



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

Tuesday 9 September 2025

Session 6



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EQUALITIES, HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
18th Meeting 2025, Session 6

CONVENER

*Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con)

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

*Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP)

*Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

*Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Alasdair Black (Scottish Government)

Emma Congreve (Fraser of Allander Institute)

Sara Cowan (Scottish Women's Budget Group)

Allan Faulds (Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland)

Professor Angela O'Hagan (Scottish Human Rights Commission)

Rob Priestley (Scottish Government)

Shona Robison (Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government)

Kaukab Stewart (Minister for Equalities)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Euan Donald

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

Tuesday 9 September 2025

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:04]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Karen Adam): Good morning and welcome to the 18th meeting of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee in 2025, session 6. We have apologies today from Rhoda Grant.

Our first agenda item is to agree to take agenda items 5 and 6 in private. Agenda item 5 is consideration of a work programme paper and item 6 will be consideration of the evidence that is taken by the committee during pre-budget scrutiny today. Do members agree to take those agenda items in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Pre-budget Scrutiny 2026-27

09:04

The Convener: Our second agenda item is pre-budget scrutiny. This is the third and final year of the committee's agreed focus on human rights budgeting and the final budget for session 6. Accordingly, the focus will be on accountability and on consolidating the committee's scrutiny throughout the session. That follows on from the committee exploring participation in 2023, as part of our scrutiny of the budget for 2024-25, and transparency in 2024, as part of our pre-budget scrutiny for 2025-26.

Although this is our first public pre-budget scrutiny session this year, the committee has held informal sessions. Last week, we heard from the Commission Advocating Rights for Minorities and the committee will today draw heavily on what we heard last week from the commission.

Today, we will hear from key stakeholders the committee has worked with throughout the session, before hearing from the Minister for Equalities and from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government.

The first part of the meeting will follow a round-table format. I welcome Professor Angela O'Hagan, chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission; Emma Congreve, interim chair of the equality and human rights budget advisory group and deputy director and principal knowledge exchange fellow at the Fraser of Allander Institute; Sara Cowan, director of the Scottish Women's Budget Group; and Allan Faulds, senior policy officer at the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland. I thank them all for coming today.

I will begin our conversation by inviting everyone to briefly introduce themselves. I will begin. I am the member for Banffshire and Buchan Coast and the convener of the committee. We will go anticlockwise round the table.

Professor Angela O'Hagan (Scottish Human Rights Commission): Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to be here. I am the chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission and was previously the independent chair of the Scottish Government equality and human rights budget advisory group.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): Good morning everyone. I am a Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party member of the Scottish Parliament for West Scotland.

Emma Congreve (Fraser of Allander Institute): I am the interim chair of the equality and human rights budget advisory group as well

as being deputy director at the Fraser of Allander Institute.

Allan Faulds (Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland): Thank you for having me. I am senior policy officer at the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I am the MSP for Clydebank and Milngavie.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): I am an MSP for North East Scotland.

Sara Cowan (Scottish Women's Budget Group): I am director of the Scottish Women's Budget Group.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): Good morning. I am the MSP for East Lothian.

The Convener: I will kick off our questions and witnesses should indicate whether they want to come in and answer anything, as should members who have questions or want to ask supplementaries about anything that has been said.

What aspirations did you, as stakeholders, have for the Scottish Government's progress towards taking a human rights budgeting approach over the course of this session of Parliament? Have those aspirations been met?

Emma Congreve: I can speak on behalf of the equality and human rights budget advisory group and Angela O'Hagan can correct me if I am wrong.

At the start of this session, a set of recommendations dealing with a range of equality and human rights budgeting factors went from EHRBAG to the Scottish Government. We are still waiting for real progress to be made on a lot of those recommendations. We got a Government response that came more than two years after those recommendations went in, which was, in itself, quite frustrating. That response took on board a lot of what was asked for and an action plan that included the tracking of actions was put in place.

In the past year, there has been a review of the progress that has been made on those EHRBAG recommendations during this session. EHRBAG includes both civil servants and external members and things have come to a head a little in the feedback from external stakeholders. Although we can see that a lot of effort, time and thought has gone into how to take forward the recommendations, the evidence of progress has been more limited.

We do not have a permanent chair at the moment. Recruitment for a permanent chair was unsuccessful earlier this year, with none of the external members of EHRBAG putting themselves

forward for the role, which I think comes back to the theme of accountability.

With progress not being made on the recommendations around changing practices in how budgets are made in Government, there is a feeling of frustration, with people asking, "Who is accountable for this? Why has there been a lack of progress, and what does that mean for the role of a group such as EHRBAG?"

It is important to state up front that we feel that there has been a lack of progress, and I think that a lot of that is tied up with who is accountable for ensuring that progress is being made over time.

Allan Faulds: There has been clear progress in terms of the Scottish Government's willingness to talk about human rights as part of its framing for budget decisions. We have seen some warm words, and progress in certain areas. However, the focus has perhaps been on the spending side of the budget and not so much on revenue raising. For example, there is a lot of recognition that social security is a human right, which is very welcome. There is also a lot of talk about human rights with regard to health and to social care, which, again, is all very positive. However, we then find that being caveated with statements such as, "Well, of course we are operating within difficult financial circumstances."

Part of human rights budgeting and a human rights-based approach is about ensuring that we are making maximum use of available resources, and there is a question about whether there has been a willingness on the part of the Scottish Government to investigate how it can use revenue-raising powers to meet its ideal spending envelope in those sort of areas. We are talking about human rights in relation to spend, but it is about whether we are doing it in relation to raising those revenues. That is where progress is perhaps limited, from our perspective.

Sara Cowan: I will build on Emma Congreve's points.

I am also an external member of the equality and human rights budget advisory group, in which we look at human rights budgeting. At the Scottish Women's Budget Group, we are particularly focused on gender budgeting. The two forms of budgeting highlight the need for outcome-focused budgets and for progress to be monitored against those outcomes.

When we consider the EHRBAG recommendations around processes within budgets, which Emma spoke about, the ones that are about processes becoming outcome focused are the ones that we have not really seen any progress on. In particular, it is about having a strong connection between the national performance framework, the programme for

government, and budgets, and seeing those documents tying through to each other. Greater clarity and connection between those documents would potentially help in relation to tackling the implementation gap and how the budget is progressing the set outcomes

Professor O'Hagan: Colleagues have captured most of what I would have said. I certainly agree with them.

For me, running through the comments here is the gap between narrative and practice. The EHRBAG recommendations were made some time ago, and in concert with the officials whose responsibility it is to implement them. However, alongside the very slow progress on the EHRBAG recommendations, there is the very limited progress on the mainstreaming strategy and the revision of the public sector equality duty, as well as, of course, the resiling from the human rights bill. That has all undermined momentum around the budget process, in which, as colleagues have said, there has been a focus on process rather than content.

That has meant that the outcomes that are desired, by the combination of resources, to achieve Government policy objectives are not being tied together. Through EHRBAG, the Scottish Human Rights Commission and other external members, including the Scottish Women's Budget Group, we have said for a number of years that there is a lack of fluency between the national performance framework, the budget and the annual programmes for government. We need to see continuity in how resources are raised, as Allan Faulds said, and in how those are allocated to achieve policy objectives.

09:15

The practice is not yet there. Human rights impact assessments or human rights and equality analyses continue to be a bit of an add-on, rather than a way of thinking and doing in policy making and in the relationship between resource allocation and generation in that process.

The Convener: Thank you, that was very helpful.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Good morning, everyone. I am sorry that I cannot join you in person, but greetings from sunny Dundee.

Angela O'Hagan, you talked about the gap between narrative and practice and about the lack of fluency. One of the reasons why the committee started this process was to try to identify how we could close those gaps. What is your analysis or understanding of why there are still those gaps and the lack of fluency that you described?

Professor O'Hagan: Good morning, Maggie. There are a number of factors. We still have a capacity gap in the Government, and perhaps also in the Parliament, in the knowledge of the application of the analytical tools to draw in appropriate data, interpret the data and data gaps from an equalities and human rights perspective, and then apply that human rights analysis to policy making and budget allocation.

As I have possibly said to the committee before, how well equality and human rights analyses are discharged at department level depends on the degree of tolerance or on the level of quality assurance and what is acceptable in different directorates. Increased scrutiny of policies and proposals is needed at Cabinet level, as is increased scrutiny by the Parliament.

The committee's focus on participation and transparency is very welcome, and you are now moving your focus to accountability, but accountability must be consistently applied, not just by this committee but across committees in the Parliament in relation to the extent to which duty bearers are meeting their human rights obligations. As Allan Faulds said, that includes our resources being maximised in such a way as to ensure that minimum core obligations are realised.

The other aspect is about the narrative and there being a human rights narrative across the Government. We have a narrative—as Allan said, there is a strong narrative about X or Y policy being a human rights-based approach—but that is not followed through into how resources are generated and allocated. It is that integration of the human rights-based approach as a way of thinking and doing government that has still to get there. There is certainly positive intention and positive will, but that is not yet integrated as a cross-Government way of thinking.

Maggie Chapman: That is helpful. There is frustration about the lack of joining those things up in that way.

Allan Faulds, you talked about the tensions between revenue generation, resource generation and allocation but also about some of the priorities that the ALLIANCE would have in health and social care. Over the course of this parliamentary session, have you seen a shift in priorities in relation to how we fund, resource and determine priorities for services and outcomes?

Allan Faulds: I do not think that I have seen a shift in where the Government and Parliament want to invest their resources. Investment in social care is significant and important to us, and there has been recognition in Parliament of the need to invest in social care. For example, we have seen increases in the minimum pay for social care workers, which is very important. I am sure that

Sara Cowan could talk at length about the gendered implications of low pay in that area. Again, that is where there is perhaps a gap between the narrative and the reality on the ground, as Angela O'Hagan has talked about.

We started off this term in social care with the independent review of adult social care, which was clear about the need for a human rights-based approach to social care and quite significant reform. That was taken up by the Scottish Government in the form of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, as was. By the time that bill completed its passage, it had, of course, become the Care Reform (Scotland) Bill.

In effect, what started out as a human rights-based attempt to reform social care to deliver a more dignified service for people accessing and working in that service became a conflict between the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about where powers should lie. What started as a human rights-based focus became a territorial scrap between different layers of government about who should have what powers, and the human rights focus was lost.

I do not think that the priority changed, but I think that the way in which we talked about those things changed. The ALLIANCE certainly found it disappointing that we went from the recognition that people's human rights were being quite severely breached in social care—people were not getting access to the care that they needed, and that care was not of the quality that they deserved—to just saying that it is about who has the powers and who has the money. That was quite frustrating.

Maggie Chapman: I hear that frustration—it is expressed by lots of people across the social care sector, from service users to providers. Have other panel members seen similar frustration? The priorities to deliver our human rights outcomes are still there, but, given the shift in that piece of legislation and the loss of the human rights bill, do you think that the Government actually has the understanding, as well as the capacity and narrative that Angela O'Hagan spoke about, to connect those aspirations to delivery? Are we missing something?

Allan Faulds spoke about the territorial scrap between national and local government. I get the feeling that we know what we want to do but we just do not know how to do it, and other things get in the way. We focus on the territorial scrap because the other question is too hard to answer. Do you get a sense of that?

Allan Faulds: A little bit. It relates to some of the stuff that Angela O'Hagan and, I think, Sara Cowan said about the lack of connection between

the different parts of the budget process and the different parts of Government.

One of the points that I listed for discussion later on is the idea that there is an increasing understanding of human rights in certain areas of Scottish Government activity and spending—social care, social security and maybe a little bit of housing—but it exists only within those specific policy areas and portfolios. It does not feed out to the wider budget process, so that the Scottish Government takes an approach whereby human rights are understood to be relevant to everything and the whole budget has to work towards achieving those rights. That connection is not really there yet. There are some areas where human rights are recognised and some where they are not so much, and it does not feel like a coherent whole yet.

Emma Congreve: One thing has changed recently with the responsibility for the equality and human rights budget statement—is it still called the equality and fairer Scotland budget statement? The activity that happens around that budget is in the process of moving from the equalities part of the Government into the exchequer. That is positive, because it recognises that the exchequer function in Government needs to grasp this. It needs to take a role in co-ordinating—that is very much its role just now—and understanding the process of bringing together the human rights and equalities aspects of the budget.

