



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

### WELFARE REFORM COMMITTEE

Tuesday 12 January 2016



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**WELFARE REFORM COMMITTEE**

**1<sup>st</sup> Meeting 2016, Session 4**

**CONVENER**

\*Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)

\*John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

\*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

\*Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

\*Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Lorna Kettles (Scottish Women's Convention)

Dr Angela O'Hagan (Scottish Women's Budget Group)

Emma Ritch (Engender)

Dr Marsha Scott (Scottish Women's Aid)

Samantha Smethers (Fawcett Society)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Simon Watkins

**LOCATION**

The Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2)



## Scottish Parliament

### Welfare Reform Committee

*Tuesday 12 January 2016*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]*

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Hugh Henry):** Good morning and welcome to the first meeting in 2016 of the Welfare Reform Committee. I wish everyone a happy new year. New year's day seems so long ago that it has faded into distant memory.

I ask everyone to make sure that their mobile phones and other electronic devices are silent and switched to aeroplane mode.

The first item on our agenda is to agree to take in private item 3, which is consideration of our report on the budget. Are we agreed?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Draft Budget Scrutiny 2016-17

10:00

**The Convener:** Our second agenda item is consideration of the Scottish draft budget for 2016-17. I apologise for the tight timescale for this exercise, which is totally outwith our control. However, we feel that it is important to take some evidence on the budget, and one issue that we want to consider is the gender perspective on it.

I am pleased that we have a number of witnesses from a wide range of organisations to help us to shape our view. We had hoped to have Ann Henderson, the assistant secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, but unfortunately she is ill and has sent her apologies. Committee members Clare Adamson and Christina McKelvie will join us slightly later. We have with us Emma Ritch, the executive director of Engender; Angela O'Hagan, the convener of the Scottish women's budget group; Samantha Smethers, the chief executive of the Fawcett Society; Dr Marsha Scott, the chief executive of Scottish Women's Aid; and Lorna Kettles, the research adviser for the Scottish Women's Convention. I welcome you to the committee.

I know that all the witnesses have strong views on not only the budgetary process but many of the issues that affect women in society. However, we are specifically interested in whether any of the financial decisions that the Scottish Government is making in the budget will affect women in Scotland positively or adversely. Some of those decisions might relate to the direct spend of the Scottish Government's departmental activities, the funding for the services for which the Scottish Government has responsibility, such as health, or, indeed, other areas of expenditure by the Scottish Government, such as local government, in which employment and service delivery are both important to women.

Is what the witnesses have seen so far doing enough to support and enhance the status of women in Scottish society?

**Dr Marsha Scott (Scottish Women's Aid):** I will focus on a few issues that are terrifically important to domestic abuse, but it is important to establish at the outset that I am a big supporter of Scotland's approach to domestic abuse, which treats it as being intrinsically linked to the drivers of women's inequality. I commend the committee for connecting domestic abuse with the impact of social security cuts and structures because, if we are at all serious about ending domestic abuse in Scotland, we have to show significant political, social and economic commitment to addressing the broader indicators of women's inequality. I

suspect that that theme will run through much of what is said today. It certainly runs through the three points that are most urgent for us on the budget.

My colleague Angela O'Hagan in the Scottish women's budget group will raise the problem of a local-national disconnect on budget thinking. We are delighted that most of the violence against women and girls fund and the children's services fund money seems to have been protected in the budget. That money is an important funding source for Scottish Women's Aid and it is even more important for local groups. However, the message from national Government for quite a long time has been that local groups need to wean themselves from national and central funding and become part of the local and community picture of community planning partnership decision making on local funding.

The difficulty is that we have a strategy in the budget that protects funding at national level—it is never enough, but we are delighted to see that it is relatively stable—while the freeze on council tax is maintained, meaning that local services are cut. About 58 per cent of our local groups' budgets comes from local funding, mostly from housing budgets. The two cannot be taken separately as if, somehow, the women and children who are experiencing domestic abuse do not live in the communities that are affected by the council tax freeze.

Our concern is that there is a lack of gendered joined-up thinking on that issue. Although we absolutely welcome the £90 million that has been allocated for affordable housing, there is a clear failure in terms of housing allocations and housing policy. The single biggest reason why women return to abusive relationships is, and has been for many years, the lack of affordable and safe good-quality housing. That issue is critical for the safety of women and children.

The failure to gender housing allocations and housing policy means that women experiencing domestic abuse continue to be disadvantaged in the system. I draw your attention to the report "Change, Justice, Fairness: Why should we have to move everywhere and everything because of him?". I cannot share the document with the committee because it is still embargoed, but it has been sent to the Minister for Housing and Welfare. The report is on a project with women experiencing homelessness and domestic abuse in Fife. It is a critical piece, damning the good intentions on the issue and highlighting the impact of the failure to gender housing policy in Scotland, at both national and local levels. I must underscore the importance of being willing to move from good intentions to good practice.

Finally—although I will, of course, want to come in again later if possible—the third and most problematic issue for us in the budget is legal aid and legal services. As our colleagues in the Law Society of Scotland have pointed out, the situation on legal aid is dire for women and children experiencing domestic abuse. A core recommendation in the report is that women should be given access to free legal support for protection orders and for dealing with the housing system in general, which is incredibly complex legally, for example on matrimonial homes issues.

Having no recourse to public benefit makes dealing with legal issues such as child-contact cases enormously expensive for women. They therefore tend to have to make very unsafe decisions over representing themselves and their children in such cases.

Another aspect is women's inability to stay in their own homes and the enormous harm that relates to their having to move into a refuge or other form of emergency accommodation.

**Dr Angela O'Hagan (Scottish Women's Budget Group):** Thank you, convener, for the opportunity to attend the meeting and for the committee's on-going interest and your follow-through focus on gender after your inquiry last year and its recommendations.

Before I set out some key points, I commend the submissions from sister organisations that have highlighted a number of issues. They all point to there being a mixed bag of measures in the budget and a mixed bag of impacts. Marsha Scott has touched on some of the significant protections. The retention of funding—albeit that it has been slightly reduced—the retention of the Scottish welfare fund, the bedroom tax mitigation and the council tax reduction funding are all very welcome. However, the Scottish women's budget group had anticipated more indication of a move from mitigation to more direct, transformative action to signal, in respect of the new powers coming down the line—albeit that they are not within the scope of this budget—what the character of social security in the future is to be in Scotland. An enduring focus on mitigation is necessary and welcome, but it needs to be partnered with further action.

The focus on mitigation is significantly undermined by the massive cuts to local government funding. Although health budgets have been protected, there are questions around what is meant by the funding that has been allocated to the integration funds for health and social care and what the impact of that will be on local authority budgets alongside the massive reduction in local government funding. I appreciate that choices had to be made about resource allocation and that some of those choices are

difficult in terms of resources. Some also seem to be political choices. The budget is always about difficult choices, but mitigation is severely undermined by the fact that front-line services that women provide and rely on as service users will be significantly affected by the reduction in funding to local government. There is a lot more to say on that, but, by way of setting out a stall—as it were—I will leave my comments there.

**Emma Ritch (Engender):** Like sister organisations, Engender welcomes the opportunity to give evidence to the committee on the issue of women and social security. We value the committee's engagement with the issue over this parliamentary session and the sustained follow-through from its inquiry, which was exceptionally welcome and illuminated some of the terrain.

As we allude to in our submission, austerity and welfare reform are processes in which successive announcements have revealed cuts that predominantly affect women and children, so the committee's approach seems to be a very helpful way into the budget. I echo the comments that Scottish Women's Aid and the Scottish women's budget group made. Engender has for years joined the Scottish women's budget group in calling for substantive and substantial gender budget analysis to be included in Scotland's budget process.

