



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Equalities and Human Rights Committee

**Thursday 8 October 2020**

**Session 5**



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**EQUALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE**  
**20<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2020, Session 5**

**CONVENER**

\*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab)

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con)

\*Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

\*Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

\*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Emma Congreve (Fraser of Allander Institute)

Christina McKelvie (Minister for Older People and Equalities)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Claire Menzies

**LOCATION**

Virtual Meeting



# Scottish Parliament

## Equalities and Human Rights Committee

Thursday 8 October 2020

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]*

### Pre-budget Scrutiny 2021-22

**The Convener (Ruth Maguire):** I welcome everyone to the 20th meeting in 2020 of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee. Our first item of business is the second evidence session in our pre-budget scrutiny 2021-22, on the impact of Covid-19 on equalities and human rights.

We have two witness panels; I am very grateful to witnesses for their attendance. I welcome our first witness, Emma Congreve, who is knowledge exchange fellow at the Fraser of Allander institute. Thank you for being with us today.

I remind everyone to allow broadcasting staff a few seconds to operate microphones before you begin to ask your questions or provide an answer. We now move to questions.

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Good morning. The current financial situation has had a massive impact on medium-term and short-term finances. Can you provide an assessment of how the Scottish economy has performed during 2020? What can we expect to happen over the coming years because of that impact?

**Emma Congreve (Fraser of Allander Institute):** I thank the committee for having me. 2020 has been a year like no other for the economy, and there is still a huge amount of uncertainty about what will happen next. The shutdown of many sectors at the beginning of the crisis had the immediate impact of a reduction of in the region of 20 per cent in the size of the economy.

That was temporary and things have changed since sectors started to reopen. We have seen the low point of the trough. We hope that we do not go back to lockdown, in which so many things had to shut down completely. Yesterday's announcement will probably mean that there will be some contraction, following a few months in which growth in the economy had picked up a bit. When we get the outturn data for 2020, we might see quarters in which some months had a pick-up in growth and some had a falling-off, as restrictions have changed.

However, gross domestic product and the size of our economy are considerably lower than they were at the start of 2020. It will take many years to make up that ground.

It is important to say—this is true of all recessions, but it is especially true of this one—that some sectors have been really badly affected, other sectors have not been so badly affected and some have probably not been affected at all. We have come up with a new shape to describe the recovery: it is a “K” shape of recession and potential recovery. Some parts of the economy will still be able to grow even with a lot of uncertainty, so although they might not grow at the speed at which they would have grown otherwise, they will recover faster than other parts of the economy. Hospitality will take a hit for the next little while, following the new restrictions that have come in.

There will be different speeds of recovery and they will be much more distinct than we would normally see in a recession because of the restrictions on specific parts of the economy. The story differs depending on who you are, where you are, the type of work that you are in and the type of company you are. That makes it very difficult to understand the overall picture and to work out how many people are caught up in all this, what the interactions are and how supply chains will be affected. Things like new starts and graduates joining companies and progression will look very different in different parts of the economy. The regions of Scotland face different challenges, as well. It is a mixed bag, with a lot of uncertainty.

The only certainties are that the economy is much smaller than it was and that it will take a number of years for us to get back to the levels that we were at before the pandemic.

However, we need to understand what will happen next and where that will take us. The Fraser of Allander institute has put together some scenarios. We are not doing forecasts per se, because this is not a good time to do forecasts, with so many things being about to change. The scenarios indicate that recovery will take a number of years; it will fully between two and four years, depending on what happens in the next little while, before things return to where they were at the start of 2020.

**Alexander Stewart:** Can you give us a flavour of your analysis of the implications for public finances and the Scottish budget?

**Emma Congreve:** In the United Kingdom as a whole, there has, up to now, been a considerable amount of additional money spent and additional borrowing done in order to bring in many schemes, including the coronavirus job retention scheme. There has been a big increase in borrowing. A lot of money has been passed on to

the Scottish budget in 2020 through Barnett consequential, which has been a boost to the Scottish budget this year. A lot of that money has been allocated already. There is still a little bit of uncertainty about exactly what the final position of the Scottish budget will be for 2021.

Looking ahead, I note that a lot will depend on how the UK Government decides to move ahead—if and when it starts to think about moving towards balancing the books, as they call it. There is a lot of uncertainty about that. We must then look at how that passes through to the Scottish budget.

Secondly, we have to consider the implications for Scotland's own tax-raising powers and how they interact with the fiscal framework. That adds another layer of complexity. A reduction in tax revenues here will obviously reduce the amount of money that is coming in, but will not necessarily have ramifications through the fiscal framework, as long as we are not out of kilter with what is happening in the rest of the UK. It is very difficult to know at the moment whether Scotland is facing a more significant hit to its taxes than the rest of the UK faces, and it will be a while before we begin to understand that. We will see reductions in what comes through from taxes, then we will have to factor in what happens at UK level.

The UK Government's autumn budget was cancelled. We might get a signal through the autumn spending review—we hope that it goes ahead—but, again, it is really difficult to know. We are unlikely, as was the case for 2020-21, to see a big expansion next year. There will be some tightening, but it is very unclear what the impact of that will be.

**The Convener:** I want to ask about the distributional impact. I think that we all acknowledge that existing inequalities have been exacerbated in 2020 as a result of the pandemic. Where are the most widespread and deeply felt inequalities in Scotland during 2020? Looking ahead, where are we likely to see changes in the coming years?

**Emma Congreve:** What has happened in 2020 has exacerbated existing inequalities in many ways. I will talk a little about the additional issues that the pandemic has brought up. Any economic downturn tends to reinforce the inequalities in society; I do not think that this one will be any different. We often see during recessions the effects on people on lower incomes in less secure jobs, who work in lower-paid industries, many of which have been significantly hit—for example, retail and hospitality. They are particularly important sectors for women, who work in low-paid jobs in part-time work to allow for their work-life balance.

We think that two groups in particular have been additionally impacted by what has happened. The first group is people with disabilities. It is important that we understand what “disability” means. It covers a wide range of people with very different conditions, of differing severities. There are people who have needed to shield who might still be very uncomfortable with going out into any form of normality—people who are facing additional barriers to going about their normal lives because of the existence of the virus and the implications that their catching it would have. That is one group of people who have been more impacted by this crisis than the rest of us.

Under the “disability” umbrella, we have been doing a lot of work on people with learning disability in recent weeks and months, and will continue to do so. We have seen many examples of care packages being taken away because of reprioritisation that has been necessary under budget pressures. While some of the personal care and statutory elements of care packages remain, there has been a loss of some parts of care packages that allow people to live their lives as independently as possible. Such people have had a real worsening in their standard of living because of those care packages being taken away. In some cases, family carers have had to try to pick up the slack, which has put big pressure on them.

A large group of people who need additional services are affected by that—additional services that allow them to live in their own homes, to have the social interaction that they need and to get a bit of help with keeping their finances on track. It is crucial that people with learning disabilities get information in a way that they can interpret on things such as what the implications of lockdown mean for their lives. There is a lot of information that is very hard to understand, at the moment. There are also people with disability and long-term health conditions to consider.

The second group is parents. The situation has improved a bit with schools going back, but there are still some issues. Mothers are, typically, the primary care givers. There were implications of schools closing for such a long time, regardless of whether parents were able to balance work and care. We saw a lot of evidence from surveys and so on that mothers were having to take on much more of the burden of childcare, and were having to spend less time on their work. Some had to leave their work or to try to opt into furlough, if their employers were offering it, so that they could give the care and learning that were required.

