Dear Christina

Inquiry into Human Rights and the Scottish Parliament

Thank you for your letter to the Health and Sport Committee in relation to your above inquiry. My Committee having discussed your request have asked me to reply in the following terms.

The Committee welcomes this work by the Equalities and Human Rights Committee and considers it timely that this Parliament considers how well we have been taking human rights into account in all of our work and what more we could be doing to take them into account throughout our scrutiny functions.

As a Committee this session we have been mindful of human rights implications in aspects of work notably when scrutinising prison healthcare. It has also been a factor during our short looks at the provision and delivery of social care and mental health. Throughout each of those pieces of work we have been able to hear directly from service users and others directly affected.

Our predecessor Committee from last session could point to a number of areas where consideration of human rights was fundamental to legislative scrutiny they undertook, perhaps most notably when considering Bills seeking the right to die, organ donation and mental health.

You also ask about barriers to consideration of human rights issues and here we would point to a general absence of awareness of the rights and how they could or perhaps should apply. This lack of awareness probably, in general, exists across all
of our stakeholders as well as with the Committee. We wonder if this is an area in which the Scottish Human Rights Commission could assist in some way by raising awareness and delivering training.

As a Committee we are expecting to consider two pieces of legislation this year and we would expect human rights issues to be a factor in each. We are unclear as to the extent to which current procedures require impacts to be assessed and presented clearly against human rights and this is an area we anticipate we will be looking at closely throughout our scrutiny.

I hope these comments are helpful and the Committee wishes you well with this important piece of work, not least with the implications that will inevitably arise from the UK’s withdrawal from the EU.

Yours sincerely

Lewis Macdonald
Convener, Health and Sport Committee