We recognise that the budget was the product of an abbreviated process that was not within the gift of the Scottish Government and that that placed enormous pressures on officials and others. However, we share the disappointment of others at the extent to which some of the rhetoric about women's equality has been reflected in the process and the explanations of spending allocations.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights has made it very clear in written submissions to the committee that the current constitutional arrangements in Scotland do not allow the Scottish Government to mitigate fully all the social security cuts that have been made. We are looking to the future in terms of the additional powers over social security that are coming to Scotland. In the meantime, a more broad-based approach to mitigation must be taken.

10:15

Things are getting worse for women because of cuts to United Kingdom social security under the aegis of welfare reform. Therefore, we would call for mitigation attempts that look at the raft of spending that is necessary on women and women's concerns. Those concerns include violence against women, as set out by Scottish

Women's Aid and colleagues at Rape Crisis Scotland, but also employability, transport, issues around women and the labour market, housing—as Dr Scott said—childcare and long-term care.

Mitigation cannot only be about trying to redress the cuts to universal credit and other provisions by direct payments to individuals. It must recognise the effect of those cuts on households, families, women's lives and, to go back to the convener's initial question, women's equality.

The Scottish women's budget group tells us that women have borne 81 per cent of the decade of cuts in the form of consolidation, personal tax rises and cuts to social spending. Clearly, the cumulative effect of those cuts affects women's equality. We know that women's income is directly related to the extent to which they enjoy equal rights with men in Scotland, so we must take other action if those cuts persist and are sustained.

We very much look to the future in our submission. We had a sense of déjà vu when looking at the budget this year—we could actually have resubmitted last year's submission with very few changes. Recognising that it is a pre-election budget, happening within the timeframe that it is, we ask the committee to make some fairly stiff calls for a better process.

We have heard a lot about the ambitions of the Scottish Government for realising women's equality through the medium of the allocation of spending in Scotland. We consider that to be imperative now, in the face of those cuts to women's incomes, and we urge a much more substantive process of gender budget analysis. There have been very small incremental changes to the equality budget statement that have been positive, but we have not yet seen what we want, which is an analysis of the impact of the Scottish Government's cumulative spending decisions on women's inequality, and of the steps that are being taken to redress any inequalities that still exist.

**Lorna Kettles (Scottish Women's Convention):** I echo what sisters have said: the Scottish Women's Convention appreciates the opportunity to provide evidence today. The women whom we talk to daily say things that echo the comments that have been made.

At the Scottish Women's Convention we try to be positive where we can. We do quite a lot of work on a national level with organisations down south and they often comment on things such as this—the ability to be involved in the process and to have a closeness with elected representatives. That just does not exist down south.

Similarly, efforts such as the Scottish Government's commitment to mitigating the bedroom tax and its establishment of the welfare

fund are not seen down south. We must appreciate that efforts are being made—that is positive and as an organisation we welcome that.

However, there were things about the draft budget with which we were a bit disappointed. I echo what was said about it being very similar to last year's budget. We are constantly asking for the same things—really commonsense things—but there does not seem to be a joined-upness.

We understand that there are limited powers over welfare. We did quite a bit of work at the end of last year on the employability services that are coming and the changes to social security. We are very positive about that—especially the engagement processes and the effort that was made to get women involved. However, we have to look at the issue as a whole. We need to not just alter the frequency of the payment of tax credits, but ask why women are receiving tax credits. They receive them because of the type of employment that they are in. Inequality starts at an early age: there is more spending on modern apprenticeships that are designed for men than there is on those that are designed for women. That gender streaming will perpetuate inequality as it goes on.

Although there are positives, we must bear in mind issues of transport, childcare and women's access to the labour market, as well as the issue of why there is a reliance on welfare support anyway. We know that, in the main, women tend to rely on welfare support when they are in employment. That support is a top-up, which is provided through tax credits, council tax benefit and housing benefit. We were somewhat disappointed that a little bit more was not done on the supporting measures that could allow for less reliance on welfare benefits, which seem like simple things.

We are positive, and we look forward to seeing what comes out of the powers that will be devolved. We cannot consider just the powers themselves, however. We must bear them in mind together with other aspects on which the Scottish Government has the power to make budgetary decisions.

**Samantha Smethers (Fawcett Society):** This is a fantastic opportunity to give evidence here today. Down south, we do not really get this opportunity. I notice the difference.

A lot of points have been made by colleagues, and there are a couple of things that I want to pick up on. It feels like there is a lack of a strategic approach. When we are mitigating the impact of what is a bit of a tidal wave of welfare reform, that is not surprising, in a way.

On the point about the missed opportunity of taking a gendered approach, the issue is one of

identifying a more cost-effective way of managing our public finances. It is not about making a concession to women; it is about doing things better—better for the public purse as well as for everybody else.

The connection between the local and national levels is fundamental. Cuts at local level will have a massive impact on women—there is no question about it. Women disproportionately rely on local services. They will informally step into the breach in some cases. Where social care services are being pulled back or where thresholds for those services are rising, with fewer people qualifying for them, that will have a direct impact on women and their employment. We know that.

We also know that, when childcare becomes less affordable, it is often older women—grandparents, in particular—who step in to fill the gap. Despite the investment in childcare, I would point out that children do not stay three or four years old. In addition, women need help when they want to return to work after maternity leave. There is an absolute desert of childcare. There is not really any meaningful offer of childcare support for children between the ages of nine months and three years.

We therefore need to invest in a childcare infrastructure in the UK and create what we have been describing as more of a national childcare service—a more joined-up childcare service. It would be great to see the Scottish Government taking a different approach to childcare from the incremental, small-steps approach that has been taken by the Westminster Government. There is a good opportunity with something like that.

Another key thing to think about is the fact that there are particular groups of women involved. By 2020, lone parents will be particularly hard hit. We have only staved off the impact of the tax credit changes. We have not reversed them, and they will come down the line in 2020. The prediction is that there will be twice as many lone parents in poverty in 2030 compared with now.

Women are in work and in poverty, and the projection that we are seeing indicates that that will get worse. It is similar for particular groups of women, including older women and disabled women—you can see the categories that have been listed in our submission.

Rather than simply take steps of mitigation, the Scottish Government could take a very different approach if it chose to see the opportunity of a gendered approach. It feels a bit like that sort of ambition is lacking.

**The Convener:** A huge range of issues have been raised, and we will no doubt come back to them. The issue that Dr Marsha Scott raised about



legal aid is a fundamental one. There are council cuts, and there is the council tax freeze.

I will pick up on something that Dr Scott mentioned with reference to domestic violence, women's aid groups and national and local funding but, to be honest, it could apply to a range of things. There are two aspects that I want to probe. First, you suggested that some of the local groups should consider trying to wean themselves off national funding and that they should look more to local sources of funding through community planning partnerships and so on.

A debate is going on in Scotland in relation to health, education and a range of services: we do not like postcode lotteries, but we also appear to believe in local decision making. In that sense, there is a contradiction. Should local groups have the same level of funding and access to services across Scotland, or would you support continued variation of services across the country, depending on how local decisions are made?

**Dr Scott:** I think that that is a bit of a false dichotomy. I want both those things, in a sense. I must reiterate that I am not saying to local groups that they need to wean themselves off national funding; I am just saying that that is the message from a series of Governments that have come out with successive announcements about violence against women funding—now violence against women and girls funding—that is centrally driven.

In essence, you are asking about the benefits and disadvantages of taking a local approach versus a national approach. I think that it should be “and”, not “or”. Services become sustainable, secure and mainstreamed at local level when they are clearly and transparently linked to local need. What is needed in Shetland will be very different from what is needed in West Lothian or in Glasgow. The distribution and exact shape of services need to differ according to postcode, and there needs to be a gendered and needs-driven assessment at national level of how need differs across places.

We therefore need a pattern of spending that allows local control over shape but which is driven by national outcomes, as represented in the equally safe strategy.