09:15

Schools going back has changed that somewhat, but many schools are having to send

kids home, and kids are having to self-isolate for whom there is still no childcare infrastructure available—in particular, where informal childcare was part of the mix. Lots of parents, mothers in particular, will be struggling. We know the fundamentals of how the gender pay gap operates: women have to make trade-offs to keep their families functioning, which means that sometimes their working lives have to take a back seat, which inadvertently gives a signal to employers and so on. You can imagine that very few women who have young children to care for are thinking that they will go for a new job or a promotion opportunity, because they do not know what will happen.

There is a lot for those two groups—people with disabilities and women. It is all connected to the socioeconomics of poverty—child poverty, in particular—and it manifests over time as a widening of inequality for those groups of people.

**The Convener:** Is there evidence that those who are on lower incomes tend to spend their money locally, so there is a double knock-on effect in neighbourhoods and areas that are slightly worse off? If people have to stay in their homes and their income contracts, is there a double dunt on areas that are more economically challenged? Is that fair to say?

**Emma Congreve:** There are two issues. People with lower incomes tend to spend more of their income because, in economic terms, they have a higher propensity to consume, which means that they have less excess income to save. They are more likely to spend a £1 increase in their pay than someone with a higher income is—someone with a higher income may save part of that.

You are right, convener: people often spend money more locally if they have lower incomes. That is primarily because they have to travel to reach other destinations. That is especially a barrier at the moment, with people being advised not to use public transport unless they need to. The ability to shop around or even to get to a big supermarket can be limited for people with lower incomes, especially if they do not have a car. If a person has less income and they were previously more likely to spend that money locally because of the barriers to travelling elsewhere, there will be a knock-on impact on local areas.

It is worth saying that not all people on low incomes live in low-income areas. The Scottish index of multiple deprivation shows that a lot of people on low incomes live in the more deprived areas of Scotland, but a lot of people on low incomes live in different communities throughout Scotland. There is some evidence that they spend their money locally because of the restrictions on them and the barriers that they face rather than

because they necessarily want to spend all their money locally, if that makes sense.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** Thank you very much for coming to see us. The presentation has been fascinating so far.

I want to pick up where the convener left off. You have talked about the harm of the emergency to various groups, which will be disproportionately disadvantaged. I want to ask about the lessons of history, from your perspective.

We know from previous economic shocks on the scale that we are looking at that, in the long range, other groups will be disadvantaged and will have their inclusion hampered. They might be excluded from the jobs market. People in equalities groups who were struggling will struggle further. Can you give us examples from previous economic shocks—from 2008, in recent history, or from further back—of what we can expect and what we, as legislators, should be doing to mitigate that?

**Emma Congreve:** The previous recession was slightly different, because we did not see the big reduction in jobs that we would have expected to see in a recession. I think that it will be different this time round and that more jobs will be lost.

On the priorities coming out of recessions, we saw a move to slightly lower-quality jobs in the previous recession. That seemed to be the way forward. We kept a lot of jobs, but a lot of them were part time. We saw the emergence of more precarious contracts and the gig economy. That is not all bad, but it led to a shift towards more precarious work.

One thing to learn as we come out of this recession is that, although jobs are critical—we need jobs for people to be able to get income—their quality is a really important part of the picture. It is quite difficult for the Scottish Government to understand that or to be able to do too much about that, because it does not have powers over job regulation, for example. However, there is the question of what needs to be put in place so that the best-quality jobs emerge and we have people in Scotland who are ready to take on those jobs.

That goes back to thinking about skills. In the recession of the 1980s, for example, there was no real focus on what the pathway was for people who had lost their jobs, with those jobs no longer existing. Now, we are unsure about what the future looks like for things such as hospitality. I hope that it will come back, but it may be a little while before it is able to. There is a lot of feeling that high street retail was already on the decline. Has the crisis simply fast-forwarded that? We might see structural changes in the type of jobs that are available in our economy.

What is the pathway? What are the alternatives for people, particularly young people, for whom those jobs might be the first rung on the ladder or might be supplementing their income to get through higher education? That is a crucial issue. Can we think about what the further and higher education sectors can bring to equip people and set them on a potentially different pathway?

There needs to be an additional focus. If tackling inequality is a Scottish Government priority, there needs to be a focus on how to restrict or mitigate the harm that is being caused and get back to where we were before, and on how to ensure that people do not fall further behind. That speaks to some quite targeted support and a real focus on particular groups. I think that young people will be a big focus for the Scottish Government in the recovery, as they were at the end of the previous recession, but it is clear that they are not the only group that needs a lot of attention.

We are particularly concerned about people who are already at the fringes of the labour market. I have mentioned those groups. We are particularly concerned about mothers who may have been working only part time for a few hours in order to supplement their income, and people with a disability, who have additional barriers to work in the first place.

It is not just the economy that has a role in mitigating harm. The Scottish Government now has more social security powers, so it could be filling the hole for a little while so that people can stay on their feet and not get into cycles of debt that will take many years to unravel. Giving people economic security while the labour market is in such a state of flux is really important for their resilience, mental health, wellbeing and so on. It is not just about how to fix the economy; it is about how to look at the wider picture. We will be in this situation for quite a long while, so how can we best equip ourselves to get through this period and come out the other side?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** My final question ties in very nicely with the end of what you have just said. We know that, before this particular economic shock, there were significant difficulties for a range of equalities groups—people with disabilities, whom you have covered extensively, people with care experience, people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds and, indeed, mothers—in accessing the employment market. As you have pointed out, there will be a disproportionate impact on them. Are there mechanisms, policies and schemes that we have adopted in the past which we could deploy rapidly now to make life better for them, so that they have a fighting chance when they are jostling in the

labour market against the countless thousands of people who have just been made unemployed?

**Emma Congreve:** That is a really good question. There are schemes that are in operation now, such as fair start Scotland scheme and other employability schemes, that I expect will be going through a bit of soul searching to understand whether they are the right schemes operating in the right way at this moment in time. An issue that is relevant to the whole area of equalities is that there is not always that much evidence of the impact of schemes and how successful they have been in meeting outcomes for things such as equality and poverty. They might be quite good in looking at success in getting people into jobs, for example, but they do not always drill down into whether they have had an impact on vulnerable groups that we want to help.

The Scottish Government has looked at a scheme that existed around 15 years ago in designing its parental employability support system. I cannot remember its exact name, but it was really well evaluated, and it showed that a holistic approach is needed for people for whom there are additional barriers to the labour market. It is not enough to have them in an employability scheme that just gives advice on their CVs and links them up with employers; they need help to navigate things such as childcare services and to work out how they will get to and from their jobs if they are physically quite far away from the labour market.

Interventions that look at the whole person and their family are often important in understanding what they require and what their barriers are to accessing the labour market. It is often not as simple as having a better CV and some advice on how to do interviews well. Obviously, that simplifies what employability services try to do, but a real holistic approach is needed.

09:30

I cannot remember exactly what that scheme was called, but it came in under the previous Labour-Lib Dem Government. It was wrapped up into the local government concordat, so it still exists to some extent in local authorities. The Scottish Government has looked at it in thinking again about how it can design a scheme for getting parents into the labour market in particular. I think that it is looking at it for disability, as well. That is really important.

