roddick, MSP  
Minister for Equalities, Migration and  
Refugees

The Scottish Government

Via email only

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Dear Minister

### **Budget 2024-25: Pre-budget scrutiny**

I am pleased to set out the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee pre-budget scrutiny views for the forthcoming Scottish Government's Budget 2024-25.

This year, the Committee's scrutiny continued its focus on human rights budgeting, building on work undertaken over the past two years. At its meeting on 23 May, the Committee agreed its broad approach to pre-budget scrutiny for 2024-25 would comprise a three-year plan to look at each principle of human rights budgeting in turn focusing on **participation** in year one, **transparency** in year two and **accountability** in year three.

As part of this year's focus on participation, the Committee agreed to explore the impact of the budget from a lived experience perspective, and worked with the [Whole Family Equality Project](#) in Edinburgh. One of the aims of using a deliberative process was for the participants to suggest questions that the Committee asked the Minister on their behalf. The approach also allowed us to understand how well participation lends itself to budget scrutiny, and vice versa.

The Committee is grateful for the time and valuable insight provided by the panel which helped inform the conclusions and recommendations in this letter.

In addition to the panel process, the Committee held a formal evidence session with stakeholders to explore the principles of gender budgeting and of participation in the budget process.

This letter highlights some of the issues which arose in both the informal and formal sessions.

We look forward to receiving your response once you have had the opportunity to consider the Committee's recommendations.

Should you have any questions, please contact the Clerk to the Committee at [EHRCJ.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:EHRCJ.committee@parliament.scot).

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

Kaukab Stewart MSP  
Convener  
Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

## BUDGET 2024-25: PRE-BUDGET SCRUTINY

### Introduction

1. Over the past two years the Committee has built a solid understanding of human rights budgeting and a useful evidence base and examples of how the principles of human rights budgeting can support budget scrutiny.

### A human rights approach to budgeting

2. Human rights budgeting in the context of the budget process assesses the process against three principles, which are based on international human rights standards:

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Participation  | Does civil society have opportunities for meaningful engagement in the budget process? Does the budget process actively engage with marginalised groups who are least likely to have their rights realised? |
| Transparency   | Do Parliament, civil society and the public have accessible information about budget decisions?   |
| Accountability | Does the budget process include sufficient oversight to ensure accountability for budget decisions?   |

3. For the second year running the Committee has structured its recommendations around the three principles of human rights budgeting in recognition that these could provide a useful framework for understanding progress.
4. [In our pre-budget letter last year](#) we asked for further clarification on how the Scottish Government would move towards using a human rights budgeting approach. We also made recommendations around understanding intersectional and structural equalities budgeting, the budget process, how the Scottish Government applied human rights principles to its taxation approach, understanding gaps in data and tracking spend, encouraging participation in the budget process and advocacy.
5. We also recommended that the Scottish Government consider demonstrating adherence to the three principles of human rights budgeting within its budget documentation, across all portfolio areas.
6. The Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's approach in adopting the Committee's recommendation on reflecting the three principles in the presentation of the budget.

## The Committee's approach

7. At its meeting on 23 May, the Committee agreed its broad approach to pre-budget scrutiny for 2024-25 would comprise a three-year plan to look at each principle of human rights budgeting in turn focusing on **participation** in year one, **transparency** in year two and **accountability** in year three.
8. This year's pre-budget scrutiny focused on participation. As part of that scrutiny, to run alongside the Committee's formal scrutiny, the Committee agreed to explore the impact of the budget from a lived experience perspective. One of the aims of the informal participation, which took the form of a deliberative process, was for the participants to suggest questions that the Committee would ask the Minister on their behalf.
9. The Parliament's Participation and Communities Team (PACT) identified a group, [The Whole Family Equality Project](#), which it was in the process of building a relationship with. Both the Committee and this group agreed to working together over three deliberative sessions.

## Call for views

10. The Committee issued a [Call for Views](#) in a short survey format with accessible and broad qualitative questions to encourage wider participation. The call for views ran from 4 July to 25 August
11. The Call for Views focused on finding out how much people know about the budget, finding out which areas of the budget people think affect them most and finding out how to involve the public more in the budget process so the Committee could gain a better understanding of spending outcomes and lived experience.
12. A [summary of written views is available here](#).