**The Convener:** You suggest that allocation should be based on postcode and need. Is the allocation then set nationally? The scale of the issue in Shetland is clearly different from the scale of the issue in Glasgow, so Glasgow would get more money, based on need and demand. Does anyone on the panel support the view that services can be better in Glasgow than they are over the boundary in North Lanarkshire, or do you think that services and funding for women in need

should be the same whether someone is in Coatbridge or Carntyne?

**Dr Scott:** There is not a yes or no answer to that. Women should be offered what they need, and what they need is driven by local circumstance. I suppose that we could set a national standard—actually, I would really love there to be a national standard that said, “All women should have access to the criminal justice and civil justice system and we will ensure that that happens by ensuring that any woman who experiences domestic abuse has access to free legal aid and free legal representation.” How that national standard was delivered locally would then need to be designed locally.

**Samantha Smethers:** Something to consider would be how, in practice, services would be funded to meet need in a rural area as opposed to a city. A different funding model might be required for areas where there is important need that must be met, but the cost of meeting that need is disproportionate. There needs to be recognition of how that would impact—

**The Convener:** That is not what I am asking.

**Samantha Smethers:** I suppose that I am thinking about the service user's perspective.

**The Convener:** You might not be familiar with the areas that I mentioned. Carntyne and Coatbridge are only a few miles apart. Both areas have significant levels of deprivation, but they lie in different council areas. Should it be right that, for example, Glasgow decides to fund and support women across a range of services in a certain way, but North Lanarkshire decides to use its money differently? Should women in both communities have the same level of support, because we do not like postcode lotteries?

10:30

**Samantha Smethers:** If we start with the service user and their journey, it could be possible for that need to be met in different ways. As Marsha Scott is saying, we must expect some differences among areas, but as long as there are minimum standards and needs are being met, it does not matter if local authorities are meeting them in different ways.

**The Convener:** In recent years, we have had a big debate on ring fencing of funding. Dr Scott mentioned that she welcomes the protection of some of the sources of funding. Many of our colleagues in local government do not support ring fencing and want to have local flexibility to spend their money. Should there be any ring fencing for services to women, either at a national or a local level?

**Dr Scott:** Can I add to that? I was probably not being very articulate, but I was trying to say that there needs to be ring fencing at national level around outcomes. If we connect women's improved access to the paid labour market with decreases in domestic abuse—I am happy to say that I would find no difficulty in doing that—in my imagination, there would be ring-fenced and gendered policy and provision around those outcomes, although not around the design of how they would be delivered. In a sense, it is a bit like the single outcome agreement process; we agree with you what the outcomes are, we give you the money and then you do it.

The problem with the current structure is that the decision making at national level reflects the disconnect between national and local. There is no analysis of whether the money is adequate or appropriate, based on different needs. The engagement with the third sector in the decision-making process at local level is also inadequate.

The funding structure needs to change. I would welcome something like public-social partnerships, which would create that mainstreamed, sustained support for local decision making. We cannot have a “we give you all the money and let you do it” model, because there would be places that would make decisions that were not in line with national strategies or policies. There has to be a combination of the two and it cannot be an either/or.

**The Convener:** Does anyone else want to add to that before I bring in other members?

**Dr O'Hagan:** There are a number of points to underscore here. The starting point needs to be meeting women's needs and having a gendered approach to public policy making that has a clear vision, which others have alluded to. What is the purpose of the public service? What is the purpose of the public resources that are being allocated? They are to achieve and advance equality and improved wellbeing for all. Part of that process is eliminating the inequalities that exist, such as male violence against women, among many others. We have talked about women's access to the labour market and about care. I hope that we will talk more about those matters.

On the allocation of public resources, collectively over the years we have made the argument for the importance of ring-fenced funding and the important job that designated funds do, although we recognise that designated funds are only part of the picture.

An issue that always comes up in gender budget analysis is the importance of focusing on not just the direct spend on women but how mainstream spend contributes to the advancement of women's equality. That is where I think

colleagues are highlighting a bit of an absence—indeed, a derailment—of gender analysis in the public spending process, about which we have hitherto been positive. This time round, it feels as if the wheels are coming off a wee bit in some of the decisions that are being made, in that there is a disjuncture and a disconnect between the measures that have been imposed as part of UK Government welfare reform and what it is in the Scottish Government's power to do, and in some of the Scottish Government's action across policy areas in its own domain, which will exacerbate the impact of not just UK welfare cuts but other austerity measures, including the reduction in funding.

That disconnect can derail us and set off arguments to do with the false dichotomy, as Marsha Scott put it, between levels of allocation and levels of service quality. We absolutely have to have a common ambition to have the highest quality of service along with local accountability for meeting local need, but the sustained imposition of the council tax freeze has removed some of that democratic accountability and local decision making.

**Emma Ritch:** I agree with everything that Dr O'Hagan said—I am giving everyone their Sunday names today. Engender supported Scottish Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Scotland and the Scottish women's budget group in the save our services campaign, when violence against women funding was set to be un-ring fenced. Engender was campaigning for ring fencing partly on practical grounds, because we saw that local authorities were not undertaking gender budget analysis and that there seemed to be no political will to increase spend on violence against women services.

If the Scottish Government had not listened to those calls and the ring-fencing decision had gone the other way, we would now find ourselves in a difficult position. I sit on the board of Rape Crisis Glasgow, which has not had an increase in funding from Glasgow City Council for more than 10 years, in the face of massively increased demand for services, partly because of cuts to public services as a result of downward pressure on budgets.

I entirely endorse colleagues' calls to begin by thinking about demand and what women need. Engender absolutely does not want to see a differentiated service in terms of outcomes. We want women to achieve the best possible outcomes, but we recognise that outcomes might be delivered in different ways in different spaces, because of geography, other stakeholders and partners in the area and other things.

We see a clear need for all budget setters to take a gendered approach, because when there is

no such approach decisions are made to slash local rape crisis centre funding without taking cognisance of the impact on women, who are experiencing cuts to income because of so-called welfare reforms, as well as other things. More gender budget analysis is a solution to some of those problems.

**The Convener:** Does anyone else want to comment?

**Lorna Kettles:** I would like to make a brief point about rurality, which has been touched on. The issue is not always given the recognition that it should be given in this fairly rural country in which we live. That takes us back to the point about delivery of services at the point of need. The Scottish Women's Convention would say that there probably is not such recognition. It might be that just one woman in Wick needs a service, but because a blanket approach is taken with so much of the funding that is given out, which just does not work, that does not happen.

Gender budget analysis is the most important way of achieving a fairer society—that is as important to us as it is to the other organisations that are represented here—but we need to bear in mind rurality and the unique geography of the country. Someone who lives not in the Highlands or away down in the Borders but 10 minutes out of a main town or city, in what could be considered to be a rural area, might receive quite different services because of that.

**The Convener:** Can we widen out the discussion?

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** As per usual when we talk about the budget, we are talking about people, but we have also been talking about processes and where we are with them. Processes are often very important to get the right outcomes for people. Today, people have rightly been talking about this budget's restricted timetable, which does not do much to help any of us to scrutinise it. However, we are where we are.

Dr O'Hagan asked what we will be able to do with the powers that we are going to get. Our knowledge of what is or is not possible is a bit restricted, because we do not have the financial agreement on that.

Sometimes we get ourselves into positions because of the way in which budgets have worked in the United Kingdom for generations—let us be honest. We do not get the opportunities to discuss and think about what is required. That does not happen nationally or locally, and so we get the disconnect in services that we have talked about around the table today.

How would the groups around the table like to be more fully involved in the budget process, from

the bottom all the way up? How do we ensure that the UK Government, the Scottish Government, which may sometimes be to blame, and local authorities take cognisance of the need of folk out there, rather than what they think is the need that is out there?