We heard recently from people in a group that we talked to about learning disabilities about the support that they would like to help them to get into the labour market. They often find the process of applying for a job very difficult. Often, tests are not set up for a person with a learning disability to



get what is required and get through the hoops. A service that would help those people to navigate application processes is needed. They said to us that people do not need supported employment the whole way through. They need help at the application stage and help with simple things, such as working out how to get to interviews, where the building is, and what they need to do when they get there. If they get the job, maybe they will need a bit of support for the first couple of weeks to help them to settle into their routine and know what is going on.

It is about seeing things from the person's perspective and seeing what their barriers are rather than seeing things in an umbrella-like way and saying, "This is what disabled employability services look like." We want to see schemes that are moulded to people rather than schemes that are designed at a higher level. Participation and people being talked to about what they need are key parts of that.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** It has been very interesting to hear you talk about where we might want to target things in the future. I want to talk about data gaps that might be causing problems. I was on the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee when it looked at the gender pay gap, and we found out that there were a lot of gaps in terms of disaggregated data.

As Alex Cole-Hamilton said, we need to assess what has worked, but also to target things in the right way as we go forward. You have talked about your predictions about the people who will be the most adversely affected economically by the pandemic. Do you see that there might be a need for better disaggregated data so that we can target things in the right way?

**Emma Congreve:** Absolutely—I could not agree more. There are valid reasons why it is difficult to disaggregate equalities data. Although the populations of groups might be quite big, they might comprise quite a small proportion of the overall population, hence it is difficult for survey data to capture enough people to know that results are robust. However, there are ways around that. Government statisticians have a system of asking similar questions across a range of surveys to try to increase the sample size for particular equalities groups, which they have used for minority ethnic groups and, I think, religious groups. That is still not ideal, because it does not necessarily allow people to ask very detailed questions—it is just about getting at the broad base of some of the big issues.

Disaggregation is very important and I know that there is a lot of frustration in some stakeholder communities when they are given reasons such as a lack of a big enough sample size; they say that that is not good enough. We know there is a

problem with sample size and that we need to sort it out.

To be able to provide good cost-effective future policy to address the gender pay gap, it is important to be able to pick out exactly what is happening through people's life courses, to see where the issues come up, and, where there have been successes, to understand what works and, in particular, what does not work.

In relation to statistics for minority ethnic groups who might face very different barriers, I note that we often have just a white group and a non-white group, and it is not helpful to badge people in just that way.

I have already talked a lot about disability, which is a word that you see in a lot of mainstream policy documents and strategies, but it is clear that the people writing them do not understand exactly what disability means. It is not just one thing; you cannot just have one disability action plan. Of course there are parts of Government that understand and really get this—the minister and the equalities unit, who are on the next panel of witnesses, for instance—but there is not necessarily a mainstream understanding of disability in the likes of the economic development teams. If data are not disaggregated, the more mainstream analyses do not necessarily capture disability. To misquote someone, "If you don't measure it, it won't get done".

Good data is critical if you want people to understand and be able to create mainstream policy, because it is the language of a lot of Government departments. There are good initiatives that are trying to capture the voices of lived experience, which is important in helping to understand how to interpret the data and where the data misses bits and pieces, which it always will. The participation approach is necessary, but it must be both, not just one or the other.

Investment is necessary to work out where the data can be found. I know that there is work going on to look at administrative data sources and see where disaggregated data on equalities can be used from other sources where it is collected for other purposes. Departments running the big Scottish Government surveys, such as the Scottish household survey and the Scottish health survey, could think a lot more about how to disaggregate their data.

The Scottish Government puts a lot of money into the family resources survey, which is the carried out by the Department for Work and Pensions and is the main data source on incomes and poverty that is used across the UK. It forms the basis of how we measure the child poverty targets in Scotland. It uses a big sample from across the UK and quite a big sample from

Scotland proportionally, and there could be some improvements in how the questions are asked and the results are disaggregated. There is potential, but investment is needed. Surveys are expensive, but they are critical to getting understanding and information into mainstream debates.

I could not agree more that it is important to focus on disaggregating data.

**Gillian Martin:** I want to pick up on a couple of things from your answer. Surveys are one thing, but in the white heat of the pandemic, a lot of Government funding was distributed very quickly. Some of it was delivered through local authorities, some through funds that the Government set up and some through enterprise agencies. In your work, have you seen any kind of assessment of where that money has gone? There are a lot of very small women-led businesses that going under or really feeling the heat, and maybe the voices that shout the loudest get the money thrown at them, while other voices are drowned out. From your work and from the data, can you see where that money has gone and where it has made an impact? I am thinking in terms of gender.

**Emma Congreve:** So far, we have not seen any analysis of the impacts of the spend.

There are two parts to the issue. The first is the speed at which the Government felt that it had to move—the feeling that it just had to get money out of the door as best it could.

Secondly, there is the question of whether it was done as well as possible. If the Government had been able to do an analysis of the impact of the spend on particular groups, and where it wanted the money to go, there would have been an opportunity to look at some of the equalities implications of the spend.

This comes back to my point about how mainstream equalities analysis is. Equalities is often seen as something separate that is done by a group of people in one part of Government and is not the domain of people in the part of Government that is doling out the money. That is an issue for budgets as well as for emergency situations such as we have had during the pandemic.

As I understand it, equalities analyses are done by a group of people separate from those who decide the overall packages of expenditure going out in budgets, and they do not necessarily feed into the decisions about where the money goes. It is no surprise that we have seen that with the money that has gone out during the pandemic, because it is not done systematically even in normal times, for normal budgets.

Are the right systems in place to ensure that when we are moving at speed, the money is going

to the right places? There will always be trade-offs in deciding where money is spent, but we have to understand the trade-offs before we spend the money, so that we are aware of what is happening. We saw that in local government, with the emergency legislation and care packages being removed. It was done very quickly because it was felt that it to be done quickly, and it is only now that we are hearing how detrimental that has been. It is quite apparent that the decisions that were taken did not take account of the implications that they would have for people's lives. It was probably understood that there would be some implications, but they were not factored in systematically.

How equalities analysis is done is not just an issue for what has happened in the past year. It is an issue for how money is spent in each and every budget. It is not collectively understood.

**Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** I have a couple of questions about the budget process. As I am conscious of the time, I will roll my questions into one. We have spoken quite a lot this morning about the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on certain groups of people. What difference would a human rights or gender-based budget process have made to the pandemic and how can we move to that? What do we need to do to make sure we have a gender-based budget approach? What skills and resources do we need? How can we ensure a participatory budget process?

09:45

**Emma Congreve:** In answer to your first question, unfortunately we do not have a counterfactual, so I cannot give you anything other than my own reflections. A human rights or gender-based budget process might have resulted in less harm than we have seen to some groups, as I think that some of these things could have been seen coming.

Childcare has always been a gendered issue, so it was no surprise that the impact of having children at home and being schooled from home was a huge pressure on women, but it did not seem as if much was put in place to mitigate that. It did not seem to be something that the Government needed to worry about. Education is now being seen as a priority and it will be the last thing that will be shut down, but much of the reason for that is to do with the educational attainment of the children rather than the wellbeing of the parents and their ability to get back to work.