## The Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group

13. The Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group set out its recommendations in its report '[Recommendations for equality and human rights budgeting – 2021-2026 parliamentary session](#)' in July 2021. The Committee notes from the Scottish Government's [response to the recommendations on 21 September 2023](#) that it confirmed it will prioritise "Linking policy development more effectively with budget decisions (and vice versa), improving outcomes data and better supporting longer term financial planning" and that "the most effective place to ensure that lived experience views are considered is at portfolio level when developing policies".
14. The **Committee notes and welcomes from the document a strong focus on improving transparency and accountability as these will be areas that the Committee will explore further in its pre-budget scrutiny over the next two years** including the Scottish Government's confirmation that it is "undertaking a research project in 2023 to examine what a Citizen's Budget might look like in Scotland".

15. **The Committee notes and welcomes that in the annex to its response, the Scottish Government accepts 25 of the 31 recommendations**, two of which relate closely to participation and engagement (Recommendation 10 and Recommendation 21).

### **Citizen's panel process**

16. Participation has been an ongoing theme in evidence over the Committee's scrutiny this year and for the last two years, with links to both transparency and accountability. Stakeholders, engagement participants and respondents to the Committee's survey emphasised the need to understand and reflect lived experience, including intersectionality, and the importance of improved public engagement, a transparent and jargon-free process, and accessible documentation.
17. [The Whole Family Equality Project](#) is supported by [Capital City Partnership](#) and delivered by [Children 1st](#) and [CHAI](#). The project aims to bring about significant and measurable improvements to the lives of individuals and families from ethnically diverse communities across Edinburgh, and to empower people by giving them a leading role in the decisions that are made about the project's design and delivery.
18. The panel brings together representatives from ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged communities where they can combine their lived experience to advise on better practice for service providers. This includes sharing their lived experience with a number of partners to address socio-economic disparities.
19. A group of 12 participants agreed to take part in the Committee's work. The process the Panel followed was as follows:
  - On 29 August 2023, the Panel attended a session delivered by the Participation and Communities Team (PACT) with support from SPICe and the committee clerks. This session focused on building capacity among panel members, and covered the role of the Parliament and Government, and the Committee, and an introduction to the budget process. This was followed by an online drop in discussion to help the Panel prepare for the next steps in the deliberative process.
  - On 12 September 2023, the Panel and Committee (along with the Convener of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee) worked together in groups to discuss how and when people should be able to participate in the budget process, what the barriers to this are along with possible solutions, and policy areas may be where human rights aspirations are the hardest to meet. This was an opportunity for panel members to share their lived experience and its importance in budget spending decisions such as health, social care, local government, education, and housing.
  - Finally, on 3 October 2023 the Panel, supported by PACT and SPICe, used the discussion notes from 12 September to form questions for the

Minister in groups, then worked together to agree how to merge, re-word and prioritise these questions. SPICe was asked by the group to apply the agreed changes to form a final set of six questions, and the Panel agreed these unanimously by correspondence.

20. Between these three sessions, the Panel were given extra support by PACT, SPICe and the committee clerks through evening video calls, briefing documents, and a face-to-face session. This support aimed to make sure all panel members had time to understand the budget process and space to ask questions to build their confidence in forming questions, and to help panel members prepare for giving formal evidence.