**Marsha Scott:** I agree that the issue is about process and outcome. I repeat that Scottish Women's Aid has a sense that the local and national funding processes do not work. They do not work for the Government or for us; they are enormously inefficient. We have short-term budgets and therefore short-term projects and project spend. At the maximum, we get three years' worth of funding, which means that we wind up spending at least one year's worth on recruitment, retention and exit planning. That engenders not only waste of the public pound but enormous waste of the talents and skills of the staff who work in services and of Government officials, who create good strategies for funding and end up with relatively little outcome for the money, because of the inefficiency that we are building into the process.

I have had some discussion with Government officials and I think that we should take a look at what political process could happen to agree social care budgets for the length of a parliamentary session. I would call on all parties to think about how we could achieve that in a consensual manner. At the moment, we are looking at three-month extensions to our budgets for services that rely on the violence against women and girls fund and the children's services fund. We are absolutely clear and understand that that was the best possible scenario prior to the holiday break, given the budget schedule, but it is just not good enough. The process will not get us to where we want to be in Scotland on domestic abuse and women's inequality in general.

We enjoy in Scotland a wonderful consensus on domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women. Could we not commit to a similar consensus-based approach to finding our way out of this cycle of inefficiency?

10:45

It comes back to the question of how we can plan a process that identifies need at the local level and engages stakeholders without providing them with undue influence. I understand that that would be messy, but I think that the process could work better than it does. A key, no-brainer part of it is being willing to commit to something that we think is a good idea for a longer period. We do that with capital infrastructure—it is not as though we do not commit subsequent Parliaments to investment in bricks and mortar, so why can we not invest in people over longer periods? We could

do that through centralised decision making if, as I mentioned, we then funnelled money locally over longer periods through something like public social partnerships. They could be third sector led and could be mandated to engage service users and potential service users in the decision making.

**Dr O'Hagan:** You asked how we could involve people in the budget process. Although it is maybe not everybody's burning passion to be engaged in budget analysis—I hold up my hand to having a special interest—there is an important piece of work to do in engaging the Scottish public, on a non-party basis, in understanding our resource base and not only the complex nature of our funding but what it makes possible.

That takes us back to how we value public services and the resources that we have, which leads us on to how taxation powers could be used now and in the future as we look forward to more powers coming to Scotland. What could those taxation powers mean in terms of revenue generation, and what should the process of allocating revenue and resources be? What is the role of local government? The budget sends some very mixed messages about the future role of local government in a number of ways.

The Parliament and its structures, as well as the Scottish Government, could engage directly with citizens on the budget process. In the first instance, that could involve some straightforward provision of information and a celebration of the different approach that we have in Scotland, which Sam Smethers mentioned. Accountability and openness are among the founding principles of the Parliament, and we need to live up to them. We have one of the most open budget processes in western Europe, but it is also a well-guarded secret. We have a public consultation period in name, from when the cabinet secretary brings the draft budget to Parliament until that period closes, but what type of public engagement is there in the process? This is an elite discussion that we are having. The process can and should be opened up much more before we even start talking about what shape the fiscal framework will finally take.

Although I would never downplay the importance of having a robust fiscal framework that works for Scotland, the issue is how we use that structure to advance what should be the fundamental vision and objective of a fairer and more equal Scotland and how the structures around the fiscal framework work to achieve that.

**Kevin Stewart:** Dr O'Hagan, you mentioned the council tax freeze. We have seen much bigger cuts to local government services in England as well as some fairly hefty council tax rises. Between 2012 and 2015, there was a cut of nearly 20 per cent to local government services in England. Do you know of any analysis that has been done of

the impact on women of those council tax rises as well as of the cuts south of the border?

**Dr O'Hagan:** Those are really two sides of the same coin. Excellent work has been done in Coventry on the impact of local government cuts and the council tax on women. Southall Black Sisters has done similar work in London.

The equality budget statement says with no evidence that the council tax freeze has protected vulnerable households in times of economic difficulty. I question the evidence for that at a time when the council tax freeze and other measures have contributed to a reduction in local authority revenue, which has had a knock-on effect on women's employment services, which are provided for and used by women, as I said earlier. There are also the subsequent effects that Samantha Smethers referred to. Where does the impact fall of a withdrawal of care and respite services and a withdrawal of or reduction in transport services?

We need to look at a reduction in or withdrawal of council services, which primarily have an impact on women in reducing their paid employment or participation in the workplace or in leading to their withdrawal from the labour market overall, alongside the much-heralded high levels of women's employment. Where are women being employed? In what context are they being employed? What are the conditions of their employment and the character and quality of the jobs that are being eroded? When we talk about cumulative impacts, they are the kinds of impacts that we mean.

You asked about council tax rises and freezes and which is the lesser of the two evils, in a sense. What is the impact of the council tax freeze on household incomes, women's incomes and women's participation in paid employment in addition to women's unpaid care? To what extent is the intended relief of household budgets offset by all the additional costs that result to the household as a consequence of a reduction in publicly available services and employment?

**The Convener:** Before I bring in members, does anyone else want to come in?

**Kevin Stewart:** It would be interesting to hear whether Ms Smethers has examples from England, where that analysis was done.

**The Convener:** Let me chair the meeting, Kevin. Does anyone else want to come in?

**Samantha Smethers:** I would like to do so.

I do not have specific examples to give right now, but we are going to do some work that looks at local government. Later this year, we will launch a project on whether local government works for women, in which we will look specifically at

women's representation and the impact of service cuts. We will focus on childcare, social care and women's safety. That will be a priority project for us that will run for around a year.

I want to say two things, one of which is about infrastructure investment, treating the spend on care as infrastructure spend and thinking about it in that way. Marsha Scott mentioned that. That is fundamental to the way we think about care services. Currently, we do not think of care services as infrastructure, which is why they are so patchwork and poorly provided. That is also fundamental to how we spend on them. We need longer-term commitments on spending to make that happen. If we really want to see a transformational change for women over a period of time, such infrastructure spend and that approach to spending on care services are fundamental.

The quality of women's jobs, which Angela O'Hagan mentioned, is really important. We celebrate women being in work, which is great, but women are in poorly paid and insecure employment and have multiple part-time jobs. We are creating an economy that is fundamentally based on poor-quality, low-paid work, and that undermines everything else. That has to be fundamentally changed. That is a structural change, and it requires a longer-term approach.

The Scottish Government could take a very different approach, make some of those changes in Scotland, and set an example for the rest of the United Kingdom in approaching matters in that way.

**Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** First, I apologise for being late—I am afraid that the weather did for my travel arrangements this morning.

I want to pick up on the council tax freeze, because the most recent research that I have seen on it was by the Scottish Parliament information centre, which concluded that not only had council tax been fully funded but, had councils used retail prices inflation percentage increases, the funding given to local government could have been slightly less. Certainly the conclusion of that research was that the cost of the council tax freeze had been fully funded to councils, so it is unclear to me why you think that the council tax freeze has impacted on services. Is it the other budgetary cuts that local authorities have received that have impacted on services?

**Dr O'Hagan:** It is a combination of things and one thing that the Scottish women's budget group has consistently raised is the cost of funding that freeze. Had local authorities been allowed to exercise the autonomy that one would expect of local authorities, it is possible that the

£3.1 billion—which I think is the cumulative cost of funding the council tax freeze—could have been directed elsewhere to better effect over the period since the council tax freeze in 2007.

**Clare Adamson:** The figures show that lowest earners have received a benefit of 1.1 per cent in their net income as a result of the council tax freeze and, on average, people in band D properties have saved £1,200 from that, so it has put spending power into the hands of the people rather than the local authorities. Would that not have an impact on local economies as well?