The reason why I say that childcare has not been as well considered as it should have been is that some of the support services and childcare arrangements are still in flux. Parents still face a lot of issues with how to balance everything. If a

more gendered approach had been taken to the crisis, there would have been at least some discussion and a realisation of what was happening, and mitigations might have been put in place to get some parts of the complex system of childcare operating better as schools have gone back, so that mothers could get back to some sense of normality more quickly.

On the human rights side, there was a lot of concern about human rights being taken from some groups. People who rely on social care were at the front of that and an organisation called People First (Scotland) has put in some representation about how people in those groups feel that their human rights have been disregarded during the crisis.

At minimum, those two things would have been more prominent in what was being talked about. Something being talked about and something being done are different things, of course, but talking about them would at least have been a step in the right direction.

As for how that can change and what tools can be put in place, as I have said, there are some parts of the Government and some civil servants who are totally on to this and who understand what the issues are. I think that you will be talking to some of them in the next panel of witnesses. There are published toolkits showing what to consider when making budget decisions. There are things such as the equality and fairer Scotland budget statement. There are people in the Government who are trying to work on this, but the question is how you make it front and centre for every decision that is being made rather than something that is seen as separate.

I think that somebody in a previous evidence session gave the example of the how the equalities impact assessment for the Scottish child payment came after the decisions on that had been made and announced. That is the kind of thing that we are talking about. How can we be certain that the right people are making the right choices based on the evidence that they have on the equalities and human rights impacts? That is what needs to be addressed. The finance team has to take responsibility for some of this. When things such as budgets have to be done at pace, how can we be fully convinced that the right evidence has been taken in?

There have been lots of moves to improve participation, and that is important, but it cannot be used instead of the ordinary processes and tools that civil servants have to get things done, often at pace. Participation needs to be part of the whole system of government to ensure that the Government understands what people on the ground are thinking, feeling and experiencing in order in turn to inform the broad areas that it is

working on and the tools that it is using to make decisions.

My biggest thought on this is that we need to get equalities mainstreamed.

**Mary Fee:** Very briefly, following on what Emma Congreve said about awareness across the Government about where the focus should be and being alive to the challenges, is it more about changing the focus of what we do than it is about requiring a different set of skills and additional resource?

**Emma Congreve:** I think that you are right. The skills are there in the Government, although I do not know whether there are enough of them. I agree that it is about what priorities are being set. Any Government decision and any budget will have many competing priorities and many trade-offs, so what is the focus, and what are the priorities that the Government is trying to achieve?

One example is child poverty, for which we have the targets and a big push to meet them. However, it is very hard to understand the impact of the budget on child poverty, or even to understand how much money is being spent on child poverty at budget time. That takes months, if not years, to unravel. The lack of understanding says to me that child poverty is not being prioritised and is not at the front and centre of the decisions that are being made at budget time.

Even though a lot of the narrative around the budget will point to child poverty being the big priority, when decisions are being made and when the budget is being pulled together, who is there, asking, "Does this spend over here have an impact on child poverty?" There is no one at the centre working that kind of thing out. It is seen as something for someone else in a different part of Government to work out later.

There is still a silo mentality. It probably would not take too much to change that—just very firm prioritisation. We can look to New Zealand's budget process to see how to try to do that. It is not easy and you will probably not get it right first time but, if we are going to have a wellbeing budget, we need to stick to priorities that affirm wellbeing, particularly for the groups whose lives the budget is trying to improve.

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** Will you sum up your thoughts about the recovery plan for us? I appreciate that you have already addressed much of that in your answers, but what do you think the main principles behind a recovery plan should be and who should be involved? As we build back better—to use that phrase—what budget measures would you prioritise?

**Emma Congreve:** To build back better we would advocate—Fraser of Allander does not do recommendations so, in that sense, I can dodge your question—that it is about getting the basics right. It is not necessarily about new, shiny terminology or new strategy. A lot of inequalities have been widened by the Covid crisis, but they remain the same as what we have been dealing with for many years; they have just been exacerbated.

First, how do we undo the harm? How do we get our economy and our society back to where they were before the harm occurred? I am not talking about getting back to the same economic system but about getting back to where people are not marginalised by what is going on. We should look at some of Scotland's basic infrastructure, and social security needs to come into those discussions, because it is a tool for the economy as well as for individuals, in that it keeps people on an even keel so that they can continue to participate in the labour market and do not fall out of it completely. Out-of-work benefits for carers and those with disabilities could also play a key part in ameliorating some of the harm to their living standards. Therefore, we should first look at harm reduction.

To build changes to the economic system, we need to understand that it will take a long time for some of the big sectors employing low-paid workers to return to normal. Hospitality for example, and high street retail may never get back to where they were before the pandemic. Then there are sectors such as oil and gas in Aberdeen. We need to think strategically about alternatives for the groups of people who were reliant on those sectors for their jobs. Where is the alternative skills trajectory? What kind of impact could a skills policy have on those groups?

Job creation is critically important. We will not pretend that we do not need new jobs to be created, but we have to think about that K shape. Where are those jobs on the upwards trajectory that will come out of the recession better than those that will be more restricted for longer? How can we focus on getting the right people skilled and into jobs in the sectors that will be doing better than others? There is no magic bullet. We hope, however, that recovery will not be about shiny new strategies but will be about going back to basics, understanding people's realities on the ground and building from there, rather than trying to imagine something that is a long way off and might not help people here and now.

**Fulton MacGregor:** Thank you for that very full answer.

**The Convener:** That concludes our questioning for the moment. Thank you very much for being with us as the sole panel member, Emma—that

was quite a shift for one person. We appreciate your time and your answers, which have been very helpful. If you wait for broadcasting to turn off your video and microphone, you are free to leave the meeting and continue to watch on Scottish Parliament TV if you wish.

We will briefly suspend while broadcasting sets up the second panel.

09:59

*Meeting suspended.*

10:05

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** I welcome our second panel: Christina McKelvie is the Minister for Older People and Equalities; Emma Harvey is the divisional performance manager in the equality and human rights division; and Sean Stronach is the head of the equality unit in the equality and human rights division of the Scottish Government. Thank you all for being with us this morning. I remind all participants to give broadcasting staff a few seconds to operate their microphones before speaking.

Minister, thank you very much for being with us today. Please make your opening statement.

**The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie):** Thank you for inviting me to give evidence today on the equality and human rights budget process.

In the 2020-21 budget, the promoting equality and human rights budget line increased to £30.2 million. That was a significant increase from the 2019-20 budget position, which I hope you will agree signals the Scottish Government's commitment to the work.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that, across the Government, there has been a significant impact on our normal way of working, we have ensured that we have used this budget to deliver support to those who are in need during this crisis.

The three-year funding streams that support equality and human rights organisations were due to finish in June this year. The Cabinet Secretary for Security and Older People and I decided early on in the crisis to avoid additional pressures being placed upon partner organisations to apply for new funding streams in the midst of the pandemic response and we extended the grants schemes to September 2021. In addition to providing clarity and consistency through that decision, we have added flexibility within grants for organisations to reprofile, reprovise and adapt their work to meet the demands of Covid-19.

The details of the replacement funding streams—the delivering equally safe fund and the supporting equalities and human rights fund—will be announced shortly, and it is our intention to open the funds to applications by January 2021. The new streamlined funding streams will more closely align our funding with the national performance framework outcomes, and will encourage and support partnership working to tackle some of the more entrenched issues of inequality across our society.