### **Citizen's Panel informal evidence**

21. The following paragraphs summarise the discussions the Citizen's Panel had with members on 12 September, which were structured around identifying and addressing barriers to participation and meeting human rights aspirations.
22. The barriers to participants spoke of included their background and status (including immigration status, race and religion), a lack of trust in the political process, a lack of time and lack of awareness of how to be involved or how to learn more about the budget, a lack of understanding about communities on behalf of the administrations involved, a lack of invitation for people to take part, an over-reliance on jargon and technical language, and a lack of accountability in the process.
23. The panel felt that addressing these barriers was the responsibility of the Scottish Government, but they also felt the voluntary sector could play an important role and the Government should embrace the opportunities. The panel also felt it was important for citizens to be involved at the budget-setting stage. On the Parliament side, the Panel felt that it could get out of its "bubble" more, and that Committees should collaborate.
24. When discussing ways to overcome barriers, the Panel focused heavily on education and information sharing. It thought that the Scottish Government should engage more directly with communities, improve its consultation process, and raise awareness of the budget process. The Panel said that improving diversity in the Scottish Government was crucial, and that people should be able to see and understand the data underlying budget decisions, and "follow the money".
25. Finally, the Panel said that the UK and Scottish Governments could work together more to help citizens understand where different powers lay, and that all organisations involved, including the Parliament, should highlight good practice in participation.
26. The Panel agreed that, to them, human rights meant everyone having their physical, social and psychological needs met, and that this included people having equality of opportunity.

27. It agreed that it was important for the Scottish Government to listen to citizens to understand the policy areas where human rights might not be met. The areas of concern they highlighted were around education (including free school meals), housing and homelessness, social work, support for immigrants and asylum seekers, employment and skills shortages, and cultural sensitivity in public services. Some of these themes carried through the Panel's deliberations and are reflected in the questions they developed.

### **Stakeholder oral evidence**

28. In addition to the panel process, the Committee held a formal evidence session on [26 September](#) to explore the core principles of gender budgeting and participation in the budget process. It heard from:

- Heather Williams, Training Lead, Scottish Women's Budget Group
- Allan Faulds, Senior Policy Officer, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) and
- Alexis Camble, Policy Manager and Mirren Kelly, Chief Officer, Local Government Finance COSLA

29. Witnesses confirmed that human rights budgeting and gender budgeting are complimentary approaches and should be used together. The Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG) explained that the three principles of human rights budgeting are equally relevant to human rights budgeting. In addition, both should be performance and results oriented with clear links between policy, spending and outcomes. Additional principles in gender budgeting would include consideration of:

- The impacts of spending decisions across women's lifetimes.
- Focusing on how decisions will impact on care, especially on unpaid care and how this links into women's ability to work.
- A working assumption that there will be a differential impact on women and those with protected characteristics because a lack of data is why negative impacts are often overlooked in the EqIA process.

30. The SWBG explained that a gender or human rights budgeting approach needs to start with data and the identification of who is most impacted, and that services should be designed around meeting human rights from there. The suggestion was that the current approach is the opposite of this. The ALLIANCE spoke about the need to deliver social care in a culturally sensitive way.

31. COSLA emphasised the need for capacity building around human rights particularly in light of the upcoming legislation, and the workforce and resource implications this would bring. The Verity House Agreement was referenced by both COSLA and SWBG as an opportunity to strengthen collaborative working and effective decision-making as close to communities as possible.

32. The ALLIANCE said there was a clear role for the Scottish Government in enabling participation by improving the resources it makes available to support

the Budget, for instance by making it clear what the Budget will deliver within each portfolio area.

33. Stakeholders raised specific concerns about the effectiveness of equalities mainstreaming, and about human rights aspirations being unmet in social care.
34. On data, whilst the SWBG spoke about data gaps, COSLA said that it wasn't always a lack of data that led to unaddressed equalities issues. Rather, it was a lack of resource to analyse data and apply them effectively to the decision-making process. The ALLIANCE, however, also highlighted that there is a lot of data missing around minority groups. They gave the example of social care, where a great deal of data is collected, but very little of this links to people from BAME or LGBT+ groups.
35. SWBG spoke about the need to increase education around budget-setting and spending decisions and said there was a need for a clear conversation at a local level about this to help people understand more. They also said that understanding more about how revenue raising impacted on different groups was important. Witnesses suggested that increased budget education would help support a move away from adversarial approaches with people from different protected groups or demographics pitted against one another.
36. Finally, the ALLIANCE highlighted the role of the Third Sector in supporting participation and concerns around capacity to do this in a context of reduced funding.