**Dr O'Hagan:** How is that £1,200 offset by all the other questions that we have raised around having to meet the cost of services being reconfigured, services being withdrawn, additional transport costs and employment having to be reconfigured? At the same time, we have seen a reduction in women's employment. Certainly in the early stages of the council tax freeze, women were coming out of local government-funded employment at all levels. There are impacts on both sides and what remains to be costed and researched is what those impacts have been. We need to quantify the kinds of impacts that I am talking about. Although a figure of £1,200 has been given as the income generated, if you like, by the council tax freeze, the question is how that has been offset by other costs arising from the cumulative impact of other measures.

**Clare Adamson:** But if there had not been that freeze, households would not just be £1,200 worse off; they would be more worse off than that because it has been estimated that councils would need to increase council tax by around 10 per cent just to stand still. In order to raise money from the council tax, just to stand still, we are talking about 3 or 4 per cent increases in the council tax. We are talking about quite a big increase in the amount taken from household incomes in order to generate any money for local authorities from council tax.

**Dr O'Hagan:** Increases that might have been possible had there not been the job losses or the associated increase in household costs of having to find alternative means to cover all household needs, such as care provision. We can bat this back and forth, but the core point is to be cognisant and to conduct research and inquiry that explore what those cumulative and additional effects have been.

**The Convener:** Just before I bring in Neil Findlay, have women who are in receipt of 100 per cent council tax benefit financially gained during the period of the council tax freeze in the way that I have and members sitting round this table have?

**Dr O'Hagan:** I cannot answer that question directly. I would assume so, but one of the things

that I mentioned at the outset is the council tax reduction and the fact that that has been protected and funded is absolutely to be welcomed. When we look at who is in receipt of that, it is lone women parents and older women. That partially answers your question.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** There may be a £1,200 gain, but if you are on a five-year or six-year pay freeze or a below-inflation pay increase, if you have lost your childcare because the facility that provided wraparound care has closed, and if the fruit and vegetable co-operative that you used to go to for your cheap fruit and veg has shut, that £1,200 will be wiped out very quickly. It is not difficult to understand. Those are the services that civilise us as a society. There is a cost to that and it is a cost that we should all contribute to.

11:00

Some of the things that I hear from women in my region make me want to weep. Some cleaners spoke to me the other day. They work in their kids' school and take great pride in their work. It is their school—it is nobody else's school. They told me that their hours have been cut, that their pay does not keep up with inflation and that they now clean the classrooms only every second day because the council is completely strapped. That has an impact not only on their financial situation but on their professional pride in their work, which is a key factor.

Those cleaners' situation is only one small indication of what is happening. We could look at the whole range of public services. Professionals in social work and education, classroom assistants and the like—all of them are seeing not just their financial situation but their professional situation eroded, which is just as significant.

A couple of other issues have been mentioned, but we have not had much discussion about social care. Without a doubt, social care is the biggest disaster in Scotland at the moment; The situation is absolutely catastrophic and unless we completely revolutionise what is going on it will come to a juddering halt and women will be in the front line of the disaster that is unfolding before our eyes.

Given all that, do public policies such as the council tax freeze and the disproportionately high cut to local government in the budget advance women's equality or not?

**Lorna Kettles:** That is a loaded question. You said something that reflects what has been said by many women whom we have spoken to who have done a job for a long time. There are older women who worked for a local authority or another organisation for a long time who have, because of the situation in the country overall, found

themselves unemployed. Women have been made redundant or reduced to job sharing, for example, and are having to look for alternative employment where none exists. There is not much recognition of older women in the budget. There is a lot about employment for young people. No one would deny that that is important, but there is not much acknowledgement that many older women have lost their jobs. They might have been in the job for 30 years and never have had to write a CV. They are discriminated against because they do not have higher—they cannot complete a form that asks about higher. That is something else to consider.

We all know that there is not a lot of advancement of gender equality at the moment. I do not think that we can blame any single factor. However, as I said at the start, the Scottish Women's Convention feels that we need to look at the issue as a whole.

We have always welcomed the additional childcare hours because anything that has the potential to advance gender equality is a positive thing. However, the hours went up from 475 to 600, which works out at only about 16 minutes a day, which does not really help working parents. There is also the issue of how childcare is provided—the lack of local authority childcare and reliance on private childcare—and that kind of thing. However, it is fair to say that local government services are, in the main, used and provided by women. It therefore stands to reason that a substantial cut will impact in different ways on a wide range of women.

Where do women such as those whom Neil Findlay was talking about, who have done a job for a long time and now find themselves having to go into a job share or losing their job, go? That is the only job that they have ever known. There are no longer jobs for life, nor is there the idea that used to exist that people should get into a local authority job when they are young because it is a good job to do.

It stands to reason that cuts to services that are provided by women and, in the main, accessed by women will push gender equality back.

**Emma Ritch:** I will try to answer the question whether the council tax freeze imperils women's equality—

**Neil Findlay:** And the disproportionately high cuts to local government.

**Emma Ritch:** Engender has historically joined in the statements by sister organisations that the council tax freeze is not helpful in advancing women's equality. Close the Gap mentions it in its submission and the Scottish women's budget group has already mentioned it, as have others. The dialogue that has happened at the committee

really speaks to the need for a process of figuring out how the council tax freeze and cuts to local government spending affect women. We cannot guess, and the women's budget group is not guessing, but some of the questions are difficult to answer.

It was very hard for Engender to answer the committee's questions about the impact on women because we have not seen in the budget documents the cumulative impact assessment that we want to see. There is no gender budget analysis that takes a look across the spending portfolios to see whether the budget as a whole advances women's equality. The message that we have had for years is that it is really necessary to connect all those things together.

The Scottish Government has ambitions for women's equality that are very clearly set out in the programme for government and other articulations. To pick up on an example that was mentioned, the statements that the First Minister has made about childcare as infrastructure are enormously welcome. Several years ago, on international women's day, she described childcare as infrastructure and talked about the necessity of conceiving it as such in order to advance women's equality. We are absolutely behind that perception. However, if you look at the budget, you can see that the new Forth crossing is included at a value of £1.6 billion, but there is no enumerated resource commitment to childcare investment. Therefore, there is a bit of a gap between the rhetoric on childcare as infrastructure and the budget. We would add long-term care to that and recognise the immense pressure that women in communities throughout Scotland are under because of vanishing care resources.

I am sorry to keep making this point, but process is important because if the analysis is not done it is very hard to answer the questions. We want gender budget analysis to be integrated into the Scottish budget and local authority budget processes—otherwise, we are just doing the best we can to try to piece together the impact on women. We really need to do better with the allocation of resources across Scotland's people and communities.

**Dr O'Hagan:** I thank Emma Ritch for that exposition of what the Scottish women's budget group stands for and what our sister organisations support.

I will answer to Neil Findlay's question: no—the council tax freeze and local government funding cuts do not advance women's equality. Notwithstanding current pressures on local government funding, we still have outstanding equal pay claims that local authorities have not settled and, as Emma Ritch said, we have no

process by which budgetary decisions are analysed for their full effect on gender equality.

There is a transformative intent behind gender budget analysis. To what extent does the budget recast gender relations? Does it take women and men out of the traditional roles in the family or the workplace in relation to care and employment? We need to see the budget in the round as having an impact on women's economic autonomy and independence, as well as men's status.

Forgive me if this is an overlong contribution. I will make a written submission about this to the committee as well as to the Equal Opportunities Committee.

We could look to the work that the UK women's budget group has done looking across policy domains and apply that in the Scottish context, and we could look at the work of Howard Reed of Landman Economics—who has appeared before the committee—whose model has subsequently been developed by Diane Elson and Sue Himmelweit. If we use the data that I mentioned—the data that is talked about in the equality budget statement and in the draft budget and spending plans on council tax reduction—as an overarching measure or proxy, it shows the potential extended impact on women of the Scottish Government draft budget proposals. Through the cuts, women lone parents and women pensioners stand to lose more, according to the gendered household type analysis in the Landman Economics model, as Samantha Smethers has already mentioned. The health budget is protected in Scotland, but the impact of local government funding may well offset some of the gains from that.