It is, of course, shocking that women and children have been subjected to greater risk of domestic abuse and violence during the pandemic, but in response to an increase in demand from front-line support services, last month I announced an additional £4.25 million of funding for organisations to increase their support and meet that need. That was in addition to the £1.5 million that was quickly provided in March to Scottish Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland to support service redesign, expand the national helpline capacity and provide support for women and children.

We have also supported organisations to access our £350 million community and wellbeing funds, with around £3.4 million of that funding having been given to equality organisations to provide urgent community support, with a particular focus on older people and others who are at risk of experiencing isolation. That included over £870,000 for Age Scotland to increase its helpline capacity and over £312,000 to support minority ethnic people—in particular, for providing culturally appropriate food and support services.

The committee will be aware of the dual uncertainties that the Scottish Government faces from adapting to respond to the Covid-19 crisis and from the lack of a UK autumn budget statement. Despite those uncertainties, equalities and human rights lie at the heart of our approach to budgeting. In forming spending plans, ministers must take into account the impact of their decisions on equality considerations. The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People and I have been working closely with all our ministerial colleagues to support those considerations.

Covid-19 has highlighted the deep-rooted inequalities that exist within our society, so it is vital that, as we move to the next stages of our renewal and recovery work, we use this opportunity to make fundamental and lasting changes to address those inequalities.

Convener, I will finish with that point because I know that you have a number of questions. Thank you for allowing me to make an opening statement and to set the tone.

**The Convener:** Thank you, minister. That was helpful. Can you give us some insight into the challenges of managing the budget this year? You have mentioned two areas of uncertainty. The committee would be interested to hear about the challenges around making decisions at speed. You gave good examples of additional funding for older people and for tackling violence against women. How do you balance the need to urgently put in place funds to help the people who need help with the requirement to ensure that public funds are used effectively and that we understand the impact on equalities of what we are spending?

**Christina McKelvie:** That is a smashing question, convener, and it is a question that we asked ourselves at the beginning of all this. You will not be surprised to learn that within the first few days of planning for lockdown and then going into lockdown, my officials and I met a number of stakeholders in the areas that we thought would feel the biggest impact and be at most risk. It is never easy to be fleet of foot like that but we had to do it and get on with it.

Ensuring consistency and sustainability was among our main concerns, which is why, when we were speaking to our stakeholders, our first questions were, “What do you need to keep doing your work?” and, “What do you need to support the work you do?” For a lot of organisations, the impact of having staff going off or working from home and changing over to different systems was taken into consideration because we needed to make sure that the organisations could do the work that they needed to do to maintain consistency in delivering services, and we also needed to consider maintaining consistency for people accessing the services.

We picked up on the issue of domestic violence quickly—the issue of people being in lockdown in a home that is not safe. The other big issues were social isolation and loneliness. We worked closely with all the organisations to see what we needed to do.

The equality and human rights budget supports about 200 organisations in delivering a wide range of activities and services, but most of the funding agreements were due to end in June, so we made a quick decision to extend the funding. We asked whether they wanted it extended for three months, six months or longer: “longer” was the answer that came back, which is why funding was extended for that wee bit longer.

That allowed us to work on our next set of funding schemes differently from before, when we did not have the insight that Covid has given us. We have been able to look differently at aims for our future funding streams. We were also shifting from five to two funding streams, applications for which will be opening soon. Our main priority was

to ask our stakeholders and partner organisations how they could maintain their services and what they needed to maintain their services, and then to make sure that people who needed the services could access them.

Can I come back quickly to social isolation and loneliness? Although we had a strategy and we knew what we needed to do and the national implementation group was already working on what it needed to work on, we realised that a swathe of people who had never faced social isolation and loneliness before would now need those services, so we had to think about how to respond. We took a partnership approach, which we had always wanted to do, but the pandemic made sure that we were all in one room, so to speak.

I heard Emma Congreve from the Fraser of Allander institute speak about Government being in silos. I can absolutely say that all the silos were dropped at that point. Although we work on our portfolio interests, we realised that we needed to work across the Government to ensure consistency and to deliver services innovatively.

**The Convener:** My next question might seem to be a bit unfair in some ways because we are still very much in the pandemic—we are not through it yet, and I know that work is still going on—but I will ask it anyway.

At this stage, are there any budget decisions that, looking back, you might have made differently? Are there things that you might have done differently? Or are those questions for when we are in calmer and better times, if there is such a thing?

10:15

**Christina McKelvie:** Yes, we have already learned many lessons. We needed to get huge chunks of money, such as the £350 million, out the door and into organisations quickly. There will always be things that we could have done better, but many of the constraints on how we did things in the past have been turned on their heads and we have learned a lot about how we can take our new funding streams forward.

On whether there was anything that we could have done differently, I am not sure that we could, when we were in the teeth of it all—as, indeed, we still are. Over the past few weeks, maybe in the past month, we have been starting to think about renewal and recovery, about how we could apply lessons that we have learned to the new funding streams, and about how we could mainstream across Government to do things better and more effectively. However, the numbers of Covid cases then started to go up, restrictions started to come back in, and the impact started to increase again.

In the light of yesterday's announcement by the First Minister, it is difficult to give a straight answer to the question, but we are scrutinising everything—the different ways that we have got money out of door, how we have supported organisations, how organisations have reprofiled and realigned and how we have worked in partnership with them. Many organisations are now much better at working in partnership. Many organisations say that their relationships with local government have grown and blossomed and have become more effective. We have a lot of learning still to do and we are already starting on that. Social renewal advisory boards are doing some of the work; I know that Aileen Campbell and Shirley-Anne Somerville are focused on that right now.

**The Convener:** Thank you. That was helpful.

In opening, you mentioned some of the coming challenges. I would be interested to hear more about how you expect the budget process to look now that there will be no UK Government autumn budget, which we would normally expect. Would you expand on that?

**Christina McKelvie:** We also have to take account of Brexit considerations and their impact. My colleague Kate Forbes made a statement to Parliament last week, which you will have caught. The 2020-21 Scottish budget to fund public services, keep transport going, and do what we want to do about the wellbeing economy and better outcomes for people who have suffered the most, depends on the UK Government's tax policy and other announcements about the UK budget. The provisional figures are there, but they are incredibly volatile and do not tell us much. They certainly do not allow us to plan properly.

We faced a similar situation last year. It was deeply problematic for my finance colleagues then, when we did not also have to cope with the Covid pandemic, which is now adding to the pressure and uncertainty. Now we also have the potential for a no-deal Brexit or a poor-deal Brexit, which will have outcomes at the end of this year.

That is a completely unacceptable situation for Scotland and the other devolved Administrations to be in. I know that all the finance secretaries from the devolved Administrations have written to the UK Government—yesterday, I think—highlighting problems arising from not having the autumn statement and other announcements, and the volatility of the main figures. It is incredibly difficult. It was difficult last year; attempting to either cope with or recover from Covid compounds the difficulty exponentially.