### **The Whole Family Equality Project oral evidence**

37. At its meeting on [24 October](#), the Committee heard formally from five Citizen's Panel representatives from the Whole Family Equality Project. The Panel advised that as part of its work of its work with the Committee, it was able to acquire knowledge of the budget process and the EHRCJ Committee's role within the Scottish Parliament, and to become familiar with the Ministerial responsibilities related to equality within portfolios.
38. This active involvement included sharing experiences, critical discussions and formulating questions which represented priorities for the communities the Panel represents.
39. The Committee heard that, although the questions touched on various committee areas such as housing or education, the Panel's primary focus was on equality and its hope was that the engagement would encourage consideration of how funds are allocated to improve inequality across all portfolios.
40. The set of questions which were developed and drafted by the Panel were then put to the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees in a separate session. The full list of questions and context can be found at Annexe A.



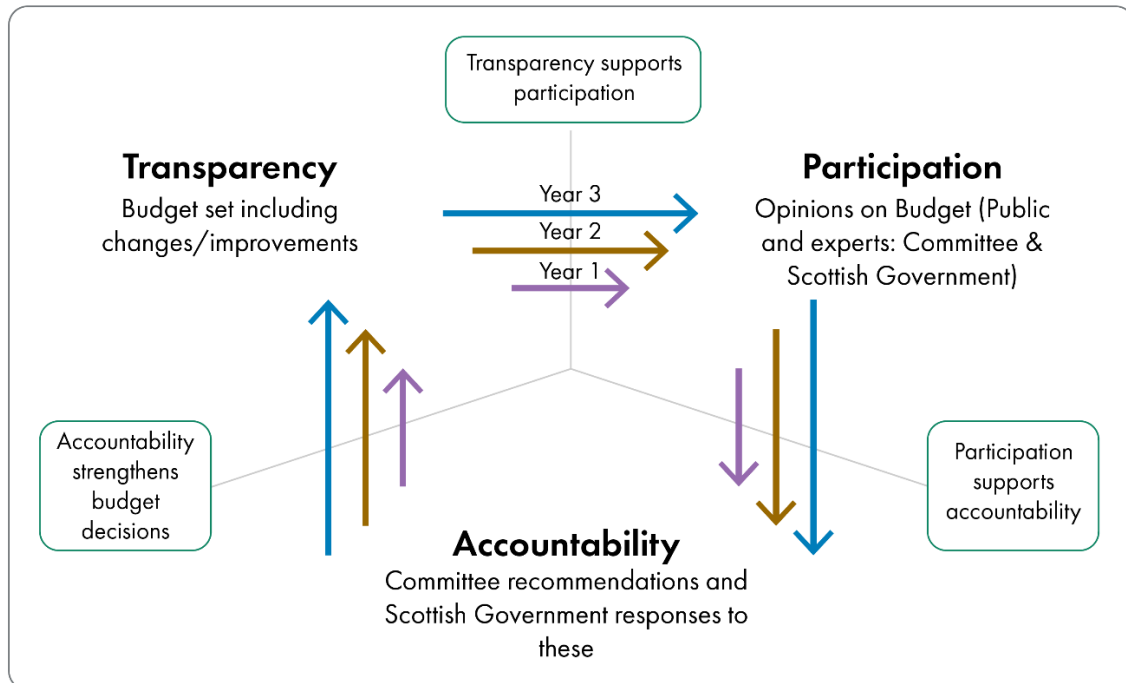
41. In summary, areas the participants highlighted the following key areas:
- The importance of diversity in Scotland's workplace and what the Scottish Government is doing to address this.
  - How the Scottish Government is ensuring teachers have appropriate equalities and diversity training.
  - The importance of closing the ethnic minority pay gap and what action is being taken by the Scottish Government to address this,
  - How the equalities impact of the current approach to free school meals is being measured and whether there are other areas of universal roll out being considered by the Scottish Government to address inequality.
  - Ways in which the Scottish Government is engaging directly with communities.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

42. As we have said in previous years, the Committee recognises the benefits of looking at the budget process, and the wider policy-making process, using the three principles of human rights budgeting as a framework. It allows for a structure and criteria within which it is possible to get some understanding of progress, and where there may be room for improvement. For that reason, we have used the three principles as a structure for our recommendations for the second year running.
43. We recognise and welcome the Scottish Government's commitment, as set out in its [response to the Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group](#), that it is "continuing to advance [its] approach to equality and human rights budgeting". We also recognise that achieving this is an iterative and continuous process. The following infographic, produced by SPICe, demonstrates how we envision this process in a continuous cycle of public participation, committee scrutiny, and budget improvements. **The Committee would like the Scottish Government to confirm that this matches its own understanding of the human rights budgeting cycle and the respective roles and responsibilities of the public and stakeholders, Committees, and Government.**