However, with regard to who is responsible for identifying the human rights and equality aspects of programmes and policy change, that is still seen to be the responsibility of local areas of Government. Although there has been a shift in moving the co-ordination function to the exchequer—which I think is positive, although we will have to see, over time, whether it makes a big difference to the focus and quality of the evidence that is used for the budget—we still have an issue in that responsibility still lies with individual ministers and cabinet secretaries spread across the Government.

That goes back to the theme of accountability. I agree with Angela O'Hagan that there are some capacity issues, but overriding that is the prioritisation element. In which areas of Government are these aspects being prioritised? As Allan Faulds said, some areas are further forward than others in this respect. There is a structural element, and that goes back to issues that the Government has talked about—for example, in its public service reform strategy—regarding the difficulty of integrating approaches across Government.

We see that in equality and human rights budgeting and in many other areas with a big strategic policy push. The reality is that it is very

difficult to do. We need to acknowledge that, while different methods are being tried, we have to do a bit more learning to understand where we have not been successful and work out what needs to change. A lot of that is structural, and it is at quite a senior level of Government—at the directors general level and the ministerial and cabinet secretary levels. We have seen huge efforts by more junior civil servants to make progress, but they are buffeted by constraints that come their way. That is partly the nature of politics, but it is also the nature of how the Scottish Government is structured and how things like this are prioritised.

Sara Cowan: To build on the social care question and Allan Faulds's response, I will give an example of where there is a disconnect between narrative and practice. In last year's budget, it was announced that the Scottish Government had met a commitment, which was made in 2021, to raise social care funding by 25 per cent. However, that announcement failed to give any detail around whether the current funding was meeting needs; how the spend was working to tackle inequalities that are perpetuated by a lack of quality care; or how rising costs have impacted the meaning of that commitment in the first place, given that it was made before high inflation really had an impact.

That commitment is really at odds with people's experience and with practice at the local government level, where charges for social care are rising—the amount that people are having to pay to access social care support is going up—and eligibility criteria are tightening. People are having that experience but are hearing those announcements from Government. Where is the accountability with regard to that experience?

Clear communications will be critical. That might sometimes mean recognising—although it may not be politically good to do so—that the change in circumstances since 2021 means that, although it is good news that the commitment was met, it is now not enough and we have to go further. In addition, there is nothing within that about other commitments that were made, such as the commitment to end charges for non-residential care. There is no detail on that from the Government, so people are left waiting and wondering whether that is going to come in by the end of the current session of Parliament, which looks very unlikely. Clear communications, as part of that accountability, will be critical.

Maggie Chapman: Thanks very much, folks.

Have there been any policy priorities that you would have expected to see some progress on? Even if it is only narrative progress, are there policy changes that you would have wanted to see that you have not seen over the three or four-year conversation about human rights budgeting?

09:30

Emma Congreve: I will speak about that with my Fraser of Allander Institute hat on.

The papers for today's meeting contain a link to a report on human rights budgeting that was produced by a former colleague at the Fraser of Allander Institute when he was on a fellowship here, at the Parliament. He now works here—it is quite complicated. That report was produced around 2021, and the example that he considered in relation to human rights budgeting concerned people with learning disabilities, which is an area that we work on a lot at the Fraser of Allander Institute.

There has been very little progress in that area, I would say. We are talking about a group of people whose human rights are probably the most neglected of any group of disabled people. There are still people who are, in effect, locked up in secure units, which denies so many of their human rights, when there is no medical need for them to be there. The social care part of the system cannot meet their needs in the community. That is really interesting. It was the subject of a case study in a report that was produced for this committee, I think, but there has been no progress.

We saw that there was going to be a learning disabilities, autism and neurodivergence bill, which would have put in place some of what we were looking for and clarified in legislation some of the changes that need to happen. However, that bill was shelved at the same time as the human rights bill, and, despite the promises that there would still be a process for draft legislation, we have not heard anything on that over the past year. That is one example of where we feel there has clearly not been the progress that is desperately required.

Professor O'Hagan: Earlier this year, the Scottish Human Rights Commission produced a spotlight report on learning disabilities, and one of the things to highlight in the context of this discussion, in addition to the point that Emma Congreve made about individuals being locked in inappropriate care settings, is how difficult it has been to follow the money, given the lack of transparency in how resources have been dispensed and discharged from the £20 million coming home budget to support the coming home implementation plan. That gives rise to concerns. I am suggesting not that there has been malfeasance, but that it is very difficult to follow the money across the budget documents.

There are positive policy commitments across a whole range of issues—social security, the Promise, tackling violence against women and girls, and so on—and they have to be recognised, including in the strategic review. However, we do

not see the transparency in the budget documentation that would make it possible to drill into how spending has been allocated, to whom, in what way and with what outcome. That picks up on Sarah Boyack's points about outcomes and the linkage between intent and outcomes not being as transparent as it might be. It is partly a matter of understanding how to articulate and partly about not implementing some of the know-how that we have, both from previous years and continuing.

I understand that, sometime soon, there is meant to be an intergovernmental meeting on equality and human rights budgeting. We have brought in lots of examples from international Governments that have taken different approaches to human rights budgeting, equalities budgeting and gender budgeting. The tools are there. It is complicated, but, in other countries with budgets of a similar size, Governments are managing to do it or at least to make further inroads.

The policy intent must be underpinned by appropriate tools and clear political direction that is followed up and through by management within Government. That speaks to Emma Congreve's point about what happens at senior directorate level and Cabinet level. If the policy and spending proposals that come forward do not allow us to identify how money is being allocated and what outcomes are anticipated, that is a process failure that we need to address.

The Convener: Maggie?

Apologies, but I did not hear what you said.

Maggie Chapman: Sorry—I muted myself to cough and then realised that I could not unmute myself.

I will leave it there, convener. I am happy to pass over to others, and I will come in again if something else sparks a question.

The Convener: We will move to questions from Tess White.

Tess White: I will start with Angela O'Hagan, if I may. My question links to the previous one from Maggie Chapman. Angela, you have given a few concrete examples, but the question is how, in your view, has the progress against the progressive realisation of human rights in Scotland been impacted by delays to strategy, policy and legislation, such as the decision not to implement revisions to the national outcomes and the decision not to introduce the human rights bill in this parliamentary session? Those things have been kicked down the road. What is your view on that?

Professor O'Hagan: Incorporation of the international human rights obligations through a human rights incorporation bill would, similar to the national outcomes, have provided an enhanced

framework for accountability and scrutiny. The Scottish Human Rights Commission has long argued that, as well as human rights being mainstreamed into the national outcomes and the process by which those are secured, there should be specific outcomes on rights realisation.

There is a combination of factors. The delay to the legislation means that there is a delay to those drivers. Legislation that drives public authorities, including local authorities, and duty bearer practice and expectation is missing, and, in the absence of legislation, that drive needs to come from the Parliament and Government. Nonetheless, the international treaty obligations to ensure the minimum core—the basic floor below which public services cannot fall—still need to be observed. That is where there is a disconnect between the practice of duty bearers and public authorities, which see human rights as an add-on rather than an integral part of setting their objectives and delivery plans, measuring outcomes, ensuring that services are evaluated and assessed—which includes appropriate complaints procedures and so on, as part of improvement systems—and focusing all around on rights realisation.

That is what we have been trying to do at the Scottish Human Rights Commission with the recent spotlight reports on economic, social and cultural rights and the rights of learning disabled people and other work. We have taken the international frameworks and have said, "Here's what is required of you as a duty bearer. Here are the gaps and the evidence that we have seen on economic, social and cultural rights"—for example, in the Highlands and Islands. When provided with frameworks that highlight the requirements and the gaps, duty bearers can see where they need to improve. The frameworks are there; however, we have an insufficient knowledge base to bring that practice into the everyday practice of service design, delivery and measurement across public authorities.

Tess White: After this session, we will have the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government and the Minister for Equalities in front of the committee. You said that there needs to be a drive from the committee—from the Parliament—and the Scottish Government. In relation to the question, what would you like us to address when the cabinet secretary and the minister come in front of us?

Professor O'Hagan: Taking a human rights-based approach has to be integral to all aspects of Government decision making, whether that is setting policy or spending objectives. Part of the accountability focus of this committee is looking at how budget decisions are made, what impact they might have and what impact they have not had so

far on rights. That is about asking whether you have the data to understand what the current situation is and where rights are not being realised and what needs to happen to secure those rights.

The bottom line is that we need minimum core obligations—that is, are services adequate, accessible, available and of sufficient quality? That is the benchmark by which this committee or any other committee of the Parliament needs to scrutinise duty bearers, including the Scottish Government. We would encourage the Scottish Government to set policy in a way that ensures that those minimum core obligations are met.

Allan Faulds: I will first respond to your initial question about the policies that have not been taken forward.

I will not repeat what Angela O'Hagain said about the proposed human rights bill, but I note that the ALLIANCE and our members are obviously very disappointed that the bill was not taken forward. We invested a lot of time and energy in it, and we are really disappointed to see that it has not come forward.

The situation in relation to the national outcomes is, again, very disappointing. The ALLIANCE was a member of the "A Scotland that cares" campaign, which campaigned for a national outcome in care. That had been accepted by the Scottish Government and it was in the new draft national outcomes. The fact that those national outcomes suddenly just went up in smoke at short notice and are not being taken forward raises questions about what is happening to them and how they will direct Scottish Government spending and priorities in the future.

At other parliamentary committees—including, I think, the finance committee—I have raised points on behalf of the ALLIANCE about the disconnect between the First Minister's priorities, which have changed with each successive First Minister, and the national outcomes. We were seeing the national outcomes in the budget but not in the First Minister's priorities and not in the programme for government.

A particular concern for the ALLIANCE, which Sara Cowan picked up on earlier, is the lack of progress on social care charging. There was a commitment that the Scottish Government would end non-residential social care charges in this session of Parliament. However, unless a rabbit is pulled out of the hat in the final budget—which we would, of course, love to see and would be very grateful for—it looks very unlikely that that will happen in this session. If that commitment was not met, that would be bad enough if charges were at a standstill, but they are not—they have increased significantly, including by 50 per cent or more in Glasgow. The inevitable consequence would be

that people would not be able to access that care, because they could no longer afford it, which would be a clear breach of their human rights in relation to their ability to live independently and to have the highest attainable standard of health. It would also mean that people who were still able to afford the charges would end up in deeper poverty, because they would be paying out more money.

That is one area where the failure to deliver on a very clearly made commitment, which was due for completion this term, is having really severe impacts on people's human rights.

Tess White: My next question is for Emma Congreve. The feedback that we have been given this morning is that there is, as Angela O'Hagan put it, a

"gap between narrative and practice."

We hear these words, but it is quite damning that, although something is said, nothing happens and things are kicked down the road. In your view, does the Scottish Government's positive narrative in the equality and fairer Scotland budget statement and in its budget responses to the committee reflect the reality in relation to policy impact and the changes that it has made to budget processes, data and documentation?

You are smiling, Emma.

Emma Congreve: It is a big question.

We must recognise that having a strong positive narrative is helpful, because it sets the mood music and gives people permission to push forward in those important areas. When we have a positive narrative, we see more action than would be the case without that narrative. We must say that that is true.

I understand how difficult it is to implement changes within a Government structure. I am a former civil servant, so I have seen that at first hand. Ultimately, you are dealing with a lot of different people with a lot of different priorities and are often being pulled in different directions. If you are really trying to effect change, a big shift in what is prioritised is required. Ultimately, you have to do less of one thing and more of another, or you have to increase the resources that are going towards whatever you are doing, which obviously involves a trade-off somewhere.

09:45

The issue with which most people in the Government who work in this area are grappling day to day is that they do not necessarily know what to prioritise and when. Again, that comes back to the direction that is set at the directorate

and Cabinet levels on what the most important things are.

Ultimately, that means that there is very slow progress on a lot of the issues that are fundamental to human rights budgeting. I know that the committee covered the issue of transparency in its scrutiny last year, but the progress that has been made to ensure that budgets are more accessible and transparent has been very slow in comparison with what we know the Government could be doing to make it much clearer what spending looks like year to year and what choices have been made. That would allow for many more questions to be asked and for scrutiny as to why that is the case. You need to know what has changed, and then you can dig into the question of why and undertake that scrutiny.