**The Convener:** Thank you. I stress the point that it is not just problematic for the Scottish Government but for local government in Scotland. We will move on to Alex Cole-Hamilton.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Good morning, minister. It is good to see you again. I will ask a couple of questions on specific measures by the Government to increase digital inclusion. I visited a learning centre in my constituency—a multigenerational information technology inclusivity project—that is very effectively handing out the iPads that the Government is funding. It is a great project. It is said that necessity is the mother of invention; that project was triggered by the pandemic. Is the success of the digital inclusion that the scheme has brought to our older citizens something that you would want to continue, regardless of whether we are still in the pandemic?

**Christina McKelvie:** Thank you very much, Alex. It is nice to see you, too.

We realised after we went into lockdown and everybody started working from home that the digital-by-default situation that many of us have been fighting for for years had become a reality. Many people had to change their working practices.

Many other people have had to change how they access services—and are doing so in ways that we had not had to think about before—because they cannot meet face to face in a support group or because they need to access information. Up-to-date changes in information on public health were going out in digital content, for example. We tried to tackle that through other media as well, but we realised that there was an issue about digital inclusion. We put in place the connecting Scotland fund, which was £5 million initially. It was, no doubt, that fund that made the difference that Alex Cole-Hamilton saw in his constituency.

We tested the connecting Scotland programme on specific groups. The committee might be interested to know that the Glasgow Disability Alliance piloted the programme for us with a number of its service users. The programme not only provides iPads, but provides and pays for internet access, and offers support for learning and skills development. It is a three-pronged package: it does not just provide a device and say, “Get on with it”; it offers so much more.

I have heard anecdotal evidence that the programme has been transformational. Members might have heard the same from constituency cases. For some people, the device on its own was terrifying, but having internet access and learning support has made the difference. Through our partnership with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, local authorities, third sector organisations, Health Improvement Scotland and many aspects of Government and civic Scotland have become involved in the

programme, and 7,500 devices have been given out.

I have some other numbers here; I will make sure that I get them absolutely right for the committee. We wanted to make sure that we were hitting the right demographic, so it is important that we ensure that we feed back the information. Of the people who took advantage of the programme, about 40 per cent were aged over 60, 34 per cent had long-term conditions or a disability that prevents them from working, and 20 per cent were unemployed.

The committee can see how important the programme is for people. There is so much more to say about it, but it is really not for me to say; my connecting Scotland colleagues are doing the work and will certainly look back to see how effective it has been. If the committee wants to do more detailed work on the matter, I am sure that those colleagues would be delighted to speak to you about it.

On the pilot, we have a number of GDA staff in groups. One of them—Susan, who is in the older people’s strategic action forum—conveyed a story about how being able to get support and access has transformed a particular individual’s life. She was talking about only one person, but there are 7,500 devices out there, so there are potentially 7,500 stories about how transformational the programme has been.

Alex Cole-Hamilton asked whether the programme should continue. That is not a decision for me to make, but it is certainly something that I would be evangelical about talking up, because we have all seen the benefits

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Thank you. I am very grateful for that answer. In the interests of brevity, I did not talk about the detail of what has been happening in my constituency, but the programme is providing a MiFi internet connection and training on how to use it. It is a very inclusive programme.

I am not sure that I caught what you said. I will go on to my next question. Could you also sweep up on whether you think the programme will be replicated in future years? It is a great project for inclusivity for older people generally, and not just through the pandemic.

My second question is this. When you were convener of the committee, minister, you chaired an inquiry that we were all part of about making rights real across Parliament and Government. We engaged Murray Hunt as an adviser. You have at your disposal a quite considerable budget for embedding human rights within the decision-making processes of Government. Could you unpack some of that for us? How effective has it been? Can you give empirical examples of how the money has been spent? How are the

recommendations from the committee's inquiry being implemented?

**Christina McKelvie:** I am afraid that I am not in a position to tell you whether there will be a future budget commitment to the connecting Scotland project, but I would certainly be a cheerleader for that.

Certainly, some of the work that we have been doing through the national implementation group on addressing social isolation has been on digital connections, and it is something that we have committed to for the next few years, anyway. Perhaps I can get some up-to-date information about proposals for the connecting Scotland project; Aileen Campbell's portfolio has been taking the work forward. I will get the committee up-to-date analysis of the programme's effectiveness and how far the project can be rolled out in the future. Far be it from me to commit other people's budgets; I am sure they would not appreciate that, at all.

The second question was about embedding human rights. That is something that we have taken very seriously across the work of the equality unit and the human rights team.

Alex Cole-Hamilton mentioned Murray Hunt: you will be pleased to know that he is now on our national human rights task force. He has been an absolute star, as he was with the committee, in bringing forward work that we need to do—in particular, a nod towards work that we need to do on embedding and incorporating international treaties. He has learned from work that he has done in other Parliaments. He continues to be a good influence, which I am really pleased about. On the back of that, he has helped us with the work of our task force on how we embed human rights across the work of the Government, and on what we need to do to ensure that rights are taken into account straightforwardly through the human-rights budgeting process.

We established a fellowship that we are running again this year, and have done so in a way that will allow it to happen again from the beginning of next year. I can get you some more information about that. That is developing as we speak.

Another part of our work is to look at the work that the Government has yet to undertake. With our being in a fast-moving pandemic, policy, regulation and law decisions are all being taken very quickly. The human rights team has been very active and has worked across Government on the economy and finance. It has worked specifically with Michael Russell and Graeme Dey and their teams on the coronavirus legislation to ensure that equality and human rights impact assessments are done of everything that we do,

and to ensure that we support colleagues across portfolios.

I talked about busting silos and mainstreaming in action. The team has been working very closely with other officials on pieces of legislation, especially the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020, because it put a lot of restrictions on all our rights, as we know. One of the main goals of Government should be to protect its people. In a pandemic, that means the right to life. Lots of work has been done on that.

Our human rights team is supporting other teams to embed human rights across Government. It is doing the response work, the analyses and the reviews of all the pieces of legislation, and it is making sure that EQIAs and HRIAs are done.

It is not our job to do humans rights for the Government; it is our job to support other parts of Government to do human rights in their portfolios, which is what we have been doing. We have seen amazing progress—to the point at which officials from other portfolios whom we have not traditionally had to speak to about this stuff have asked us, "How do we get this right? How do we do that? How do we make sure that works? An issue has arisen, how do we resolve it?" A lot of that has been going on, and it has been very helpful in informing my next piece of work on the public sector equality duty and how we will do mainstreaming as a normal thing in normal times, when there is no pandemic. There is a lot of learning to be done on that, too.

10:30

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** I will bring in Fulton MacGregor.

**Fulton MacGregor:** Thank you, convener, and good morning, minister

You will be aware that Engender said to the committee in evidence:

"Although the introduction of the Equality Budget Statement in 2009 was a welcome step, our European work tells us that Scotland is slipping behind compared with international comparators."

Is that something that you identify with? Do you have any thoughts on that evidence?

**Christina McKelvie:** Engender is one of our key partners, with Zero Tolerance, Close the Gap and a number of other organisations, and it has helped to inform a lot of our work. For example, I will be taking forward work on safer workplaces, on ensuring that the ethnic minority toolkit is in place, on ensuring that equality evidence work is being done, and on recognising impacts on women in the workplace.



Close the Gap people were included in our working group on home-working guidance and were very helpful. If you go to the home-working guidance, you will be linked to Close the Gap's toolkits, advice and guidance because we felt that that, rather than reinventing the wheel, was the best thing to do.