## Human Rights Budget

Using transparency, accountability and participation to inform the Budget is a continuous process – with small, incremental changes every year, the hope is that the budget will better reflect the Scottish Government’s equalities and human rights responsibilities



### Participation

44. The Committee learned a great deal from its experience of engagement on the budget process with members of the public through the online survey and from direct engagement with the Citizens’ Panel. Significantly, it notes the difference in the way the public view the budget in comparison to the Scottish Government and local authorities. In relation to equalities and human rights issues, these are not viewed on a portfolio basis but are linked, and universal. The Panel were clear, for instance, in showing how they saw the levers of equal opportunities begin with support for families, move into education and cultural awareness, and then transition through into adulthood through skills development and employment.
45. **While the Committee recognises that individual Ministers are responsible for different portfolios, it asks the Scottish Government if it recognises how difficult it is for Committees and individuals to truly feed into and scrutinise equalities and human rights when the Scottish Government continues to operate in siloes. It asks where improvements can be made, particularly in relation to providing information on mainstreamed issues from a broad perspective. The Committee would welcome an update on how this is being achieved.**

46. Evidence from the call for views survey suggested that a starting point for individuals, when viewing the budget, is from its personal impact on their households - for example bin collections, road repairs, and school meals. There seemed to be less knowledge about the broader decision-making process, balances and trade-offs that are made by local authorities and the Scottish Government, and people said that information as to the how and why is not easy to access, or readily available. In contrast, organisations advocating on behalf of community groups had a better understanding of processes and were likely to recognise that difficult decisions had to be made.
47. There also remains widespread confusion as to the roles and differences between the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Government and Local Authorities.
48. Engagement with the Citizen's Panel highlighted the importance of keeping people as the central focus when looking at issues, that we all belong to the same "community" and that decisions made by local authorities and the Scottish Government should involve the voices of communities and have the protection of others at its core. Our experience highlighted that, even in an area of scrutiny which does not change a great deal over time, working with citizens can give a fresh perspective. In this case, it shone a new light on how the Scottish Government approaches equalities mainstreaming and where that may not be working effectively. **We recommend that the Scottish Government acknowledge the value of the fresh perspective that involving citizens in decision-making might bring and commit to embedding citizen participation more consistently in developing and refreshing policies.**
49. The Committee welcomes the Minister's positive comments in relation to the panel process and her commitment to involving those with lived experience and reflecting their views within policy. We remain concerned, though, that this commitment is not replicated within other portfolio areas. **Can the Scottish Government clarify how this is being addressed. The Committee has also written to the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise in relation to questions from the Citizens' Panel outwith the Minister's portfolio and looks forward to her response.**
50. The Scottish Government's response to the Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group's Recommendations states that "We are not currently considering how to further embed lived experience into the overall Budget process", yet, when asked about this, the Minister contradicted this by saying "We have committed to exploring opportunities to improve public engagement with the budget process and continuing to make the process more transparent, which includes exploring a citizens budget.". **Noting that there is a difference between engaging to allow for the consideration of lived experience, and involving the public in the decision-making process, we would like some clarity on whether the Scottish Government is, or is not, exploring direct engagement with citizens in either of these contexts as part of budget development.**
51. The Citizens' Panel presented innovative ideas which it considered could improve engagement and build trust with communities such as providing opportunities for communities to join meetings with Members to discuss issues

and working with its organisation and others to provide a bridge between elected members and communities so that they may be empowered to engage in decision making processes. **The Committee would like more information on how the Scottish Government responds to proposals like these, from community groups, to collaborate on increasing citizen participation.**