In last year's budget documentation, there was a big improvement at level 4 of the budget. Much more information was produced, both on what the budget was in the previous year and what the revisions had been in-year, so that people could look at what had been spent over the previous budget year, up to the autumn revisions, and compare that with what was in the budget for the following year. I do not think that that came about necessarily because of recommendations from the likes of us, as stakeholders, but, nonetheless, it is a positive move. However, there is still so much more that could be done on transparency.

I will highlight one of the biggest and most telling signs, in my view, that those who are involved in the budget are not on top of understanding outcomes and what is working. I say this as a result of meetings that the Fraser of Allander Institute has had. Stakeholders are often asked which areas they think could be cut. Scottish Government officials ask us that question, but they should know the answer, because they should have an understanding of what the budget spend is achieving, what outcomes are being achieved, where the value for money is and where changes could be made to ensure better value for money. That requires a lot of evaluation and internal scrutiny of what is being achieved with the budget spend from year to year.

That was one of the EHRBAG recommendations. Throughout the year, there needs to be an understanding of what the impacts of the budget spend, and changes in spend, have been. The fact is that, although we, as stakeholders, are asked that question, we should be the ones asking the Government what evidence it is going to use to decide what is going to change in the next budget. The position should be flipped.

Trade-offs need to be made. Last year, ahead of the 2025-26 budget, we tried to work with officials to ensure that the equality and fairer Scotland

budget statement had a section that looked at trade-offs and at the areas in which spending was not increasing, or was decreasing, because a budget has to be balanced, and some areas go up while other areas go down. However, it was not feasible for that to be produced as part of the documentation for the equality and fairer Scotland budget statement. We might get there next year, but, again, it is about priorities and being pulled in different directions. That is at the root of why, in my view, we have not seen more progress on that aspect.

Tess White: In the interests of time, convener, I will pass back to you.

The Convener: Sara Cowan would like to come in.

Sara Cowan: Another area that we might consider, which sits across policy impact and budget processes, is how accountability sits between the Scottish Government and delivery partners, and how the money that is committed to go to delivery partners is working towards the intended outcomes. That is why outcome-focused budgeting is so important. With significant amounts of money going to other partners, particularly in local government, how can accountability be embedded through all stages of the budget process and at all levels of government? As well as examining national budgets, we look at local budgets and local budget processes. There are several examples of where there might have been Scottish Government commitments and committed funding, but without it always necessarily being spent in the way that was committed to.

For example, some analysis was done by the Coalition of Carers in Scotland on the funds to support unpaid carers, and it traced £26 million less than in budget commitments—in other words, there was a shortfall of £26 million in that support. That relates to Angela O'Hagan's point about being able to follow the money. What happens if we, as external stakeholders, cannot follow the money, and if you, as parliamentarians, are not able to follow the money to ensure accountability through the whole process?

We are not necessarily saying that all money needs to be more ring fenced. There are important reasons for local flexibility, but there are important reasons to have accountability across all levels of government. There are several examples of commitments that have been made at national Government level not being followed through. Therefore, people have experiences that are at odds with commitments that they feel they have heard at national Government level.

Tess White: We hear you loud and clear on those very important points. The mood music can

quickly turn sour if there is no delivery. I read in the papers today about carers going on strike. People have had enough if their basic needs are not being met. I also refer to the point that Emma Congreve made about the Pareto principle and the focus on the few important things. We had an example this morning of people being locked up. The committee learned about the huge percentage of women and girls with learning difficulties who are being sexually assaulted. That resonated loud and clear. The Promise, social security and violence against women and girls have also been mentioned. As I said, we hear you loud and clear.

The next evidence session is with the Minister for Equalities and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, and it is our job to take what you have shared with us this morning, and what we have heard over the past few months, and to present it to the Scottish Government—so, thank you.

Paul McLennan: Good morning. I will follow up on the discussions about following the money and accountability. Last week, we had a meeting with CARM, and I will read part of a statement that was made by one of the participants:

“One of the biggest challenges we faced was ensuring that our voices translated into meaningful influence. While our panel’s questions were put directly to the Minister, it was evident that translating these into real change requires persistence, transparency, and stronger accountability mechanisms.”

That goes back to the point that Angela O’Hagan made about the Scottish Government meeting its minimum core responsibilities. One issue that came through strongly was a real lack of data—which confirms what has been said. That also relates to lived experience. We have heard about that today. It does not just relate to the issues that were raised through CARM; it goes beyond that.

Is that indicative of what is happening in other parts of the budget? Last week, we heard about a case study on employability, and the issues there came through strongly. In your experience, does the same thing come through in other parts of the budget? Does that demonstrate that the minimum core requirements are being met or not? The accountability issue came through really strongly last week, in that the Government has been passing monies on but has not been following the money to see the outcomes.

Angela O’Hagan: That follows on from what Sara Cowan has just said. In my time at EBAG and since, we have focused on the fact that the Scottish Government discharges the bulk of the Scottish budget to a range of delivery partners. Where is the connection? Where is the scrutiny? What are the expectations? How are outcomes

measured? How are gaps in outcome delivery and funding measured?

That was the intended purpose of the pre-budget parliamentary scrutiny process, in which we are engaged just now—the Parliament would engage in a forward and backward look and ask where money was allocated, what the outcomes had been and whether money should be reoriented in other ways.

A big part of being able to interpret all that is having reliable, consistent and relevant data. There are inconsistencies in data across all aspects of public service delivery regarding who is collecting what data, how it is collected, the extent to which it is disaggregated by protected characteristics—which is relevant to the Equality Act 2010—and the extent to which it is informing what we would need to do an effective human rights analysis on availability, accessibility, affordability and quality. If we do not have the data, how will we direct public resource to meet policy objectives?

We have been talking about data for as long as we have been talking about equality and human rights budgeting, which is the entire lifetime of this Parliament. We still have not got there—there are a lot of inconsistencies in many different areas. Whether it relates to custody and detention, violence against women or whatever, there is a range of inconsistencies across agencies, which means that data is not accurate or consistent.

There is then a question of how data is used. We need to understand the role that data plays for policy makers at whatever level and the interrelated nature of different policy areas. That was a focus of the employability case study that you mentioned. The interrelationships between housing, education, transport and access to healthcare all have a bearing on employment and the ability of individuals or families to take up job opportunities where they are available. The Scottish Human Rights Commission’s spotlight on economic, social and cultural rights in the Highlands and Islands demonstrated that interconnection. It also demonstrated the remoteness of voices to power, which is where Paul McLennan started his comments.

Paul McLennan: The Social Justice and Social Security Committee, on which I previously sat, held an inquiry into employability, during which the issues that you mentioned in relation to housing, transport and childcare were raised. I mentioned last week that how we follow the money is not just for this committee but for other committees, as well.

Does Emma Congreve or anyone else want to come in on that point? It is about how we learn lessons in this committee and in other committees

about following the money in various budget areas.

Emma Congreve: I will talk briefly about tackling child poverty, which has been a focus of budgets and is one of the First Minister's priorities. Earlier this year, I undertook an exercise in which I tried to follow the money from all the policies that have been in the two delivery plans on child poverty to date. However, I was not able to follow that money properly using data that is in the public domain. The Scottish Government, in its efforts to track spend on child poverty, which it updates annually in its progress reports, does not capture the full range of spend, nor does it fully capture outturn spend as opposed to budgeted spend.

Reducing child poverty is probably the First Minister's most visible priority, and it has been up there as a priority in most budgets, particularly in this parliamentary session. If it is impossible to even follow the money and understand what is being spent to reduce child poverty, that shows that it will not be possible in other areas of Government policy. That is quite a telling example.

Paul McLennan: I noticed Aberlour's comments on similar issues in the press this morning.

Allan Faulds, do you want to come in?

10:00

Allan Faulds: I have a few points to make. On the data side, the ALLIANCE has consistently, for many years, called for improvement in data gathering. We need comprehensive, robust, intersectional and disaggregated equalities and human rights data so that we can understand the impacts of policies. That is not currently up to standard. My colleagues know a bit more about that side of things than I do, and Angela O'Hagan has talked about it quite a bit. It is very likely that that will impact both the development and the evaluation of policies.

Another point is that, if we have not clearly defined what our minimum core standards and obligations are in Scotland, which we have not, what are we measuring against, and what are we measuring the delivery of?

I refer back to the committee's session on participation a couple of years ago, in which Pam Duncan-Glancy referred to a then-recent report about people with learning disabilities not being able to choose where they live. We have discussed that theme today with regard to people being inappropriately institutionalised. If a group of people in society is not able to have a choice over where they live, is that an acceptable minimum core standard? Do we just accept that there is such a group and allow that to be the case? That is obviously a problem.

Regarding following the money and evidencing how policies work, carers organisations have repeatedly raised the point that there is a real difficulty in following the money relating to the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. Millions of pounds are, in effect, missing in between the Scottish Government giving money to councils as a result of the 2016 act and the implementation on the ground. People cannot see where that money is going. If we do not have the data on how that money is being used to make carers' lives better, we do not know if it is being used well and if people's lives are being made better.

Sara Cowan: I want to re-emphasise the importance, from our point of view, of collecting sex-disaggregated data and intersectional data. As Angela O'Hagan said, that is inconsistent across different Government areas, as some areas are collecting more data than others. However, the critical point is about ensuring that the data that is available is being used. It should be analysed—not just stated, as we sometimes see—and used to drive decision making. That is where the importance of the data lies.

We have recently undertaken a couple of pieces of research on care, which is an area that is still consistently highlighted, as it has been for many years, for its poor data quality. The need for data improvements in some areas, which might be holding back changes in those areas, is critical.

The Convener: Before we move on to questions from Pam Gosal, I have a question of my own. Taking on board everything that you have said so far, how can we demonstrate that minimum core obligations can be met with regard to how equality impact assessments work in all spheres of government?

In my previous life as a local councillor, we always looked at equality impact assessments at the end of the process, after reports had been presented to us. Emma Congreve said that the structures are not set up for what we are trying to achieve in this respect. I can see that the structures do not include equality impact assessments in those areas that we should be concerned about, which should feed into the building of services in the first place. Often, such assessments are add-ons, but it costs additional money to add things on, and when there are cutbacks, they are the first things to go.

I want to look at how that can be changed and how equality impact assessments can be embedded into the structure of all spheres of government from the very beginning. How do you see that happening? Would that be possible, and would it help with a human rights budgeting approach? We are looking at accountability for local government in that regard. For example, I have seen some equality impact assessments on

the closure of sheltered housing complexes. When a council goes ahead with such a closure even though it is evident that it will have detrimental impacts, where is the accountability? What rights do people have? My question is about where equality impact assessments should sit and to what extent they can be used to provide that accountability.

Emma Congreve: That is a question that EHRBAG comes back to frequently in its discussions and with its internal members. As you said, it is well understood that EqlAs are often done as add-on exercises, rather than being done in an integral way at the start of the process and being used to develop the resulting policy.

Fundamentally, this comes back to how policy is made in the Scottish Government. Although there are examples of an equality issue being at the forefront of the process of developing a policy, more often than not, policies are developed to deliver on a particular need or outcome that has been identified. Rather than being done through an equality analysis, that has been done through a process of saying, “We need to do something about housing policy—we need to build X number of new homes.” If that had been done on an equality and human rights basis first, the type of homes that were built first would probably look quite different, because although the process that the policy has gone through is about meeting a target that is based on housing need, ultimately, it is not based on the housing needs of equality groups.

It is a question of going back to basics with regard to what policy is being made for. Manifestos are a key part of the issue, because if something is in a manifesto, it has to be done. That is an issue not only for the Scottish Government but for the parties and their development of manifestos. They need to have a better understanding of how to develop their manifesto proposals on an equality basis.

There has to be more challenge in the policy-making environment once the Government is in power, and there has to be an expectation that there will be pushback on the need for equality and human rights aspects to be considered first rather than last. As far as I understand the policy-making process, there is not currently a challenge function in place whereby we can step in and hold to account whoever needs to be held to account during that process. Arguably, it is too late by the time it gets to the legislation stage and the Parliament steps in, because the fundamentals have been set. Although changes can be made during the legislative process, which is very important—there is a greater role to be played with regard to scrutiny and challenge—those aspects

must be built into the foundations of how policy is developed.

Professor O'Hagan: I agree with everything that Emma Congreve has said—I do so as a matter of course, but I particularly agree with what she has just said.