Engender is always pushing us to do more and to do better. We welcome that, and we work very closely with it on a number of things along the way. "A fairer Scotland for women: gender pay gap action plan" and the toolkit that we have in place are examples. We are doing additional work around data, and the equality evidence finder.

Members might remember that when I came into post, I put in place an independent chair of the equality budget advisory group in the form of the ever-amazing, ever-challenging Dr Angela O'Hagan. Engender will always push us to do more; it will always be looking for international comparators and we will take all its recommendations on board.

I say that we are doing quite a lot, but as I also said, we can always do more. I am keen to keep working with Engender. I am also happy to respond to any other evidence of which the committee thinks we should be cognisant that comes to it from any of the organisations.

**Fulton MacGregor:** Convener, am I all right to ask a second question?

**The Convener:** Yes, of course.

**Fulton MacGregor:** On that last point, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission said in evidence that it is not overly clear about, or has—should I say?—put some question marks around how the equality and fairer Scotland budget statement influences budget decisions. Can you take this opportunity to point to examples of what impacts the equality budget statement has had on budget decisions?

**Christina McKelvie:** Again, we welcome such challenges because they challenge us to strive to do better. You might know that we call on the Scottish Human Rights Commission to support us in many ways, and to advise us about areas where we could improve our work. That is one such area.

The equality budget advisory group is currently working with the Scottish Human Rights Commission to develop our practice. I hope, for the committee's purposes and to answer Fulton MacGregor's question, that that is welcome. I have no doubt that the commission will come back to us with some pretty strong recommendations. We are keen to see them and to see how we can use them.

The human rights budget, like the equality budget, helps us to develop our policies and to

plan what we need to do. It informs and underpins our laws and regulations, and it makes us sensitive to human rights issues. Our aim is to improve that budget and to contribute to the work that the committee has strived to do for many years now in terms of realisation of human rights in everything that we do.

There are lots of areas in which we have taken that into account, including our race equality work and our gender pay gap action plan. All such areas are informed by our human rights and equalities budget and process. For particular points about having a fairer Scotland for disabled people, or a fairer Scotland for older people, we have many ways in which we inform the budget process. The budget equality statement informs the work that we need to do.

If the committee has other ideas or recommendations, I am keen to hear them, because this is a continuous learning process. We do not just say, "We've done an equalities budget and a human rights budget. Tick. That's it done". That is never done, because we always have to strive to do more and to do better. That is why challenges and recommendations from our partner organisations are helpful, needed and certainly welcome.

**Fulton MacGregor:** I had another question about the Scottish Government's recently announced measures to make equalities and human rights central to budget decisions, but they have been referred to in the minister's opening statement and throughout the evidence, so with the convener's permission and in the interests of time, I am happy to leave it at that.

**The Convener:** All right. We move on to Gillian Martin.

**Gillian Martin:** Thank you, convener, and good morning, minister. I am interested in what you have been saying about the equality evidence finder. I do not know whether you heard my questions to Emma Congreve from the Fraser of Allander institute about data and disaggregated data. You will know of my interest in gender pay gap issues because I am on the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee. The lack of disaggregated data is a bugbear of people who have come to give that committee evidence. Is the Government working towards including disaggregated data in the equality evidence finder, for future budgets?

**Christina McKelvie:** I managed to tune in to hear most of Emma Congreve's evidence, which was helpful. I have made a note to get the *Official Report*, so that I can look at points that she brought up. I found this morning's evidence to be interesting.

We already had the equality evidence finder website in place and we are looking at how we can update it and make it a much more accessible source of data. I know that Gillian Martin will be delighted to know that there is somewhere that she can go to find the numbers that she needs for asking her questions.

Our data have different characteristics across different topics. There are many issues about our priorities and what areas they are in. At the beginning of the pandemic we had questions about data and how we use it. You will know that the equality evidence finder features in recommendations from the work that the First Minister's national advisory council for women and girls is doing.

We were already focused and working on how we could produce better, more disaggregated and more understandable data. At the start of the pandemic we quickly realised that there were gaps—for example, in ethnicity data, which precipitated the setting up of the expert reference group on Covid-19 and ethnicity. The group initially just looked at data, but it has now come up with recommendations on systemic problems.

The data only tell us the numbers related to certain characteristics, but there is systemic discrimination based on race, gender, disability, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights. Many protected characteristics were not included. The data was okay up to a point, but detailed disaggregated data was not available when we needed it. We were able to cross-reference some data with ethnicity data from the previous census, and that gave us some information that allowed us to target resources.

The work of the evidence finder is vital because it allows us to target resources to areas and groups of people who need it. The money that we committed to Gypsy Traveller communities is a perfect example. We were also able to promote public health messages and the test and protect strategy across radio and other mainstream media to specific minority ethnic groups.

I heard Emma Congreve's comments on childcare. We were able to make childcare an economic issue, which I am sure will interest Fiona Hyslop and others. If childcare is not seen as an economic issue, 50 per cent to 52 per cent of the population—that is, women—will not have equal access to the labour market, to recovery or to getting back to their jobs.

Disaggregated data is something that my equality team and I have taken very seriously. We realised that although we had done good work, there were gaps when it came to detailed information that we needed in order to target resources. We managed to resolve some, but not

all, of the problems, and we still have work to do. I know that the national advisory council on women and girls continues to recommend that we get our disaggregated data in better shape so that we can use it to target resources.

**Gillian Martin:** Thank you, minister. I am delighted to hear all that, because it represents quite a step change from previous years.

I turn to the analysis of gaps and of what has worked and what has not worked. Does that analysis extend to the Government agencies, the local authorities and the enterprise agencies that have been getting the funding out? That may be where some of the gaps are. Given that we have the equality and fairer Scotland budget statement, has any equality impact assessment been done across all the agencies that provide support and funding of where the funding has gone?

**Christina McKelvie:** From my budget, we fund a wide range of about 200 organisations that do amazing work, right down to the level of local communities and discrete communities of interest.

A big part of the work that we need to do is about ensuring that other policy developers understand why disaggregated data are important. Comprehensive slide packs that included all the evidence from the equality evidence finder and covered the impact of Covid-19 on age, disability, ethnicity and gender were collated and distributed to policy makers and shared across all policy teams working on impact assessments. You know about the work that I have done with Councillor Elena Whitham on the Gypsy Traveller action plan and with Councillor Kelly Parry on social isolation, loneliness and wellbeing in relation to older people, so you will not be surprised to learn that local government has played a key part in our work.

There is another piece of work that we are still undertaking—we have a meeting coming up in a few days. The Deputy First Minister recently chaired a public services hub, which involved every minister and cabinet secretary, apart from the health ministers who, for obvious reasons, have their own hub. Economy and finance also ran a hub, and we were able to cross-fertilise. We got intelligence and advice all the time, which informed our policy people so that, when it came to getting funding out the door, it went to the right places. Sometimes, there was a need for the most fundamental things. There was a need for food, security, support and medicine—the things that we need just to function in our lives.

10:45

Gillian Martin asked whether there has been any analysis of all that work. We are attempting to work on that, but it is going to be tough to do it

now that we are back in a second wave of the pandemic. However, my officials and I meet with equality stakeholders every week and get information back from them, so we are able to use their anecdotal data and their hard data. Many of them are doing surveys every week and have data that we are able to draw on in order to direct resources appropriately.

Right across the machinery of Government and local government, and across civic Scotland, we have all been learning how we can use data much more effectively for the purposes of getting resources to the right people at the right time, and quickly.