This comes back to Emma Ritch's key point about process. I say this at every intervention that I make: we need to integrate appropriate tools and time, and we need to build the capacity of policy-makers and the confidence and competence of the officials who are putting together the budget and the equalities budget statement so that there is substantive evidence and analysis that can support claims such as that the council tax freeze protects vulnerable households. We need to see that analysis across the piece.

We have touched on investment and infrastructure. The Scottish women's budget group had high hopes that the budget would refer to the refresh of the Scottish Government investment plan building on the political agreement on and support for the idea of a caring and sustainable economy as set out in "Plan F: A Feminist Economic Strategy for a Caring and Sustainable Economy" by the Scottish and UK women's budget groups earlier this year. The Scottish Government fully supports that idea and we see it in many policy statements. Emma Ritch alluded to—indeed directly referenced—the First Minister's

and the Government's commitment to childcare, which is enormously welcome. However, we need to see the shift from rhetoric to the allocation of resources as investment in our economic and social infrastructure. That is not yet coming down the line.

These are straitened times—I understand the financial and time constraints on the budget. As we come into an election period, it is a challenge for all the political parties to look at how the resources that we have now and will have can deliver a sustainable and caring economy.

**Samantha Smethers:** I want to come back to social care, which is really important for the medium and longer terms, as well as for now. One of the really striking things that we have seen through the social care debate in England—I am sure this applies in Scotland as well—is the prediction of a shortage of informal and formal carers in the not-too-distant future. We are heading into a future in which our aging population will not have the care that it needs, simply because there will not be the people to provide it. We are expecting older women, in particular, to work for longer and to provide more care: they care down the generations as well as up the generations. A double whammy of work and care is concentrated on the population of women aged 50 to 65.

Unless we have a vision for the kind of caring that we want in our society and our economy, we are going to hit some big problems in the very near future, because there will not be enough people to do the caring. That is a product of our undervaluing care. We do not see it and we do not value it, so only when we run out of it will we start to realise what it means not to have a caring economy.

**Marsha Scott:** It is not terribly surprising that my point is directly related to that. I will go back to Neil Findlay's comment about a civilised country and the cost of that—although it would also be worth discussing the cost of having an uncivilised country, which we pay every day.

11:15

For me, the problem lies both in the disconnect between national and local financial and budget analyses and in the lack—as Emma Ritch has pointed out—of robust analyses of the impacts disaggregated by gender and of where a household's money goes.

I cannot believe that we have not said much about universal credit. We have still not heard whether the Scottish Government is going to take up its power to direct universal credit to individuals in the household. It would be very problematic if it does not do that, particularly for women who are

experiencing, or who are at risk of, domestic abuse.

The larger issue around all that, which is frustrating for us at Scottish Women's Aid, is that there is no framework involving outcomes, measures and planning for making Scotland a less unequal country for women and children. If we had a larger economic model that reflected everybody's understanding of the ways in which unpaid care, paid care and paid work intersect in our personal lives, we would have budgets that reflect how those things interact. A larger economic model of that sort would treat childcare as a long-term investment that is critical to the outcomes—economic and social—that we should be demanding in what is a civilised and very rich country, in general terms.

I have an example—I beg your pardon for telling this story. In my previous employment, I got into a conversation one evening when I was working late—as so many of us do—with the woman who was cleaning our offices. She had previously been engaged as part of the organisation's regular staff. The cleaning had been outsourced a number of years previously, under a different set of Governments. This woman was in her late 60s. She had to get up in the morning and had to be prepared to provide childcare for her daughter, as a grandmother, but without always knowing whether she would have to do so because her daughter, a single mother, was on a zero-hours contract. The woman would come to work at 5 o'clock and would work for four hours cleaning the offices where I worked. She would then go to another private office at 9.30, which she quite liked, because she could do that at her own pace and she could grab a sandwich. After cleaning those offices, she would get home some time between 11 o'clock and 12 o'clock at night. The next day would start in the same way.

We cannot see the intersection of the problems of not accommodating and accounting for unpaid care in that equation, with the paid work that the woman was providing, and all the consequences of living in a gendered economy. That will mean that, when she retires—of course, she will not be able to retire until later—it will be with an extraordinarily small pension compared with men her age.

All that is to make a plea for people to begin to think about the mitigation of women's poverty in the round as an integral part of our larger economic strategy, rather than having it shunted into a discussion about good cuts and bad cuts, as it often is.

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** The examples that Marsha Scott raises are very useful. The powers in relation to pensions and employment law, which are big contributors to



women's poverty, are not coming to the Scottish Parliament. We had the opportunity to bring employment law under the remit of the Scottish Parliament but we did not get the support in Westminster for having those powers.

The discussion has been very interesting because there is only so much mitigation that we can carry out. You have talked about priorities and the issues that we will face in the future, in addition to all the other things that we have talked about, such as universal credit and local government funding. It has been acknowledged that the health service has been protected and in the context of care it is important to mention that the budget allocates £250 million to the integration of health and social care.

If you do not accept the independent SPICe research that shows that the council tax freeze is fully funded, and given that I presume you do not think that the council tax can mitigate all the cuts coming from the UK, as well as the future pressures as a result of welfare reform, what do you think that we should cut in that context? Do you think that the health budget should not be protected?

**The Convener:** May I clarify something? My understanding was not that Angela O'Hagan was saying that the council tax freeze was not fully funded. I thought that she was saying that it was a question of opportunity cost and that the money that has been used to fund the council tax freeze could have been used for other things. Perhaps Angela O'Hagan can clarify that.

**Joan McAlpine:** If you do not mind, convener, perhaps I could have the opportunity to ask the question? This is the first opportunity that I have had to speak this morning. My question is about what should be cut, given that we face further cuts from London.

**The Convener:** Absolutely, and we can come back to that. It was also suggested that a comment had been made that the council tax freeze was not fully funded and I am not sure that that was said.

Dr O'Hagan, can you clarify that and then go on to answer the question that Joan McAlpine has asked?

**Dr O'Hagan:** I was not disputing the funding of the council tax freeze, rather I was questioning whether that was the appropriate policy choice. I have repeatedly acknowledged that those are difficult choices, some of which are imposed from elsewhere and some of which are made by the Scottish Government. I am not suggesting that the protection of the healthcare budget is not welcome.

We would welcome greater clarity on where the £250 million allocation for the integrated funds for health and social care are coming from, given the overall reduction of the social justice budget by 6 per cent, including the very significant cuts to local authorities. Are part of those local authority cuts being transferred into the integration fund?

We have been talking about investment in infrastructure and Emma Ritch used the figure of the £1.6 billion allocation to the Forth crossing. Economic and other arguments have been made as to the essential nature and utility of that significant capital investment. The organisations that are represented here today are asking for greater clarity on what investment there is in both capital and human capital in childcare and social care. We want greater clarity on what allocation will be made to support the commitment to increase the number of hours of childcare provision and to meet the need for an increase in the childcare estate and the structures of childcare around that.

We have seen an uplift of spend in the budget on investment in motorways and trunk roads. While good communication networks are no doubt essential to our economic competitiveness and wellbeing, that investment in motorways and trunk roads is yet again an example of infrastructure that is not directed at the caring side of the caring and sustainable economy question.

**Joan McAlpine:** Again, you have hit the nail on the head in identifying the almost impossible choice that is being forced on us because of the UK cuts.

I am sure that you are not suggesting that we should not build a new Forth crossing. That is really important for the economy, which affects women as well. On roads, we have seen in the recent flooding how important it is to invest in our infrastructure for everybody in society, male and female. Many of us who support gender analysis agree that we should not be forced to put the argument that we do not build a new Forth crossing in order to put money into something else.