With regard to the point about what policy is being made for, I sometimes think that equality impact assessments and human rights impact assessments are misnomers, because they look at what impact a policy will have. It is necessary to understand why the policy is being considered in the first place and what the analysis is of the so-called problem that the policy is trying to address. If policy making is always about resolving problems, that makes everything a problem, rather than the process being about finding some kind of resolution.

As Emma said, there need to be appropriate tools that are usable and understandable by officials and others who are trying to make policy so that they can do that analysis in the first instance. That goes back to Paul McLennan's point about the need for data—available, reliable and consistent data. Those tools should not be applied in a mechanistic way. Equality impact assessments and human rights impact assessments have been lined up alongside environmental impact assessments and child rights and wellbeing impact assessments, and then we get pushback from officials—not just in Scotland, but elsewhere—who say that that results in cognitive overload and that it puts too much pressure on the policy-making process.

I completely disagree with that, given that the intention of policy—this applies to the shared political objectives around this table and in any cross-party context—is to have better life outcomes for the population over which Government governs and that Parliament represents. The intention is a better life for all.

The drive needs to involve seeing the different tools as all pointing in the same direction, whether that relates to human rights, environmental rights, children's rights or equalities analysis. Those should all be part of the policy process. That means understanding what difference X policy will make on Y issue, as experienced by A, B and C in the population. Resources should then be allocated to policy objectives that align with that analysis, and the evaluation should then follow through.

That is what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has consistently and directly articulated to the Scottish Government in relation to gender budgeting and other forms of equality budgeting. There should be an ex ante analysis—an initial early analysis—and a

concurrent analysis that looks at how things are working out in the way that the policy has been designed and is—or is not—being implemented. That should be followed by an ex post analysis that looks at what happened as a result of that policy intent and how resources were allocated.

The Convener: That was really helpful—thank you.

Sara Cowan: I agree with the points made by Angela O'Hagan and Emma Congreve, and on the importance of EqlAs in driving decision making. As Angela mentioned, the OECD did a report on a gender budgeting pilot that was conducted in Scotland. That report, which was published last year with the budget papers, highlighted the need to increase the use of information from EqlAs in budget decisions. It highlighted that gap and the need to use information to drive the decision-making process.

One of the key things is the need for leadership from elected members in looking for the information, as well as a culture change in how information can be used to drive decisions, which Angela talked about. When we were reviewing last year's local budget decision making, we examined all the different EqlAs, and we were surprised to find that, despite several councils reducing spending in areas such as school transport, additional support for learning and other care-related areas, only one local authority identified sex as an affected characteristic. More recently, we have seen that in some Scottish Government papers. For example, in the medium-term financial strategy, there is a lack of recognition of the role of unpaid carers. The equality analysis process should help to bring that out.

The Convener: That is interesting—thank you.

We move on to questions from Pam Gosal.

Pam Gosal: I thank the witnesses for all the information that they have provided so far. My question links in very nicely.

Last week, we heard from former participants in the whole family equality project about the importance of not working in silos. Employability often goes hand in hand with many of the areas that we have heard about today, such as housing, education and transport. I remember asking the Minister for Equalities, in February, about the need to move away from the current portfolio-based budget modelling towards a more performance-orientated approach. The minister agreed that departments must work together to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Today, however, we have heard about a lack of connections. We have heard that such considerations do not feed into wider budgets, that some areas of human rights are understood while

some are not understood, that how resources are allocated is not followed through, and that more connections and greater clarity are needed. Furthermore, people cannot follow the money to find out what is being spent. Those are just some of the issues that have been raised.

Could you expand on those comments in relation to the cross-portfolio approach? Do you believe that the Scottish Government is doing a good job at taking a cross-portfolio approach in human rights budgeting?

Professor O'Hagan: Efforts have been made. As Emma Congreve mentioned, a huge amount of work has been done over many years to improve the budget process and to improve the integration that we are all talking about today. In a sense, there needs to be greater demand for such scrutiny by the Parliament and better accountability on the part of the Scottish Government. That scrutiny is needed to drive better practice, because there is an accountability gap, which I and colleagues have referred to today.

10:15

Moving from portfolio to performance budgeting requires all the actions that we are talking about. We need to have clearly identified objectives that are based on analysis of relevant and accurate data that reflects people's lived experience, the lived realities of people's lives and the extent to which rights are being realised. Policy should be made on that basis and the outcomes should be measured. There are examples from around the world and from close by—for example, the Irish Government has been trying to move to performance budgeting. However, we see some of the same issues there in relation to cross-portfolio thinking and the interrelation between different policy drivers. That is the crux of things.

As the secretariat and the work of EHRBAG move from the equalities and human rights directorate into the exchequer, an overview needs to be taken. The practice needs to be adopted of making the connections across portfolios and spending areas, but in such a way that equality and human rights are seen as being integral to the approach to analysis and decision making, rather than being seen as of secondary priority or secondary order practice.

Pam Gosal: You said at the beginning that progress has been made. However, we have highlighted quite a lot of issues today, which we also spoke about last week in our private session. The system is clearly broken somewhere; there are cracks in the system that the Government needs to look at. That is why we are scrutinising the issue today—otherwise, we would not be here.

Today, we have heard that there are numerous issues with connections and accountability. It is for the Government to ensure that the leadership is there, but, as we have heard, that should flow right down to the councils. In what areas has progress been made with the Government? What is being done wrong? If the Government has made progress, why are we scrutinising the situation?

Professor O'Hagan: I have said that progress has been made and that a lot of work has been done to improve that progress. However, I have also pointed to many of the cracks. I think that that is a fair assessment. There are a lot of cracks in this process, and the equality and human rights analysis can fall between those cracks. As I have said already, the cracks that exist relate to lack of knowledge and lack of practice in relation to how tools are used.

I have referred to the significant efforts that officials have made—Emma Congreve has also alluded to that—but we have seen officials rolling boulders up hills and those boulders rolling back down. There needs to be a whole-Government approach to the matter. What we are talking about here is a whole-systems approach.

For the past 25 years, there has been a lot of talk about mainstreaming equality and human rights, but, yet again, the Government is pondering on a new mainstreaming strategy. I have always said that equalities and human rights budgeting activates mainstreaming because, by bringing together decisions on resource allocation, it brings together the whole policy process. However, as Allan Faulds has said, resource revenue raising, policy objectives and resource allocation must be viewed in the round as part of a human rights-based approach. The biggest crack is that that latter part is seen as the secondary, not the primary, activity.

Pam Gosal: Thank you for clarifying that.

Emma Congreve: I am sure that the minister and the cabinet secretary will mention this later, but one area where we have seen a bit of progress at cross-Government Cabinet level is that the Government now holds a ministerial workshop—I am not quite sure what the term is—to look across the different core decisions that are made as part of the budget process. As far as I am aware, the Minister for Equalities leads that workshop. That is an internal process, so EHRBAG is not privy to exactly what is discussed there, nor to what actions follow or what changes have been made as a result of it. However, that is one example of how efforts and progress have been made towards cross-Government collaboration.

What you said earlier about the portfolio-based approach to budgeting being a constraint is still

very true. The ministerial workshop represents another effort to break down some of those silos, or at least to discuss the issues more broadly across portfolios. One thing that I would flag, however, is that part of the public service reform strategy that came out earlier this year was a recognition that moving resources between portfolios is extremely difficult. That was focused on the Scottish Government's work on prevention, which is very much in alignment with what we are talking about on equality and human rights.

The Government admits that there need to be processes that allow the sharing or reallocation of budgets, or even a process to ensure that it is not just one minister who signs off the budget for their portfolio. There are changes that need to be made to the operation of budgets. Given the public service reform strategy, we will be looking for this year's budget and the spending review to put into practice some of the things that the Government has admitted are needed where there are cracks.

Allan Faulds: We have been talking about some of the actions for the Government in taking a non-siloed approach, but this is about the Parliament, too. I very much welcome the fact that the committee has been taking a human rights-based budgeting approach for a number of years—although I am a bit nervous about saying that we have all enjoyed it. It is a really good approach, but the question is: what are other committees doing?

I will spare the member's blushes, but after the 2021 election, we wrote to several committees and I remember one member of a particular committee coming back to say that, although human rights-based budgeting was an interesting concept, they were not sure that it would be worth the time and effort. That was in 2021 or 2022, so I hope that the member's view has changed since then—and I should say that it was not a member of this committee. That effectively suggests that, if we treat human rights as coming within the purview of this committee alone, simply because its title contains the words "human rights", we will have that kind of siloing.

As we have pointed out on other occasions, the Parliament supports commissioners, and scrutinises their work. If we just passed that to this committee, we would not see human rights being embedded across the whole Parliament. There is, therefore, a role for the Parliament and all committees to take the same approach that this committee has taken.

I also want to touch on some of the points that were made earlier, because they are relevant. I was going to make a point about the directionality of the equality impact assessments of the equality and fairer Scotland budget statement. We have heard a positive narrative about how it is a useful

tool for showing how policies are justified, but there is a question about directionality. Are equality outcomes driving the budget and is the budget statement explaining what they are, or is the budget just being set anyway and, as we have already discussed, the equality outcomes are simply add-ons and post-hoc rationalisations? Is it just a matter of saying, "Here's a policy that was in the budget anyway, and we've found an excuse to say why it is a good thing for equalities"?

There is something in that. As we said earlier, those things need to come about earlier in the process; they need to be a start point, not an end point where we say, "We have decided on this policy. Now, what are its impacts?"

Pam Gosal: I take what you have just said, Allan, as a positive that the committee has been doing good work.

Last week's meeting was very interactive, and I found it very productive—I am sure that other colleagues have talked about it, too. We enjoyed listening to people's real-life experiences as well as those of people who are working on the ground. All committees should definitely go out and hear people's real-life experiences; after all, we just sit in this building, making laws and policy. Although there is consultation, last week's meeting showed how important it is to hear about real life.

Something that was highlighted last week and which has been talked about many times today is the issue of accountability. One particular point was that the Scottish Government gives out money for programmes; the people leading those programmes might not be qualified or have the experience, but they are given large sums of money, with no accountability and transparency. I have heard today about a lack of transparency; about the fact that it is very difficult to follow the money and find out how it is allocated and spent; and about a process failure and a lack of accountability. Who is accountable when it comes to finding out whether progress is being made over time and where the money from Government to councils is being used?

The scenario that I have set out is one that people told us about last week. They said that, when the money that is given out goes down the chain, the project managers who are put in place do not have the experience. Nonetheless, they are given these very large sums of money to run those programmes. Allan, you mentioned accountability from Government to council, and it would be good to hear your views on how accountability in programmes can improve. What more can the committee do? We have heard about the good work that we are already doing, but could we do more? Could we ask the minister and cabinet secretary the right questions when they are here later? What would you want us to ask them when

it comes to accountability from the top right down to the bottom so that we ensure that that golden thread is there?

Allan Faulds: You make a good point about accountability. Often, for those working in a political arena, accountability will come down to voting; if there is an election in a few years' time, and you like—or do not like—what the Government has done, you can vote on that basis at that point. However, that is no good if you have a budget for 2022-23, and people have real concerns about a particular area. Building in moments for accountability in year as a direct response to budgets is definitely important.

I had a question for the committee about the progress that it was making with its approach to engaging with lived experience, and I am pleased to hear that that engagement has continued. I agree with the point about other committees doing the same; I know that the Education, Children and Young People Committee, for example, looks at how children and young people and students have been affected by particular policies, and this would be a good approach to take there. The ALLIANCE is strongly for it. Indeed, we have had for many years now the idea of hearing from lived experience and ensuring that, whenever we hear from those people, that experience is properly valued. It is not about people being made to repeat their story over and over again, but about ensuring that decisions are informed on an equal basis.

There are opportunities for all levels of Government to do more. For example, you could have lived experience panels getting people to come in and talk about their experience. As you have said, you can often end up with people in particular roles who are perfectly qualified to handle money, in the sense that that is their profession, but who do not necessarily understand the impacts on people. Making the space for those officials to hear from people who are directly impacted can improve their understanding of how equalities are being delivered on the ground. That sort of approach should be taken forward more broadly if we are to get more of that lived experience from all kinds of groups, and to formalise it by giving it more of an institutional role.

Emma Congreve: I want to make a brief point about the important role of proper impact evaluation. In particular, when money goes out with Government to local government, the third sector and the private sector, it needs to go with an expectation that a good impact evaluation will be done. However, that requires resource, and it is often the first thing to get cut out of budgets, particularly in the third sector. There needs to be more understanding and better capacity in

organisations that receive public money to allow them to do good, robust evaluations.