**The Convener:** I will bring in Mary Fee.

**Mary Fee:** Thank you, convener, and good morning, minister. Third sector agencies consistently raise the sustainability and flexibility of funding as key issues. Does the crisis that we are in create an opportunity to rethink how we fund and collaborate with the third sector?

**Christina McKelvie:** It is nice to see, you, Mary. You will know that the policy responsibility for that area lies with the communities portfolio and with Aileen Campbell, and I am sure that she will be keen to respond. I will get an update from her on the third sector.

Partnership working has been absolutely key for the purposes of the work that I do in equalities and the way in which it impacts on the work of the third sector—[*Inaudible*.]—respond to local communities in all of this. I will be shifting from five funding streams to three, and they will be three-year funding streams, which will be absolutely key from point of view of the equality unit and my portfolio.

We have taken some advice and evidence from our third sector stakeholders. On sustainability, stakeholders said that three-year funding streams will allow them to plan year on year, rather than spending a month every year applying for funding and wondering whether they are going to get it.

We have taken all of that on board. I have shared that experience across Government portfolios, and especially with my colleagues in the communities portfolio, because we have all been learning about how we can streamline, direct, reposition and refocus the funding streams. I am sure that Aileen Campbell would be more than happy to inform the committee about third sector funding. I am happy to ask her any specific questions that you may have for her and to come back to you, but it is not for me to tell her how to run her budgets.

**The Convener:** Thank you, minister. I think that we all appreciate that and welcome your reflections on the third sector organisations that

you are working with. However, I will not put words in Mary Fee's mouth.

**Mary Fee:** Thank you, convener. It would be good to get a bit more information from Aileen Campbell, so the committee could look at doing that.

Minister, can you give us any detail about how the £25 million third sector recovery programme will support charities and communities as we move from lockdown to recovery?

**Christina McKelvie:** Again, that is probably not a question for me. The social renewal advisory board has been doing a lot of work in its circles, and there have been a lot of conversations with third sector partners. Again, the question is about the communities budget, and it is not for me to decide where that budget should go. I should perhaps get you some updated information from the cabinet secretary responsible.

**Mary Fee:** Thank you—I appreciate that. As my next question was going to be about the third sector, it is probably better that the committee also puts it directly to Aileen Campbell, but thank you for your responses.

**The Convener:** You mentioned Brexit earlier, but I did not ask you specifically about structural funds. Have you had any feedback from the organisations that you work with regarding the uncertainty around the replacement for structural funds?

**Christina McKelvie:** I have probably heard much the same as the committee itself has heard about uncertainty. We are not sure. On the back of the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill and the pandemic response, with third sector organisations having to focus on the work of keeping people supported and safe during the pandemic, it is quite difficult to come up with an updated position. It is probably best for me to get that for the committee from Michael Russell's team, which has been working alongside Kate Forbes's team on structural funds. Let me go back to those colleagues and get you the most up-to-date information. Our focus has been on responding to the pandemic, and anything that I tell you now might be old information that is in my head. I will get the up-to-date information for you.

**The Convener:** Thank you—that is much appreciated.

Our final questions are from Alexander Stewart.

**Alexander Stewart:** Thank you, convener, and good morning, minister.

We have heard quite a lot of evidence from other witnesses about the substantial increase in the number of individuals putting themselves forward to volunteer during the pandemic. We

have also heard about how managing such a large increase in numbers is not cost free, particularly when some individuals need support to volunteer. What support does the Government provide to ensure that it can tap into the goodwill of volunteers and continue to provide opportunities for those who need support to volunteer?

**Christina McKelvie:** That is a great question. We have all seen absolutely awe-inspiring examples of volunteering in our local communities. In my constituency, we have the Hamilton Covid-19 warriors, who are a group of mummies who made sure that everybody was fed and that the kids had the rainbows to colour in for their windows, as well as the Larkhall rainbows and the Stonehouse Covid response group. No doubt we all have examples of how people just stepped up and stepped in to look after their communities.

A lot of that was organic and not formal volunteering, but on the back of it we had a drive on volunteering. The Scottish Government could not have been more grateful to the tens of thousands of people who came forward. Some volunteered to go back into work in the health service at a time when people were really needed to support the sector. Some made amazing contributions as carers, as providers of services, as mentors or as leaders in their community or group. There were many volunteer roles. The Scottish Government is keen to support volunteers. Again, if the committee is looking for more up-to-date information, I should say that volunteering also falls into Ms Campbell's area. I know that the social renewal advisory board is also looking at the area.

I will give two examples of volunteering that fall within my portfolio and which have made a huge difference: Befriending Networks and Generations Working Together. Those organisations work very closely with older people and younger people, and there were public health issues around those groups working together during the pandemic. The organisations managed to shift a lot of their training, support and other work online, ensuring that they were able to continue to do their work.

Some of the funding that we put out quickly went to both Generations Working Together and Befriending Networks in order to ensure that people who needed their support got it. The volunteers were absolutely key. One of the big challenges that those organisations had was that a number of their volunteers were people who needed to shield; they were maybe in the older age categories that are susceptible to the virus. All of that had to be taken into account. That was brilliant volunteering and I want to hold on to it.

A number of innovative projects stepped up during the pandemic and I want to see how we can replicate that effort in the work of the national implementation group for the social isolation and

loneliness strategy. If we can maintain and sustain some of the projects that stepped up during the pandemic, we can deal with some of the big issues that we have been trying to grapple with.

I am sure the social advisory renewal board and Ms Campbell would be keen to give the committee an update on the work that they are doing on how to sustain and maintain volunteers as a bigger force as we go forward. You have probably already seen some of the work that Generations Working Together and Befriending Networks have done; if not, you should look at what they have been doing. They are absolutely awe inspiring and we are incredibly grateful to them.

**Alexander Stewart:** You have identified the commitment and enthusiasm for supporting their communities that has developed as the pandemic brought out the best out in some people, enhancing the reputation of volunteering and ensuring that those who are vulnerable and need support received it. You have said that you want to embrace that and capture some of it to ensure that it becomes more mainstream and is not just a knee-jerk reaction. Some communities, individuals and organisations may require a more structured approach. What can the Scottish Government do to support and sustain them?

**Christina McKelvie:** That is a smashing question—it is also a very pertinent question, and one that the social renewal advisory board is looking at right now. I would urge the committee to have a conversation with Ms Campbell and Ms Somerville about the work that the social renewal advisory board is doing. We have a very successful volunteering strategy in Scotland and we are looking at how to use what we have learned to build on it, maintain it and sustain it. I am sure that we would all welcome that.

The mobilisation of the circles—the social renewal advisory board's get-togethers, which it has held many of in the past few weeks—has also been absolutely amazing and lots of evidence has come out of them. I can make sure that you get up-to-date information from the social renewal advisory board as well as information from Ms Campbell and Ms Somerville.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much for your evidence this morning. It is heartening to hear of all the good work that is going on. It can give us faith that, as difficult as things are just now, they will all pass. We appreciate your time this morning. Thank you again.

That concludes the public part of our meeting. The next meeting of the committee will be on Thursday, 29 October. As previously agreed, I now move the meeting into private session. We will reconvene in five minutes on Microsoft Teams.

10:57

*Meeting continued in private until 11:40.*

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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