52. The Committee understands that the Minister for Parliamentary Business has confirmed, [in evidence to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee](#), that work is planned to form a central team to enable participation and engagement work across all portfolios to be mapped and evaluated. **The Committee would welcome clarity on how equalities and human rights mainstreaming will be linked to and reflected in this review function, including how the Minister can influence the targeting of participation towards portfolio areas most in need of understanding and empowering 'easy to ignore' groups.**
53. The Committee heard that there is a role for the Scottish Government in enabling participation by improving the resources it makes available to support the budget and making it clear what the budget will deliver in each portfolio area. The ALLIANCE highlighted the role of the Third Sector in supporting participation and concerns around capacity to do this in a context of reduced funding. **The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government commit to mapping the role of the third sector in supporting engagement and participation and consider how this role can be reflected in budget-setting and guidance to local authorities on supporting the third sector.**

## Transparency

54. The Committee notes the Scottish Government's commitment to applying human rights principles to the budget process, and to demonstrating where its human rights obligations have been reflected in the Budget process is essential. We heard, in post-Budget evidence with stakeholders in January 2023 that the improvements were welcome, there was more that could be done. [Dr Alison Hosie \(SHRC\) said, for example—](#)
- “There are a number of vague statements connecting budgets to positive impacts on people's rights, but there is no substance to explain how that is to be achieved. A little bit more detail is needed—lines about the illustrative examples of the type of spending and the analysis that has gone into formulating those policy actions. At the moment, when you read through the examples you are left wondering why the examples were chosen. Have they been cherry picked? What was the reasoning behind their inclusion?”
55. We agree with stakeholders, that more could be done to build on the improvements already made to the budget documentation, and to link human rights, outcomes and spending together more clearly to tell the clear story our Citizen's Panel said was crucial to improving participation.
56. **The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government consider how it can more meaningfully demonstrate its adherence to the three principles of human rights budgeting within its Budget documentation,**

**across all portfolio areas.** This might mean policy statements which clearly explain, for instance, how data and lived experience has been used to inform decision-making and should indicate where engagement and impact assessments have resulted in changes to the budget with detail on how the process has upheld the Scottish Government's human rights obligations.

57. The Committee notes that the Scottish Government will lay a revised set of National Outcomes before the Scottish Parliament in spring 2024 and looks forward to seeing improvements to the links between the National Outcomes and the Budget. **To support this, we recommend that the Scottish Government considers how it can better produce measurable outcomes and ensure that enough data is collected to determine whether those outcomes are being met.**
58. We welcome the improvements that have been made in the accessibility of budget documents but remains concerned that the budget process is one that is broadly difficult to navigate for the public. **It asks the Scottish Government to be mindful that the public may be unfamiliar with language and particularly acronyms, and that it continues to work to improve accessibility in its language and documentation.**
59. The Committee notes that barriers to engagement and participation are not new, but do not appear to be improving. **We welcome the action being taken by the Scottish Government on data improvement and equalities data mainstreaming but are concerned that this may be causing a delay in action being taken. Can the Scottish Government provide reassurance that this is not the case?**
60. On data, whilst SWBG spoke about data gaps, COSLA said that it was not always a lack of data that led to unaddressed equalities issues. Instead, it was a lack of access to it or resourcing ability to analyse the data and apply it to the decision-making process. **The Committee asks that the Scottish Government reflect on stakeholders' views and asks it to make access to data more readily available. It also notes stakeholders' views that there continues to be limited data on minority groups, for example BAME or LGBTI+ particularly in the area of social care and asks the Scottish Government to set out how improvements can be made.**
61. Stakeholders also raised concerns that education around budget setting and spending decisions is lacking, and conversations need to take place at local level to help raise awareness and reduce animosity between communities. We also heard that the Scottish Government needs to understand more about how revenue raising impacts differently on different groups. **Is the Scottish Government taking any steps to address these concerns?**

## **Accountability**

62. The Committee notes the Minister's role in the development of the equality and human rights mainstreaming strategy and considers this strategy should support the Scottish Government in targeting support to policy areas where spend would most effectively protect equalities and human rights. It asks that

the Minister provides the Committee with regular updates on the development of the strategy.