Bringing this back to accountability, I wonder who is accountable for ensuring that public money is delivering what it is expected to deliver. I do not know the answer to that question—it would be interesting to put it to the Government. When large sums of money leave the Government to deliver an outcome that it has set, who is accountable for ensuring that sufficient evaluation is done and that answers to that question are available in evidence for scrutiny by committees such as this one?

Pam Gosal: I will certainly put that to the Government.

Professor O'Hagan: On the question of who is accountable, one answer is that the Scottish Parliament is the ultimate guarantor of human rights in Scotland. The scrutiny that all committees exercise is, as Allan Faulds has said, essential. The Scottish Parliament's committees are required to scrutinise duty bearers and the frameworks that have been set out, whether it be the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality framework or those that exist in the international treaties that clearly set out what the obligations are. We have been in front of this committee as well as others—for example, in relation to the concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights—and have said, "These are the gaps that have been found, and these are the actions required to address them." Again, that is where Parliament holds Government and duty bearers to account.

10:30

I go back to your point about whether the people to whom public money is discharged are well equipped. Clearly, there is a need for better knowledge and understanding of human rights obligations in relation to service design and, as Emma Congreve has said, evaluation. However, a knowledge and understanding of human rights obligations is also required to hold those duty bearers to account, along with clear direction from Government or within duty bearer relationships. After all, there is a complex arrangement of delivery partners, whether it be in health and social care, detention or across the public sector, and—this brings me back to Pam Gosal's earlier point about cracks in the system—those cracks arise if the scrutiny is not consistent across all those partners and if the understanding of the objectives and the purpose of the delivery is inconsistent.

Ultimately, it comes back to Parliament's scrutiny of duty bearers, and the participation of those with lived experience is key to that. Having long been an advocate thereof to the committee

and elsewhere, I really welcome the existing progress on participation, but it is also worth noting that the Parliament's ability to support effective participation is underresourced. That is something else to consider.

The Convener: We move to questions from Marie McNair, please.

Marie McNair: Thank you, convener. We have had a really interesting session. The question that I was going to ask has been covered, so I will leave it there, in the interests of time.

The Convener: Thank you very much. That brings our evidence taking from our first panel to a conclusion, and I thank everybody for their participation this morning.

We will suspend briefly for a changeover of witnesses.

10:32

Meeting suspended.

10:37

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome our second panel of witnesses, who are Shona Robison, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, and Kaukab Stewart, the Minister for Equalities, along with Scottish Government officials Rob Priestley, who is head of the mainstreaming unit, and Alasdair Black, who is deputy director for budget and fiscal co-ordination.

I invite the minister and the cabinet secretary to make short opening statements.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): Thank you for the opportunity to set out the work that we are doing to strengthen accountability and to ensure that equalities and human rights principles remain at the heart of the budget and spending review process. The Scottish Government places the utmost importance on being open and transparent about how, where and why decisions on public finances are taken. I will take a moment to reflect on what has been achieved.

Given the focus of this meeting, I am heartened that the SHRC's report last year on how the Scottish budget for 2021-22 stacked up against international best practice showed that Scotland would be the highest-scoring country for budget oversight in the 2023 open budget survey global rankings. The most recent results for Scotland represent good progress since the SHRC last ran that assessment, in 2019, when it assessed the 2017-18 Scottish budget. Scores were up across the board on participation, transparency and

oversight. When compared with the latest country rankings in the OBS global rankings for 2023, all three of Scotland's scores sit higher than the respective global averages. When global comparisons are made, Scotland is one of only a small number of comparison countries to have made progress rather than stagnating or slipping backwards.

Of course, as ever, more must be done, and we remain committed to making further improvements and responding to feedback. For example, the committee has asked us to move towards multi-year budgeting to demonstrate accountability. As a result, we are this year undertaking a spending review alongside work on the Scottish budget for 2026-27 and that review will set spending envelopes for three future years for resource and four years for capital.

To support those processes, we are continuing to conduct impact assessments so that we can make decisions informed by high-quality evidence, ensuring that we focus on the impact on protected groups and comply with our statutory duties. We are, of course, operating in a challenging fiscal environment and it is critical that we focus our resources to deliver value for money and to advance equality.

We are introducing a new strategic integrated impact assessment approach this year, aiming to integrate multiple statutory duties to provide a more rounded and holistic understanding of the potential impacts. Our goal is to enhance both the efficiency and effectiveness of those assessments. That work is being shaped in collaboration with stakeholders, including the equalities and human rights budget advisory group and the OECD.

I am grateful for the committee's time today and now hand over to the Minister for Equalities.

The Minister for Equalities (Kaukab Stewart):

Thank you, cabinet secretary, for that introduction, and I thank the committee for giving us the welcome opportunity to appear jointly, demonstrating our shared commitment to collaboration and to advancing equality, inclusion and human rights across the whole Government. Our shared ambition is to ensure that equality and human rights are central to budget decisions, and we continue to build on our partnership, meeting regularly to maintain a consistent and embedded focus on equality in budgeting, while taking advice directly from the equality and human rights budget advisory group.

As I have previously said, my personal and visible leadership is critical to that. I have actively engaged with colleagues across portfolios, supporting and challenging them to identify meaningful actions to address inequality in Scotland. To date, I have held more than 14

meetings with ministerial colleagues, focusing on identifying practical steps that each portfolio can take to improve equality and human rights outcomes. For example, earlier this year, I worked in collaboration with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport to launch a pilot scheme that will provide free rail travel for the companions of blind and partially sighted people. Those conversations have been constructive and forward looking, and I am encouraged by the shared commitment across Government.

We all have a responsibility to tackle inequality and to uphold human rights, and I am determined that that will be reflected in our actions. One example of that is the pre-budget ministerial equality workshop, which was first held in 2023. Since then, we have scheduled that workshop earlier in the budget process, and I have taken a more substantive role in the workshop, which enables ministers to discuss the impacts of potential budget allocations on equality groups before decisions are taken and is a powerful tool for embedding equality and human rights principles in our policy and budgetary thinking.

The budget does not, of course, exist in isolation, and the quality of analysis for the budget depends on how well equality and human rights are mainstreamed across Government. That is why, when we published our long-term equality outcomes this year, we focused on those that would act as enablers of system-wide change, improving the awareness and use of equality evidence, improving how we are informed by lived experience and participation and strengthening the relevant impact assessments. To support that, each outcome is backed by short-term and long-term actions over a four-year period. We will regularly report on those actions, further increasing transparency and accountability. Those improvements directly support the work that Ms Robison and her team deliver through the budget.

We hope that the committee recognises the Government's continued dedication to advancing equality and human rights budgeting and the tangible actions that we are taking to drive improvement. There is, of course, more to do and we will continue listening, engaging and acting on feedback from this committee and other stakeholders.

The Convener: Thank you both very much. Cabinet secretary, is the Scottish Government still committed to human rights budgeting, and, if so, what does that look like?

Shona Robison: Yes, absolutely—we are. We have heard from the Minister for Equalities about the changes that we have made in the process to ensure that it is not a case of doing a human rights analysis after the event but of engagement before budgetary decisions are made, to ensure that

decisions and potential decisions are put through a human rights lens. Success looks like having that engagement earlier to ensure that the assessment process is transparent and open.

The added opportunity on this occasion, with the upcoming fiscal events, is that, through the spending review, we are able to demonstrate the line of sight for funding that will ensure that we can be open and transparent about the commitment to this work over a number of years. Ensuring that human rights are at the heart of the budget process is the job of not only the Minister for Equalities. It is the job of every cabinet secretary and every minister to ensure that human rights are at the centre of the work that they are doing and that they engage with the Minister for Equalities, who is providing a check in the system that the processes and work that are under way meet the requirements and are being done in a way that engages with not only ministerial colleagues but key stakeholder groups.

That is what the process looks like; it should not be overly complicated, and it should have a demonstrable effect. I emphasise that we are not talking only about the funding in the equalities brief; we are talking about funding across the board and looking at whether the decisions that we are making and the decisions that have been made can stand up to the scrutiny of a human rights perspective. We are not there yet. We have work to do, but progress has been made, as I outlined in my opening statement.

The Convener: Minister, you spoke about the equality and human rights budget advisory group. What progress has been made against the group's recommendations?

Kaukab Stewart: I want to thank the EHRBAG members for their valuable support and input, and I extend special thanks to Emma Congreve for her thoughtful leadership as the interim chair.

I think that we wrote to the committee on 19 February to update you on the Scottish Government's progress against the group's recommendations. At the time, I was confident that we were making good progress on the actions and that we were broadly on track to meet those within the proposed timeframes.

At that point, of the 22 actions, nine had been completed, 12 were in progress and one was yet to get under way because it was contingent on the completion of another action. The completed actions include agreeing in partnership with EHRBAG the continued improvements to the equality and fairer Scotland budget statement—EFSBS—and taking a more integrated approach to the equality analysis of the programme for government and the budget. We have also been establishing a senior leadership group to scrutinise

and bring challenge to our approach to embed equality and human rights and enable cultural change, and we have published an easy-read version of the EFSBS.

Since February, there has been further progress to support our commitment in Scotland to equality-led budgeting. The Scottish Government is hosting its first international knowledge exchange event in October, which will bring together experts from across government and civic society to explore how integrated impact assessments can advance equality and human rights in budgeting. That should foster a more collaborative approach, embedding inclusive evidence-based practices into future budget processes.

At its meeting on 11 June, EHRBAG members agreed that reporting on the action plan will be paused while further consideration is given to the group's terms of reference. However, work continues during this time, so our focus will shift to the two strategic objectives for this year, which are achieving an integrated budget impact assessment and proposals to improve budget transparency and accessibility.

The Convener: Has the equality data improvement programme been improving outcomes? Where are we with that?

Kaukab Stewart: Improvements are being made to the availability and analysis of equality data across the Scottish Government through the equality data improvement programme and the equality evidence strategy for 2023 to 2025. That includes improvements to the collection and analysis of disaggregated and intersectional data across policy areas. Good progress has been seen across the strategy as of July 2025. Of the strategy's 45 actions, 17 are complete, 20 are in progress and officials are supporting the remainder to be delivered within the strategy period, where possible.

An evaluation of the current equality evidence strategy to examine its impacts, including how the work has improved outcomes, will commence shortly. Work is under way to begin the development of the next equality evidence strategy, which will be done in collaboration with analysts, policy makers and external organisations that are interested in improving equality evidence.

Maggie Chapman: Good morning. Thank you for joining us.

My questions follow on from Karen Adam's questions about understanding progress and how the Government is approaching areas where there has not been progress. An area that has come up in our discussions with stakeholders this morning, and previously, is the implementation gap between the positive narrative and vision that we have in social care and the lack of delivery on those. The

specific example that we heard earlier from the ALLIANCE was that the legislation that was initially proposed to transform social care and to embed human rights in every element of its provision became the subject of a scrap about territory and powers between the Scottish Government and COSLA. How is the Scottish Government working on navigating those issues, where we have other structural tensions that impede the delivery of a powerful and admirable narrative about the drive for the delivery of human rights and equality for all in Scotland?

Shona Robison: You touch on a real tension. I will have to watch that I do not go back to speaking as a home care organiser, which I was in my former years, because I feel very passionate about this area. Without a doubt, huge improvements need to be made.

Clearly, as you have described, the debate on the national care service became focused on territory, powers and disagreement rather than the areas of extensive and broad agreement. What service users and their carers want to see from social care services should have been at the heart of it, but that was lost somewhat both in the broader debate and in the debate in the Parliament.

There is now an opportunity to work outside Scottish Government and local government silos and to focus on how we will improve social care, not just in the here and now. The demographics show that there will be a huge increase in the over-80 age group in the not-too-distant future. There will be a requirement for us to take a root-and-branch look at how we provide social care and ensure that the budgets will work. Silos do not help; the health and social care integration joint boards were established with the intention of moving away from siloed budgets but, in my opinion, there is still far too much siloed working.

We all have to take a step back and think about how we will transform social care in a way that will meet people's needs both now and in the future. Human rights are at the heart of that, because the rights of those who are often the most vulnerable in our society need to be considered first and foremost. If we keep that at the heart of our discussions perhaps we can avoid falling back into what you described as the territory and powers issues.

I could talk all day about that area, but I will stop myself there because I think that we need to have a very long and hard look at it.