**Dr O'Hagan:** What we are talking about are statements on equivalent political value, such as that the Forth crossing is of equivalent political value to childcare. We are not seeing the investment in childcare. I am raising challenges around the balance between—

**Joan McAlpine:** So you think that we should not be building a new Forth crossing.

**Dr O'Hagan:** No, I am not saying that at all. If I may finish my point, I am saying that what we are not seeing is resource allocation to the second part of the caring and sustainable economy. We are seeing investment in infrastructure, but that is

not extending to investment in infrastructure to make the commitments to childcare, which is accepted and welcomed as part of our economic and social infrastructure. We are not seeing the detail on those commitments.

**Joan McAlpine:** The First Minister has made a commitment to increase childcare to 1,140 hours by the end of the next session of Parliament. There is a commitment there, and people acknowledged at the start of the discussion that there had been a big emphasis under the First Minister on women's and children's services.

I want to touch on a more specific issue that was raised by Marsha Scott at the beginning of our discussion on violence against women, in relation to housing in particular. I take it that you would welcome initiatives such as the Scottish welfare fund; in fact, I think that you mentioned that fund. There are also crisis grants for women who are fleeing from violence, and you talked about the importance of affordable housing.

One of the choices that the current Government has made, for example, is to end the sale of council houses, and we have a commitment to build 50,000 new affordable homes.

Others have suggested that what we should do with the housing money is to give first-time buyers who have already saved for a deposit extra money to buy a home. What do you think that will do for women who have been abused and who need housing? Will giving couples £6,000 to buy a home benefit them in any way?

**The Convener:** We are starting to stray into proposals for the next election, rather than looking at the Scottish budget.

**Joan McAlpine:** In fairness, a number of people have talked about long-term choices—

**The Convener:** We will wait and see what the various parties put forward. Equally, we could go into a discussion just now about whether affordable homes are what women want, rather than social rented homes. However, we are not going to get into that. We are going to concentrate—

**Joan McAlpine:** But—

**The Convener:** No. We are going to concentrate on what is in front of us today.

**Joan McAlpine:** Well, Marsha Scott raised the issue of how—

**The Convener:** Sorry, hold on—I am chairing the meeting. Samantha Smethers wanted to come in.

**Samantha Smethers:** I wanted to respond to some of Joan McAlpine's points, one of which related to ring fencing the national health service

spend and whether that was welcome. One of the important things to think about is that, if we do not support our social care infrastructure, the health spend will be spent not on people's health needs but on keeping them in hospital when they could be elsewhere.

The little bit of money—£250 million—that will be spent on health and social care integration is not going to be enough.

**Joan McAlpine:** That is additional.

**Samantha Smethers:** Yes. But it is not—

**Joan McAlpine:** So what do you think should be cut?

**Samantha Smethers:** I do not feel qualified to talk about things such as road infrastructure. It would be very dangerous for me to stray into that and I will not talk about it.

At the moment, we are not comparing the current infrastructure spending proposals and the proposals that we are talking about. We are not comparing like with like in the analysis of the data that underpins the proposals. What we are talking about is infrastructure spend too, but it is not being analysed and compared in that way in the budget process. We need to do a bit more homework—or perhaps the Government needs to do a bit more homework—in order to really understand what the potential would be of investing in a care infrastructure and in the care economy. It would be massive.

11:30

**Joan McAlpine:** But there is a commitment to almost double the number of hours of childcare, for example.

**Samantha Smethers:** Yes. I am coming to that.

**Joan McAlpine:** Indeed—you have talked about that. That is what you want: a long-term route and a shift in infrastructure. When you talk about infrastructure, you are talking about childcare.

There has been a shift. There is a commitment to 50,000 affordable homes. There is the need to continually mitigate against the welfare cuts that are coming from London, which we all agree are having a disproportionate impact on women. We agree on all that. However, we cannot get away from the fact that we do not have full control of our budget. So, what should we cut?

**Samantha Smethers:** I return to the point that you made about childcare hours. We have all welcomed that in our submissions. One of the critical points is when mums return to work. If that point of childcare is not supported—the childcare needs between the ages of nine months and two

or three years—people are more likely to turn to informal care. Research by the Department for Work and Pensions shows clearly that mothers will turn disproportionately to their own mums to provide that care. Those older women, whom we would also want to be in work, are more likely to drop out of the labour market and that has a knock-on effect in terms of their dependency on the welfare system and their being unable to come back into work.

If you took a more strategic approach, you would analyse the situation in that way. At the moment, we are bolting on the hours to childcare for three and four-year-olds, as that is a relatively easy way to deliver it, if we are being honest. As there are nurseries, it is easy to bolt on those extra hours to nurseries, rather than asking what returning parents and returning mums in particular need when they come back to work. It is not that we are being churlish and not welcoming the measure but, if you took the strategic approach to the matter, you would probably come at it in a different way.

**Joan McAlpine:** Eurostat figures show that Scotland's female employment level is second only to that of Sweden. Although the points that you make are of course to be considered, we should remember that women's employment in Scotland is relatively high in European terms.

**The Convener:** To be fair, other witnesses have talked about the preponderance of women in exceptionally low-paid jobs. I refer to the implications that Marsha Scott and others—

**Joan McAlpine:** Employment law is responsible for that, and that is a UK Government issue.

**The Convener:** No—we are not talking about employment law; we are talking about wages. That is an issue.

On the other side of the conversation, there is the matter of cuts. The issue is whether both the Scottish Government and local government should use their taxation powers, although I do not suppose that we have time to get into that.

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** Forgive me for being a bit late this morning. I was probably caught in the same line of traffic as my colleague.

We have proved that there are no easy answers to any of this. The matter is not straightforward. It is not just about the council tax freeze, equal pay or welfare reform—it is the combination of the whole lot.

In the budget that is in front of us—if I have worked out my figures right; forgive me if I have not—we are spending about £270 million from 2013 to 2016 on mitigating just three benefit changes from London. That is £270 million, or

around that amount, that we could be spending on other things.

How do we develop a policy and a forward-thinking budget that examines all that? To be honest, the local authority that I work with puts no gender emphasis on anything that it does. We are not getting it right at that fundamental service-led level. When it comes to budget cuts, the easy pickings are the services for vulnerable people—for example, the women's projects and the food co-ops. In my opinion, they are the easy pickings for a male-dominated philosophy in local government.

Okay—that is my feminist bit out there already. We can add to that the fact that the local authority whose area I am in has had to shell out £72 million this year to settle equal pay claims that it had sat on for decades. The other side of that is that I now represent women who, perhaps because they have been in a serious domestic violence situation or in other situations where they have accumulated debt, have not seen a penny of that equal pay money. It has been taken back straight away by the local authority to clear debts. In my opinion, that money is wages. Therefore, it comes under the Wages Act 1986; it is not about debt reclamation or council tax debt—yet I have been coming up against claims that such payments are not wages.

The only group of people who are affected by that policy are women. Therefore, we now have another compounding of the whole problem. This is about the easy pickings and the mitigation that has to go on—the areas over which we have very little control but which have the biggest impact on women.

Over the past year or so, the committee has done an amazing piece of work in examining issues concerning women. However, we have still not come up with some of the answers, and we have still not even come up with the reasons why we should be doing that. They are not being articulated. When I go back into a local authority chamber, I see that people are still just talking about the easy pickings, which concern vulnerable people and women—and the vulnerable people are usually women.

Please help me in understanding what we do now, what we have control over now and what we can do to make that difference. As far as I can see, unless we deal with front-line, local-led policy, changing it to a gendered policy, we will not make a damn bit of a difference.