63. In relation to the Budget, a range of views are provided through the pre-budget scrutiny process - carried out by the Scottish Parliament's Committees. In the Scottish Government's response to the Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group, in the context of participation, it notes that "In relation to the Budget, a range of views are provided through the pre-budget scrutiny process - carried out by the Scottish Parliament's Committees", making it clear that the Scottish Government sees committee scrutiny as one of the key points of participation in the budget process.
64. Stakeholders told us that it is not always clear what influence committees have had over the budget. The Committee considers that the Scottish Government could support accountability through facilitating scrutiny, timetabling, education, and public facing materials, but also by giving clear and detailed responses to Committee recommendations. This would enable Committees to feedback to stakeholders about what has changed as a result of committee recommendations. Without this it is difficult for the Committee to encourage participation and engagement from stakeholders and to build trust among the public. **Will the Scottish Government commit to clearly setting out within budget documents the decisions made as a result of Committees' recommendations?**
65. **The Committee asks the Scottish Government what it is doing to make sure that people have a full understanding of their own equalities and human rights, particularly in light of the introduction next year of the Scottish Human Rights Bill.**
66. Finally, the Committee appreciates by its very nature that there can be a lot of cross-cutting issues in this Ministerial portfolio but was disappointed with the lack of clarity in some of the answers to the Citizen's panel's questions. **It would be grateful if the Minister could review the session and questions at Annexe A and provide some further detail on the questions posed.**
67. **While the Committee appreciates that the Minister has no oversight over other portfolio decisions, we ask the Scottish Government how it can ensure a consistent approach to equalities and human rights can be maintained across all portfolio decisions and what steps it is taking to ensure that outcomes across portfolios can be measured.**

## Annexe A

### Panel questions

The Panel agreed the following six questions, which the Committee asked the Minister directly.

1. The panel think it's important that Scottish Government Ministers work together to find ways to close the poverty gap without people having to rely on charities and social security payments. Keeping the Promise is one way that children and families could be supported, but it must be delivered by a diverse workforce. **Can the Minister explain how she is working with the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise to ensure that The Promise considers, reflects, and supports the cultural and ethnic diversity of all of Scotland's children?**
2. The panel has concerns that even though diversity education in PSHE classes has a lot of detail on issues like sexuality, race and gender, there is little reflection or understanding of cultural differences. **How is the Minister working with the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise to ensure that teachers have the appropriate equalities and diversity training to fully support the teaching of cultural diversity and delivering PSHE in a culturally sensitive way?**
3. The Panel has strong concerns about the ethnic minority pay gap, both for children growing up in Scotland, and for New Scots, and feel that closing this gap is crucial to closing the poverty gap and supporting people from ethnic minorities throughout their lifetime. We know that two thirds of immigrants to Scotland have a degree, yet there still remains a significant pay gap. **How is the Minister taking a cross-portfolio approach to closing the ethnic minority pay gap, including working with Ministerial colleagues to make sure there are equal employability opportunities for school-leavers and monitoring the ethnic minority pay gap, especially in the context of the anti-racist employment strategy?**
4. The panel feels that many people, especially those from diverse ethnic backgrounds, are unaware of what constitutes their basic human rights, especially when they have moved to Scotland as adults. **Can the Minister outline her commitment to ensuring all communities and people of all ages, including New Scots, are educated on their human rights by explaining the opportunities that the upcoming Human Rights Bill will bring, including how the Bill might link to national indicators and measuring the progress of existing equality and anti-racism strategies?**
5. The panel think that the universal bus pass policy has been a great way to tackle inequality and poverty, and that it is a similar approach should be used for free school meals, including removing stigma and barriers by taking away token schemes and raising the age of free meals to 18. **What has the Minister done to work with the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise to understand the equalities impacts of the current approach to free school**

**meals, and will she commit to carrying out work on understanding how cross-cutting successes like the universal bus pass can be replicated in other policy areas to alleviate inequality?**

6. The panel feels very positively about the opportunity it has had to participate in the Budget process and would like to see more of this work being done, especially by the Scottish Government. **How does the Minister connect directly with communities, and how will she work with colleagues to make sure that there are more participation opportunities across portfolios, including policy education, awareness raising of engagement opportunities, and feedback on the outcomes of engagement?**