Maggie Chapman: If there was one policy area that we could spend all day talking about, that would be it. There is a gap between our narrative and vision on one hand and the delivery and outcomes on the other.

One of the challenges that was put to us this morning was that, when we are making human rights assessments of budgetary decisions, across the board, there is not always the same level of quality assurance, or the same understanding of the degrees of tolerance or the need for outcomes to be assessed. Again, I will use a social care example: the Scottish Government's commitment to raise funding by 20 per cent was well recognised, acknowledged and welcomed, but there has been no assessment of how the funding has been used or how it is delivering positive outcomes and securing people's minimum core obligations. Could you say more about the Government's work to ensure that, in every directorate across all levels of Government, right from the top and all the way down, there is a shared understanding that the thread from the narrative to the delivery of outcomes must be drawn together?

Kaukab Stewart: I will come in on that. During my previous appearances in front of the committee, I have emphasised my personal commitment to provide support and challenge across portfolios. As I said in my opening remarks, I have had 14 ministerial meetings so far, and we are now working differently. Governments are set up with departments, and everyone has subject areas while, in the chamber, we have shadow ministers to cover portfolios. It is also about cultural change. As I have said, there needs to be a will to change. We need to take people with us in order to make the change by demonstrating the positive effects that it can have.

That is part of my challenge. If we undertake impact assessments earlier, it will lead to better decision making in the future, especially in these times of fiscal challenge when serious financial decisions must be made. Money is not infinite. Therefore, we need to ensure that we look after the most vulnerable people, as the cabinet secretary says, and see the intersections in how a decision in one portfolio area can affect another.

There is much more to do. That is why having a vision and a bold ambition is important. It gives us a clear trajectory to aspire to. The journey is long and complicated but I assure the committee that we are making good progress along that way.

11:00

Maggie Chapman: We have heard about the tools that are available to you and your colleagues throughout the different levels of local and central Government. The national outcomes are one of those key tools. However, the national outcomes and national performance framework do not always match up. We cannot always follow the thread through from the NPF, budgets or the programme for government to the delivery of

outcomes. Will you, minister or cabinet secretary, say more about how the Government is trying to follow those things through more concretely? What is your assessment of the delay in refreshing some of the national outcomes?

Shona Robison: It is a fair challenge. One of the reasons that the national outcomes are being overhauled is that we want them to work better. The challenge that you present is one of the reasons why we want to have a refreshed set of national outcomes. A lot of work has gone on to gather evidence from experts and public consultation. Getting that right has meant a delay, but getting it right is the most important thing.

The Deputy First Minister has been clear that the national performance framework remains an important vision and can create the thread that you mention. There are regular holding-to-account sessions with senior civil servants, cabinet secretaries and ministers on the delivery of the national performance framework and where we are on the outcomes. That is an important, high-level mechanism to hold ourselves and others to account, because getting the outcomes right is very important.

You are right to challenge us, but that is exactly why the substantial overhaul of the NPF is being undertaken. There absolutely has to be a thread and a linkage to the missions and priorities. I hope that, when the refresh is concluded, the committee will see the benefit of it.

Maggie Chapman: Thank you very much.

Tess White: Good morning. The human rights bill has been flagged as essential to helping citizens to understand minimum core requirements. How is the Scottish Government working to progress the public's understanding of human rights, given the decision not to legislate during this session?

Kaukab Stewart: I will deal with the minimum core requirements. I recall that, when I was convener of the committee, I asked questions of Government representatives regarding the minimum core, so I take a special interest in that.

We understand the minimum core as the most fundamental requirements of social, economic and cultural rights, such as the right to adequate food, housing and healthcare, that every state must uphold at all times, irrespective of resources. The Scottish Human Rights Commission promotes those concepts within the context of a potential human rights bill that will aim to incorporate certain international treaties in domestic law to ensure that everyone in Scotland can access those essential rights.

We understand that minimum core obligations fall into two categories. The first concerns the

budget process, in relation to which they include running the process differently, driven by principles of transparency, participation and accountability—I know that the committee has been considering those themes. The second category concerns the budget itself, in relation to which they include demonstrating that the content of a budget—the decisions that are taken about how money is raised, allocated and spent—is in line with human rights obligations. That covers the maximum available resources in particular. Governments are obliged to take steps to progressively realise the rights to the maximum of their available resources. Minimum core obligations are understood to be the minimum protections that Governments should guarantee to everyone.

The human rights discussion paper that was published in July sets out proposals for ministers to run a participatory process to inform the minimum standard of social, economic and cultural rights. One of the actions that was identified in that paper was to develop the thinking on minimum standards and what that participatory process might look like. It might be worth noting that there is no global agreement on minimum core obligations, because they will differ for every nation, depending on the maximum resources that are available. It is new territory, but I can assure the committee that it is being taken incredibly seriously. I hope that that covers that bit of it.

On the decision not to legislate, Tess White quite rightly asked what we were doing in the meantime. As I said, we published the discussion paper. We are implementing the capability building programme to help the public sector and the wider duty bearers with the human rights bill. In the current financial year, we have invested up to about £200,000 to increase the knowledge and understanding of the rights that are proposed for incorporation across local authorities and health and social care providers. We will also engage with organisations' funding through the equality and human rights fund to facilitate a knowledge exchange on the proposed rights and how to prepare the ground for future duties. Our capability building workshop group is helping to inform the delivery of that work in 2025-26 and beyond.

On making that information on human rights accessible and available, it is vital to allow the rights holders to claim those rights. Working with stakeholders, we will develop plans for information and awareness raising, including a campaign that is aligned with the future timescales for the implementation of human rights. We are developing a toolkit as part of the mainstreaming strategy that will assist with improving competence in that area. That will be an online platform that will have resources and checklists around training, continual professional development and best

practice, which means that there will be a lot of practical support. There will be examples to support Scottish Government directorates and the wider Scottish public sector, so that people can evaluate the mainstreaming strategies and human rights priorities and take actions where appropriate.

Tess White: Thank you. This evidence session is about accountability. You used the terms “should be”, “obliged”, “must” and “minimum protections”. Yet, the Scottish Human Rights Commission has been operating for 17 years without any legal enforcement powers, and its remit is still based on the legislation that created it, the Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act 2006. Scottish National Party ministers, including yourself, have recently shelved the human rights bill that could have at least given the SHRC some teeth, which it needs because it cannot otherwise enforce. How can the SNP Government claim that it is committed to human rights when it has not delivered the legislation to improve scrutiny of its human rights record?

Kaukab Stewart: I have some sympathy with your line of questioning. However, in my previous answer, I gave a clear indication of the extensive work that we are undertaking. It is not a shelving; it is a delay in order to be able to advance that work and get it right. There are many treaties that are being incorporated, and getting all those different things to align is a hefty piece of work. There are treaties that have not been adopted by other countries, so, in that sense, some of this work is groundbreaking.

It requires time to take everybody with us—to make sure that duty bearers know what they are doing and how they are doing their work, and to find out what implications there will be for future legislative change in many different portfolio areas. It also requires time for rights holders to be able to take up their rights. Therefore, it is absolutely not a shelving; it is a reasonable delay to make sure that that work can be undertaken in full consultation with all the civic organisations, including stakeholders. The SHRC is a very valued partner in that.

In relation to the SHRC’s enforcement powers, it does an amazing amount of work, and its spotlights really home in on particular areas—those are really valuable. I have absolute sympathy for that point, and it will come out as the bill advances. Enforcement powers are absolutely not off the table.

Tess White: Okay. Thank you.

Pam Gosal: Good morning. Minister, on 25 February, you said in response to one of my questions:

“My role is not to make ministers’ decisions for them but to highlight those intersectionalities, to get them talking to one other and, more important, to get them to do that prior to making any decisions. That is the change of approach. I assure the committee that I am robustly challenging my colleagues to consider those things, to come out of our silos and to move towards that outcome rather than outcomes that are based on portfolios.”—[*Official Report, Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee*, 25 February 2025; c 6.]

Has there been any progress on that and are ministers talking to one another to achieve the best possible outcomes? As we know, women are often faced with disadvantages when it comes to employment, which are often made worse by an unequal burden of family responsibilities. How are ministers working together to ensure that women are not placed at a disadvantage, especially when it comes to employment?

I also want to highlight some of the evidence that we took earlier. People commented that there is a lack of connections; that things do not feed into wider budgets; that some areas of human rights are understood and some are not; that things are not followed through in how resources are allocated; that greater connections and clarity are needed; and that people cannot follow the money and wonder what is being spent.

11:15

It is clear that those are issues, and the Scottish Government cannot ignore the cracks that are showing in the system. It is good that we have you here today to provide evidence on what you have been doing since 25 February, and what work you are doing on women being at a disadvantage, especially when it comes to employment. Last but not least—perhaps the cabinet secretary would like to answer this question—what would you say about the comments that were made today, especially about connectivity? I know that the cabinet secretary mentioned that silo work is still happening and that there is still more work to be done. It would be good to hear your response to the comments that we heard earlier.

Over to you first, minister.

Kaukab Stewart: It is always strange when your words are quoted back to you, and I stand by them. I gave an outline in my opening statement of the work that I have been doing. That kind of infrastructural work of doing cultural change, enabling conversations and increasing knowledge, competence and capability, does not grab the headlines, but it makes the foundations for future decisions more robust and connected, as you say. That all feeds into some of the remarks that you said came out of the first evidence session this morning.

In that sense, none of that surprises me. Thanks for the opportunity to reinforce what the role of an equalities minister is. I take very seriously the right demand for mainstreaming. With my support and challenge to colleagues, I can say that, yes, they are speaking to one another, and they always have done.

I think that what sometimes gets lost, with the best will in the world, because we referred to it earlier, is that everybody has their different portfolios and people are very keen on getting on with their job. Having somebody who can take a wider view and see all the connections and then offer that view has been very well received by my colleagues. One massive demonstration of that is the fact that the cabinet secretary and I are both here during a pre-budget scrutiny evidence session. That is another indication that we are coming out of our silos.

I always say that everybody wants everybody else to come out of their silos until I turn around and say, "You come out of yours." That is always a bit more challenging.

There is also the annual ministerial budget workshop, which is a great opportunity when everybody is in the room at the same time. It means that clear connections can be made between portfolio decisions in the room in real time, and I am able to add my voice to that as well. The focus on protected characteristics, socioeconomic disadvantage and children's rights, for instance, embeds equality and human rights into decisions that ministers make.

The new equality outcomes were published in April this year. We have taken a new approach to the equality outcome-setting process, so that it provides the consistency that Pam Gosal asks for and leadership across Government.

The three key outcomes that act as enablers of that system-wide change, which is what we all want, focus on improving the use and awareness of equality evidence, improving how we are informed by lived experience and participation and strengthening the relevant impact assessments. Each outcome is underpinned by short-term and long-term actions over a four-year period.

I hope that that gives you a clear indication of our commitment to drive meaningful, long-term change by addressing the structural barriers that impact equality across all of the Scottish Government, as we are very much aware. I hope that that is enough information.

Pam Gosal: Minister, before I turn to the cabinet secretary, I want to touch on what you have said. It is good to hear about the key three outcomes. "Policy", "strategy" and "outcomes" are great words in a document, but what are you doing on the ground to ensure that women are not

placed at a disadvantage, especially when it comes to employment? What is happening on the ground out there? How are we helping those women get into employment? What are we doing around care, housing and so on to do that? That work will not be in a silo; a number of departments will have to work with you on that. I am sure that women out there who are listening to this will want to hear what the Scottish Government is doing to help them get back into—or stay in—work.

Kaukab Stewart: We also need to bear in mind that, due to circumstances, some women may not be able to work. It is important that they get access to the benefits that they are entitled to. I am aware of the intersectionalities around women and girls.

I cannot speak on behalf of other portfolios, but I can give you an indication of what is being done in mine. In order for women and girls to feel empowered to access equal opportunities in relation to the right to work, for instance, given the disadvantages and detriment that they face, they need equitable access to economic resources and decision making and to be able to live their lives free from violence, abuse and harassment. In 2025-26, we are providing more than £2 million to 10 gender equality organisations. Of that, £1.8 million is being provided through the equality and human rights fund. The money that we are putting towards women and girls in my portfolio area makes up 22 per cent of the equality and human rights fund. Both of the figures that I mentioned are in addition to the £21 million that is being provided to organisations via the delivering equally safe fund, which is for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls. I hope that that provides you with some examples.