**The Convener:** Please try to link answers to the Scottish budget and what we are doing with that.

**Christina McKelvie:** I think I did that when I mentioned mitigation and so on.

**The Convener:** Yes.

**Emma Ritch:** I will do my best. I absolutely recognise what Christina McKelvie says about local decision making. The two issues are reflective of each another, in that we do not see a robust process within the Scottish budget yet. We acknowledge the progress that has been made with the equality budget statement and the work that is done with the equality and budget advisory group, but we do not yet see a robust gender analysis in the budget process, and we do not see robust gender analysis within public bodies. That is contrary to the law. We have the public sector equality duty, and specific Scottish regulations require equality impact assessments to be undertaken and published by public authorities, yet there is almost a complete failure of that process and of the law to drive real change for women.

Engender has been working with Close the Gap and Scottish Women's Aid to examine how equality impact assessments have been working to drive change. Close the Gap recently published a very measured but nonetheless scathing analysis of the extent to which the current public sector equality duty arrangements, and the responses to them by public bodies, are actually delivering equal pay for women in the public sector. Close the Gap sees regression from the previous round of publications three years ago and from before that, when we had the gender equality duty and the specific requirements thereof.

It has been of real concern to Engender to see gender disappearing into the midst of a raft of other equality dimensions—welcome though they are. We should, of course, be taking an approach that recognises that women have a range of identities and are not an homogeneous group. Nonetheless, those concerns have been around for the entire lifetime of the public sector equality duty, and we brought them to the attention of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women—CEDAW—and of sister organisations from across the United Kingdom. We made the point that things are just not working.

There is the possibility of positive change. The Equality and Human Rights Commission is working in Scotland to try and improve practice. Other organisations including Scottish Women's Aid, Engender and Close the Gap are acting to provide public bodies with useable guidance and information on how to take action. We would like a strengthening of the Scotland-specific regulations; that could be done with the existing powers of the Scottish Parliament.

I recognise some of the points that Joan McAlpine made earlier. Engender called for devolution of employment law and equalities law

during the Smith commission process. We have not yet got the final detail on the small measure of equality law that will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament in the form of quotas for public sector boards. It is quite a miserly provision, but we hope that it will be taken up.

The Scotland-specific regulations are something that could be changed and we think that the time is ripe for the Scottish Government to make such changes. The regulations do not have teeth and are not being taken seriously; women across Scotland are seeing the impact of the failure even to consider the differential impacts on women and men of the policy and spending decisions that are being made.

**Christina McKelvie:** Thank you. That is helpful.

**Marsha Scott:** I will add to what Emma Ritch has said—she put it more articulately than I could have. The failure to learn how to do a competent impact assessment runs through all levels of policy making and service design. As has been pointed out, that is driven by a system that has privileged other sets of values. The things about the budget process that are relevant in this context have to do with politicians and citizens saying that it is not good enough any more: if you get a report that is not gendered, do not accept it.

It is a very exciting time in Scotland: “feminist” and “gender” are not dirty words any more. However, now is the time for us to turn all our good intentions into the transformation of society and people's lives. Some of that will require transformation of processes and structures.

We have to pay attention to the fact that only 22 per cent of local councillors are women. You will be able to draw absolute lines between the paucity of women involved in policy making at local level and the lack of any evidence of questions around gender. I wish that we could say, “Take a look at the fabulous gender impact assessments that are being done at national level as a result of the commitment there.” There is commitment, but as Angela O'Hagan said, there is no capacity and no competence. I have started to talk about gender-competent and domestic-abuse-competent analysis. We are working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on guidance on commissioning of domestic abuse services and we are saying that if you cannot be gender competent, you cannot be domestic-abuse competent.

It is about refusing incompetent analyses, whether of a local authority report or a national budget. It is not a quick fix, but it is the only thing that will actually give us transformation.

**Lorna Kettles:** Marsha Scott hit the nail on the head when she talked about the women's groups and the easy pickings at local authority level,

where services are provided by and for women, but where women are not represented. As Marsha Scott said, there are terrible levels of representation of women at councillor level. As an organisation, the Scottish Women's Convention has found that when we go into communities across Scotland—as we do—it is the women who lead the way on campaigns, whether it is a “Save our school” campaign, or a campaign on buses, libraries or whatever, but there is a real disconnect between such community activity and the next step up.

Regardless of the processes around the public sector equality duty and the things that are not being done that fundamentally should be done, there is a lack of women's voices at the table. I am preaching to the converted, but if you do not have women's voices at the table, what is important to women will not be reflected. Although you have to strive and carry on the work of projects such as Close the Gap, which is doing a lot of work around the public sector equality duty, you still have to look at representation. If women are not there, the issues that are important to women—not just women's issues but how every decision that is made will have a gender impact—will not be considered. That is very important.

**Dr O'Hagan:** I welcome Christina McKelvie's question and the comments that have been made about not reducing the discussion and debate to one about which cuts are helpful and which are unhelpful.

11:45

We are all trying to recalibrate a policy process that has, as its starting point, the concern of advancing equality and improving women's financial, social and political autonomy and status. If we accept that starting point, we should be using the powers that exist—as Emma Ritch has already clearly articulated—in the public sector equality duty. That duty is systematically undermined by the very people who are supposed to be practising it. However, the duty contains that requirement. Additionally in Scotland, it contains the opportunity for the Scottish Government to be much more directive to the public bodies that are funded by it.

We see in the equality budget statement, for example, the statement that the reduction in funding to the enterprise bodies will have no equality implications. How does that stand up? I think that that is looking through the wrong end of the telescope. The Government should be asking how the enterprise agencies are actively promoting equality in business development, in business and in enterprise support, and in respect of the quality and nature of employment and pay and remuneration packages?

In the budget there are many commendable and really welcome policy commitments—as we have stated and restated today and elsewhere—such as on childcare and on long-term care. Also, when we look at Scotland's economic strategy, the pillars on which it is built are inclusive growth and tackling inequalities.

As I have said in response to members today, I think that the budget falls short on the balance of commitments; we see cuts in the pensions, social justice, fair work and local government budgets and we see increases in capital investment on infrastructure projects. We need to question who stands to gain the most and—as I have said repeatedly—in constrained financial times and political circumstances, we need to ask whether those choices will advance women's equality and gender equality? That is where the failure of process and analysis leaves this budget falling short.

**The Convener:** Four members want to come in. I am sorry, but I do not have time for that. We will have to cut the discussion short. We have to allow time to reflect on what has been said because we have to get a report finalised today to go to the Finance Committee. I apologise for that. I thank the witnesses for—

**Kevin Stewart:** In which case, convener, on a point of order, we have a situation—

**The Convener:** Kevin—which standing order is it?

**Kevin Stewart:** Off the top of my head, convener, I do not have that information and do not need it, as you well know.

On a point of order. You have said that we have a report to write today: I understand that. We have touched on many issues—fair play to you for allowing it: that is grand—but we have not today really got to grips to the extent that we should have with some of the welfare reform aspects of the budget. I think that it is going to be very difficult for us to write a report unless we tease out some of those issues.

**The Convener:** It is 10 to 12 and we do not have time to go into a full discussion about welfare reform. Apart from John Lamont, each member has had the opportunity to ask questions. That subject was not raised by members. Contributors have all been able to comment on it but have chosen not to. We have had almost two hours in which those issues could have come up; I think that we would be doing welfare reform an injustice to try to cram in a full debate on it in the last 15 to 20 minutes. I am sorry, but members had the opportunity to cover it earlier.

I regret that we have not had the opportunity to look at legal aid, which Marsha Scott raised, which

in one respect might not be seen as a welfare reform issue, but it is fundamental in respect of the matrimonial home—it is fundamental to women in domestic violence situations who do not have access to funds. I apologise because we have not looked at that.

The contributions that we have had have been formidable and well informed and I thank you for that. I hope that we will be able to reflect some of the comments that we have heard. Thank you very much for your contributions.

11:50

*Meeting continued in private until 11:58.*

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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