Pam Gosal: Thank you. Cabinet secretary?

Shona Robison: First of all, there is always more work to be done—we have to acknowledge that. The National Advisory Council on Women and Girls is very challenging in this space; it has challenged the First Minister and all of us to do more. Our work with them led to funded work with the OECD to explore how gender budgeting approaches can be applied to the budget process in order to make it better and evidence that we are going deeper and further with gender budgeting across all our investments. Through that pilot, we were able to identify some of the gaps, for example the need to have a more strategic overarching gender goal and the need to move away from a portfolio-based budget model to one that is, as you described, not siloed. Those form part of the need for a longer-term reform programme.

We are getting better at avoiding siloed working. If we take the example of tackling child poverty, the child poverty delivery plan does not relate just

to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice's job but to everybody's job. The inputs to that plan include not just the Scottish child payment but things such as employability programmes, childcare and other services, fair work, the living wage and transport—in other words, things that sit across Government that have to be brought to bear in order to have the biggest impact. I had a meeting last night with local government on how we work together to align ourselves on our child poverty objectives for the next delivery plan. I assure you that that work is continuing.

Regarding the employability service itself, we recognise that there is a strongly gendered element to child poverty and that children in single-parent households are particularly likely to experience poverty, which means that support to get parents towards and into work must fit round the person. Some of the most successful programmes have been delivered by third sector organisations, some of which are quite discreet; they build up trust with women and parents and bridge the gap into statutory services. We must look at what works and some of that has been very successful. The job is far from done, but we can point to good examples of where there are strengths that we can build on.

Pam Gosal: Cabinet secretary, I have a question. You may have been listening when I said to Emma Congreve that I would ask about something that came up with the first witness panel. It is good to hear that progress is being made and you have acknowledged that there are gaps and cracks that must be looked at and addressed, but I find it shocking for any Government nowadays to have no accountability.

I am not saying that the Government has no direct accountability—of course it does—but we hear organisations and witnesses asking about that. We heard earlier that large sums of money leave the Scottish Government, which means that sufficient evaluation is needed, but Emma told us earlier that she does not know who is accountable. Money goes out from the Scottish Government and into local authorities and may go on from there into the private sector or into charitable or other organisations. Where does the accountability lie? Where is the leadership and transparency?

Shona Robison: Accountability is key and I would be happy to have a further discussion with Emma Congreve or any other stakeholder who wants to discuss that in more depth.

I spoke in my opening remarks about where Scotland sits in relation to international best practice in being transparent about how, where and why decisions on the public finances are taken. Using some of those key measurements to compare Scotland with other countries shows that

we have work to do but are certainly making progress.

You touch on an important point about how money is routed. If we had representatives of local government round this table, they would say that councils are autonomous elected bodies and that decisions about funding should be made there. There is an on-going debate in Parliament. Some people call for more resources to be directed through local government, or for more ring fencing, but I also hear calls for ring fencing to be removed entirely and for our 32 local authorities to be entirely free to spend money as they wish. That is a difficult tension. The Verity house agreement was an attempt to have explicit, shared objectives that the public can see and can use to hold all organisations to account. Those objectives include tackling child poverty, growing the economy, improving public services and tackling climate change and we must think about what we are going to do and how money aligns to those objectives.

There is tension and I do not think that we should pretend otherwise. I have colleagues who tell me that, if we removed the ring fencing around some funding, we would have no way of guaranteeing that that money will be spent on homelessness services or other discrete areas of work while other colleagues, particularly in local government, tell me that that there should be no ring fencing.

There are tensions and we should not pretend otherwise, but we must clearly demonstrate that funding is aligning to the key missions that the First Minister has set out. That is also a work in progress.

However, if I take child poverty as an example, I contend that the reason that the level of child poverty is falling—not fast enough and far enough, but it is falling—is that we have been able to align resources from the Scottish Government, local government and the third sector to a very clear key mission that everybody understands. That is my honest assessment of where we are at.

11:30

It is a tension, but we need to work through it, because every pound that is spent is public money, wherever it is routed, and it needs to be spent in the most efficient and effective manner and with clear objectives.

Pam Gosal: Thanks for that response. You gave a lot of information there, but I want to go back to that last point. Although we welcome a lot of powers being given to local authorities, it is important for you to give an answer to Emma Congreve directly but also to everybody who is listening—and I am sorry to be so direct, but it is

important—because this is taxpayers' money. At our workshops last week and this week, we heard a lot about the different areas where people think that money spent could be more transparent and accountable. When it comes to human rights budgeting, who is accountable for ensuring that the money goes down that golden thread? Is it leadership, or is it people all the way down?

Shona Robison: Everybody. We are accountable for setting and agreeing budgets, and in many ways, there is a parliamentary role; we can propose a budget, but at the end of the day it has to be supported in order for it to become enacted and for the money to flow in for the priorities that are collectively agreed. Once funding is allocated, it is up to local authorities, health boards and the third sector to focus on the objectives that are collectively agreed.

Accountability is at a number of levels. We are all accountable to the electorate at the end of the day, but our public servants, particularly our leadership in the public service, are also accountable. We have to be able to demonstrate progress on our objectives and to be questioned if those objectives are not being met. We should all be open to being scrutinised.

That applies to local government as well. I do not think there is anything to be concerned about there. For example, when there is variation between local authorities, and some are making great progress in an area and others not so much, we should be able to address that. It might be that they are doing better in a different area, so the more scrutiny and analysis that is applied to find out why, the better.

We will follow up on the other points that you made. I was not able to watch the earlier part of the meeting, but I will get a note of the key points, and I am happy to engage with people beyond the session.

Pam Gosal: That was going to be my last question. Will you follow up to see where the comments have come from and why they are being made, from top to bottom, to see what is happening, where it is happening and where the cracks are appearing?

Shona Robison: We are happy to do so.

Tess White: My question is a supplementary on the equality and fairer Scotland budget statement. There is a published analysis by protected characteristic. The minister talked about the importance of looking at data by protected characteristic.

Let me take breastfeeding as an example of a minimum core standard. Breastfeeding inequalities, relating to the protected characteristic of pregnancy and maternity, are highlighted on

page 19 of the report. If the Scottish Government is serious about tackling breastfeeding inequalities, which affect young mothers and those from deprived areas, why are vital support services in NHS Lothian and Greater Glasgow and Clyde, for example, being cut?

Shona Robison: I will look into that issue specifically.

It goes back to Pam Gosal's point, to some extent, in that we provide health boards with their allocation through the formula that has been used for many years to take account of deprivation, ageing population and so on. There are contentions around where that ends up landing in the overall budget. We have a growing budget for health and social care, and the formula is applied so that each health board receives its share. They have a great deal of discretion around how that funding is deployed.

Running a health board is not an easy task. There are many pressures in relation to an ageing population, both in planned care—on which there is a lot of focus—and in population health. One of the issues that Tess White has raised is very much in that space. How does a health board manage its resources, even though they are increasing, in that landscape of pressures? In some respects, health boards are a bit like local government. Some health boards are very good and have outcomes that are impressive in a whole list of areas, but they might not be doing so well in this area. Some health boards are doing better than others with the service Ms White highlighted.

How much do we want to direct health boards around the services that they provide, and how much discretion do they have? That is a tension, because we want them to do so much. There is lots of pressure on them to improve accident and emergency waiting times, and planned care and cancer care, and yet we have really important population-wide preventative measures, because we know that breastfeeding, for example, is a key preventative tool. That is a tension, and that is the honest answer.

Health boards should be held to account, and the health secretary holds them to account for the services that they provide, but there is variation across them. I am keen to minimise variation and I will take away this specific issue, but I hope that I have provided a bit of background on why services sometimes vary from one health board to another.

Tess White: Thank you, cabinet secretary, but, in the previous evidence session this morning, we heard a huge concern about the gap between narrative and practice. With something as clearly beneficial as breastfeeding, if even the most basic provision is not being followed through with defined minimum core criteria, do you have a

concern that there needs to be a tighter follow-through to ensure that there is accountability for that?

Shona Robison: There should be accountability. As I said earlier, we need to hold to account our senior leaders in the public sector—or whatever organisation—for the services that they provide. The point that I was making is that they have quite a challenging job to do because of all the pressures and demands in relation to an ageing population. The population health framework has set out a real intention to enhance population health measures that can have huge benefits further down the line. We know, for example, that the investment in early years and family nurse partnerships and all those upstream investments have great benefits later on. Breastfeeding is absolutely one of those interventions.

We absolutely recognise that there will be variation among health boards. The question for us is how much variation we are prepared to tolerate and where the accountability is. There has to be accountability and there has to be a service standard across the boards. As I said, I will take that issue back to health colleagues.

Kaukab Stewart: I will add a couple of short points. I remind everyone that health boards, like other public service providers, have to undertake equality impact assessments on any decisions that they make. That puts it on the record that they have looked at the equality impact and are taking mitigating factors into account. If there is a disproportionate impact on certain groups, the mitigating actions that they are going to take are on record.

I can confirm that the responsibility for the EHRBAG secretariat function has officially been transferred to the Scottish exchequer. I know that doing that was a request for some time, so I hope that it gives clear evidence of that alignment—so that, as members have said, we can “follow the money”. That portfolio has been shifted into the Scottish exchequer, which demonstrates the direct link between them.

Marie McNair: On the point that Pam Gosal made about accountability, I am a former councillor so can communicate on behalf of local government. I remember being under rigorous scrutiny, continuously providing feedback and evaluations, meeting key performance indicator targets and demonstrating that we had met those outcomes. There is a lot of pressure on local government and health boards.

Our user engagement work over the session has shown us the importance of involving citizens in budgeting, and giving them the opportunity to explore budget scrutiny. What has been achieved

by the Scottish Government in its own work on citizen involvement in the budget?

Shona Robison: I agree with the point that you made about local government and health boards. There is scrutiny there, and it is a difficult job. Councillors are working in a very challenging environment—given everything that we understand about the political environment, we know that the work of councillors is very difficult and can sometimes be a thankless task. I recognise the work that they do.

On the point about citizen involvement in the budget, we have worked to improve people's understanding of how it works: how we reach a budget and its development. We have heard a wide range of views from stakeholders across Scotland, from diverse communities, and we have heard the priorities of the third sector, public sector, business sector and communities at large.

We have produced public-facing information: following a review of international best practice on citizens' budgets, we enhanced our guide to the Scottish budget, “Your Scotland, Your Finances”. That is now produced alongside the draft Scottish budget publication and is updated to reflect the finalised Scottish budget agreed by the Parliament. It is also updated on budget revisions agreed in-year by the Parliament. It is a complicated system. There are in-year revisions in spring and autumn—it is not a straightforward process. However, through that publication and the updating of it, we have tried to set out how the process works in straightforward terms.

I recognise that there is more to do. We want to make those improvements, which is why last year's budget document signposted the 27 supporting documents and associated publications that accompanied the 2025-26 budget. I do not expect that there will be many folk who have read every one of those from cover to cover—present company excepted—but we try to go from that to “Your Scotland, Your Finances” to provide a much snappier way of producing information about something that is very complex.

Those are the attempts that we have made. It is work in progress. There is more to do, but we have recognised that we need to try. We want people to think about the budget. We want people to be involved as much as they can be and to give their views on process and outcome.

11:45

Marie McNair: Absolutely. Thank you for that.

Paul McLennan: I want to build on the accountability point. We had a workshop with CARM members last week. They talked about their lived experience and collaboration with

service users when they are designing services. I used this quote from one of the CARM members earlier on:

“One of the biggest challenges we faced was ensuring that our voices translated into meaningful influence. While our panel’s questions were put directly to the Minister, it was evident that translating these into real change requires persistence, transparency, and stronger accountability mechanisms.”

That was not about Scottish Government accountability but more about its partners. How can we ensure that the Government’s partners are delivering on the Government’s objectives, and that the voice of those with lived experience is reflected in delivery by partners? That was one of the points that was raised by CARM last week. I will ask the minister first and go to the cabinet secretary after that.

Kaukab Stewart: I can come in briefly on that. The way that it works is that we give money to strategic delivery partners who undertake that work, because they are best placed to do it. They have the knowledge and expertise and, usually, they have the voice of lived experience. I could give the example of the Scottish Refugee Council.

On the funding and procurement process, when the grant offer letters go out, the contract is very clear about what services we expect to be delivered. We have internal and external organisations that monitor that, analyse it and make sure that all the processes are followed. For example—I always get this one mixed up—Inspiring Scotland has more than 17 years of experience and it does regular checks and balances to make sure that the money that we provide is used for the intended purpose. If it is not, there are ways of managing that, as there are with many contracts.

Paul McLennan: Data was also one of the key points mentioned when we spoke to CARM last week, and it is different in different parts of the country. One of the things that we talked about was how data on services that are available in Edinburgh and Glasgow might be different from that on services that are available in the Highlands, for example. When looking at the lived experience and the data that is available, is that taken into account to make sure that things are changing and that policy follows that?

Kaukab Stewart: Absolutely. The current equality evidence strategy seeks to make improvements to the availability and analysis of equality data across the Scottish Government. That is running until December 2025 and work is under way to develop its next iteration.

The equality evidence finder is a web-based platform that was established to disseminate equality data to analysts, policy makers and the

general public. Work is under way to advance the data that is included in that tool and to improve its accessibility and usability. Just because the data is there does not mean that everybody is able to access it equally. We are working on that and we have seen good progress.

Obviously, there is always more to do to refine it. However, an evaluation of the current evidence strategy, which runs from 2023 to December 2025 will, alongside the collaboration with analysts, policy makers and external bodies, directly inform the next iteration about which I was talking. That is happening in real time. I hope that that gives you an answer.

Paul McLennan: Yes.

Cabinet secretary, will you expand on your responsibilities on that? One of the examples that was used this morning was the Government’s focus on, and success in, tackling child poverty. How does that determine the broader overview of the budget? Budget spending does not sit in one silo. It has to be a broader policy approach. From your point of view, where does the use of data come into that broader approach and how is that combined with lived experience?

Shona Robison: Tackling child poverty is a good example because it is a statutory duty. It is not a nice-to-do. The Parliament passed a law that we would meet the child poverty targets. Therefore, the work on the next delivery plan has to set out the analysis of the data on where we are.

That is important. We need to know where the base is now. Progress has been made on child poverty but we need to do more to close the gap to 2030. The ongoing analysis and use of data is really important to know whether we are on track to meet the requirements by 2030. Then it is about being able to use that as drivers and to test whether the policies that we are enacting to close that gap are working.

There is a lot of evidence and data that shows that the Scottish child payment has probably been the single most important tool, but the evidence on the investment in housing, childcare, transport and employability is a little less direct because it is not about putting money in people’s pockets per se. Therefore, it is important that we can capture the data on what impact reduced housing costs make on a household income to help to reduce poverty and how a flexible childcare service helps the family to reduce costs.

There is also employability. We know that work is the best way out of poverty, so we need to ensure that our programmes support parents and families in all the shapes and forms that they come in.

The six priority groups are a real focus for the next delivery plan. The data is really important not only for us to know whether we are making progress but for scrutiny. There is a lot of external scrutiny on progress on the child poverty targets. The eradication of child poverty is a good example of where we are probably more advanced. It is the single most important objective that the First Minister has set out and a statutory target.

I hope that that gives you some assurance that we use data a lot. We evaluate and it is crucial. Otherwise, how do we objectively measure the progress that we are making?

The Convener: I remind witnesses and members that we are running a bit over time. We still have a question from Pam Gosal, and Tess White has indicated that she wants to ask a question. If any other members wish to ask any more questions, they should indicate that to me. I ask everyone to make it as succinct as possible so that we do not go too far over time. I would appreciate that.

Pam Gosal: My question might have been answered, so you might be lucky, but it would be good to hear a little bit more about it.

Last week, we had a private meeting at which people from the whole family equality project spoke about money being wasted year after year because no multiyear budgeting was in place. The organisation said that, sometimes, when money is given out to a programme, it takes a whole year to get familiar with the programme, set it up and work at it and then, before you know it, in the second year, the money disappears.

It was highlighted that we should ask you about that, cabinet secretary. Do you agree that we need to have multiyear budget settlements? I think that I heard you say earlier that you are implementing multiyear budgeting. Is that right? Could you tell me a little more about that?

Shona Robison: We are delivering against our commitment to develop what we described as a fairer funding approach by providing more multiyear funding to third sector organisations that are delivering front-line services and, in particular, that are tackling child poverty. As part of the 2025-26 programme for government, we committed to what was described as a fairer funding pilot that provided multiyear funding to a range of third sector organisations, totalling about £130 million over 2025-26 and 2026-27. That supports projects in areas including health, education, justice, poverty and culture.

That is the first step towards what you described as mainstreaming multiyear funding agreements. I hear all the time from the third sector that certainty is sometimes as important—or more important—than quantity. It is important that organisations

have line of sight and know what they are getting, because they can then hold on to staff and do not have to work on a year-to-year budget.

To be fair to the Scottish Government, we had been subject to single-year budgets for many years, and it is difficult to guarantee funding to other organisations when we do not know what funding we will have. There has now been a multiyear spending review by the United Kingdom Government. That is why we set out that we will have a spending review alongside the 2026-27 budget, which will allow us to, as much as possible, look at providing that line of sight, which is only fair in relation to the spending review. I am keen to go further—this is really important, particularly when money is tight. We know that multiyear funding will help the third sector to hold on to key people who deliver vital services.

I hope that that gives you some reassurance.

Pam Gosal: Thank you very much.

Tess White: My questions are on the theme of the third sector and accountability. My colleague talked about accountability and who is responsible. There is a big emphasis on lived experience. I will give the example of an accountant. An accountant can have lived experience of accounts, but that does not make them a formally qualified accountant.

I have three questions in relation to the delegation of accountability in the third sector. My first question is about an organisation, Scottish Trans, which is funded by the SNP Government and which has publicly argued that men can breastfeed babies despite the risks to the infant and the risks of synthetic hormone-induced secretions. That has not been clinically trialled because of the risks.

Pregnant and breastfeeding women face huge restrictions on what they can eat and drink. A recent example that one mother gave me was that pregnant women cannot even have a Lemsip Max. Pregnant women are being told that there are restrictions on what they can eat, drink and put into their bodies. However, Scottish Trans is advocating for a process that uses synthetic hormones. It openly criticises the Equality and Human Rights Commission for a perceived lack of protection for men who want to “breastfeed”. The whole thing, minister and cabinet secretary, is unsafe and completely bonkers.

Earlier, I referenced the cuts to breastfeeding support services for women that have been made because of the SNP Government’s funding decisions. Why are ministers continuing to fund Scottish Trans, given that its position is undermining health and safety and evidenced-based policy making?

Shona Robison: I will hand over to the minister on the specifics of that, but I put on the record that the funding to our health boards and local authorities has increased. There have not been cuts to funding; it has increased in real terms. That is not just me saying that—we talked about scrutiny and accountability, and the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland have confirmed that funding for local government and health and social care have both increased in real terms. We should be accurate.

That does not mean that there are not difficult decisions to be made around where funding goes, but the funding has increased in real terms because of the decision that we made to increase health and social care funding considerably in the 2025-26 budget. It is important to put that on the record. Funding has increased, not decreased. The Minister for Equalities might wish to come in on the specifics around funding.

12:00

Kaukab Stewart: I have been over how and why we procure services. In previous sessions, the issue of conflation has been raised—maybe it was Tess White who raised it. Different organisations provide different services. Some of them are campaigners and provide services, too. I have made it very clear in the past that the organisations that we fund are funded for specific services that they provide. Some of them may undertake campaigning work while others may not. None of that campaigning work is funded by the Scottish Government in any way whatsoever. Generally speaking, the organisations provide services such as providing information, gathering data, listening to the voices of lived experience, running suicide helplines and informing future policy. They are undertaking very valuable work.

Tess White: On 6 May, you and your official, Cat McMeeken, gave evidence to this committee. Your official responded to my questions regarding funding for third sector organisations that are supported by the equality and human rights fund. Ms McMeeken stated that the Scottish Government does not

“provide core funding, which is for the wider lobbying activities that organisations do. It is much more about giving funding for specific services.”—[*Official Report, Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee*, 6 May 2025; c 20.]

That is also what you have just said, minister. Why, then, did the fund manager, Inspiring Scotland, specifically include a list of the advocacy work that is carried out by the Equality Network, LEAP Sports Scotland, LGBT Youth Scotland, the LGBT Healthy Living Centre and Stonewall on gender identity services in a recent progress report on the equality and human rights fund? That

is a specific question, minister. If you do not know the answer, I am happy to follow up with you separately.

Kaukab Stewart: I will have a go. If anything is left unanswered, I am also happy to follow up with you on it.

Cat McMeeken was correct, and I have reinforced what she said. One of the services that is provided is advocacy work. Often, the most marginalised people are not in a place to be able to represent themselves, so they need somebody advocating for them. For instance, the Scottish Refugee Council has just been awarded a contract to assist migrants—they are some of the most vulnerable people, as they are not able to access their rights on issues such as housing, benefits or healthcare. It is important to remember that the principle applies across all protected characteristics. Being trans is a protected characteristic, so trans people would and should be entitled to the same services as anyone with any other protected characteristic.

Tess White: I hear you, minister. I am not disputing what you say about organisations such as the Scottish Refugee Council and the need to ensure that people who are the most marginalised have a voice, but this committee is about scrutiny and accountability. Today's session is about accountability, and you cannot delegate accountability.

It has recently been reported that, since 2017, the SNP Government has given £20 million of handouts from the public purse—taxpayers' money—to third sector organisations that support self-identification. My question to the minister, and to the cabinet secretary, is: will Scottish ministers commit to working with Inspiring Scotland and other relevant parties to withdraw funding from groups that promote unlawful policies? Some of the policies that they are promoting are not only unsafe but unlawful.

Kaukab Stewart: We will continue to work with our partners in Inspiring Scotland, with whom we have a well-established relationship. In response to Tess White's question, on the budget that comes out of my portfolio and the equality and human rights fund, it might be helpful for you to be aware that 31 per cent of my total budget is spent on disability organisations and supporting people with disabilities. Twenty-two per cent of the budget is spent on advancing race equality and in the wider field. Twenty per cent of the budget is spent on women and girls. Fourteen per cent, which is the least amount, is spent on supporting organisations that work in the LGBTIQI arena. I hope that that gives you an indication of the proportions of the money that is spent.

Tess White: You have not answered the question. You said earlier that you will look at organisations that are not spending the money where you have directed that they spend the money, which is laudable and important, because it is taxpayers' money. On the £20 million, the question was: will you make sure that funding is withdrawn from organisations that are breaking the law? Will you ask Inspiring Scotland, which is your fund manager, to make sure that it does a stock check of those organisations that are breaking the law? That is the question.

Shona Robison: Organisations of any type will get funding only if they deliver what the funding is for. The minister has outlined that there is a difference between services being provided, such as suicide helplines, and the advocacy or policy position of any organisation. Numerous organisations may have policy positions that receive no funding but they provide a discrete and important practical support, such as a suicide prevention helpline. That is the distinction that the minister has made.

Every organisation is and should be subject to scrutiny by Inspiring Scotland and, in turn, by the Government to make sure that the funding that they are provided with goes on the services that they have said that the money is for, and that will continue.

Tess White: In the previous evidence session, we heard the Scottish Human Rights Commission talk about quality assurance. Will the Scottish Government—you are the cabinet secretary, and we have the minister here, too—ensure that there is quality assurance so that the organisations that you fund are not operating unlawfully? That is my final question.

Shona Robison: The quality assurance of making sure that any funding that goes to any organisation is spent on the services that it is supposed to provide will be done by the intermediaries that are paid to do that job, and that is what they will do. If an organisation is not spending the money on what it is supposed to spend it on, that would be relayed to ministers, and that is when ministers would become involved. That is how the process works.

Tess White: That is an answer to a different question from the one that I asked.

Shona Robison: That is the answer that I am giving you.

Tess White: I will pass back to the convener.

The Convener: Thank you.

That brings us to the close of this evidence session. I thank everyone for their participation; it has been valuable for the committee in undertaking our scrutiny of human rights budgeting. We have a lot of information to take away. I thank the cabinet secretary and the minister for giving your time to enable us to do our accountability work on the issue. We will be in touch with the committee's recommendations.

We now go into private to discuss the remaining items on our agenda.

12:09

Meeting continued in private until 12:53.

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Scottish Parliament
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Email: official.report@parliament.scot
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