

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee
Tuesday 9 September 2025
18th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2026-27 – evidence session with stakeholders and Ministers

Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide information to help inform the Committee's pre-budget evidence session with a panel of long-term stakeholders and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government and the Minister for Equalities.
2. At this meeting, the Committee will take evidence from long-term stakeholders in a roundtable format followed by the Cabinet Secretary and Minister—

Roundtable

- Professor Angela O'Hagan, Chair, Scottish Human Rights Commission;
- Emma Congreve, Principal Knowledge Exchange Fellow, University of Strathclyde attending on behalf of the Fraser of Allander Institute and on behalf of the Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group (EHRBAG);
- Sara Cowan, Director, Scottish Women's Budget Group;
- Allan Faulds, Senior Policy Officer, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)

Evidence with the Minister and Cabinet Secretary

- Shona Robison MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government
- Kaukab Stewart MSP, Minister for Equalities
- Rob Priestley, Head of Mainstreaming Unit
- Alasdair Black, Deputy Director – Budget and Fiscal Coordination, Scottish Exchequer

Background information

3. This is the third and final year of the Committee's agreed focus on human rights budgeting, and the final budget of Session 6, and accordingly the focus will be on accountability and consolidating the Committee's scrutiny over the session. This follows on from the Committee exploring participation (in 2023, for pre-budget 2024-25 scrutiny), and transparency (in 2024, for pre-budget 2025-26 scrutiny).
4. As a reminder, the Committee's approach to pre-Budget Scrutiny this session is summarised below, based on the year in which the Committee's scrutiny took place.

5. [2021 \(for Budget 2022-23\)](#) – An introduction to human rights budgeting, with a focus on the anticipated incorporation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) into Scots law. A call for views was held, and three panels gave evidence before the Committee heard from the Cabinet Secretary.
6. [2022 \(for Budget 2023-24\)](#) – An in depth look at human rights budgeting and using principles of participation, transparency and accountability as a framework for scrutiny.
7. [2023 \(for Budget 2024-25\)](#) – The start of the Committee’s 3-year approach, exploring participation. This included a broad public survey aimed at understanding the way in which the public understand the budget and how it connects to their lives. This was followed up by deliberative work with the Whole Family Equality Project, during which the Committee took part in a facilitated workshop with citizens exploring the spending areas which impact most on human rights, using the lived experience of participants. The participants then went on to draft questions for the Minister, which the Committee asked after taking evidence from the participants to understand how questions were developed.
8. [2024 \(for Budget 2025-26\)](#) – Transparency was the agreed focus for this year. An initial public survey was run exploring the Scottish Government’s Capital spending plans through a human rights lens and was expected to inform evidence taking and further participation work. However, the UK election led to delays to the Programme for Government and uncertainty about the Committees work programme, resulting in a truncated scrutiny process.
9. The themes which have appeared in recommendations every year are:
 - The implementation of [the recommendations made by the Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group \(EHRBAG\)](#), which were set out in 2021 with the aspiration of the Scottish Government delivering on human rights budgeting.
 - Data gaps and data use, including disaggregation and the use of lived experience.
 - Transparency in budget documents, including accessibility and clear links between budget documents, the Programme for Government and the National Performance Framework.
 - The need for the Government to demonstrate how decisions are made, for example through the use of EQIAs and data in decision-making, measurable outcomes, and demonstrating where evidence has informed policy.
 - Mainstreaming of equalities across portfolios.
 - The participation of citizens in developing and evaluating policy in a meaningful way.

10. Issues around support for the third-sector in both its advocacy and delivery role, and gender budgeting, have also been a session-long interest, but have not featured in recommendations every year.
11. A common theme in Scottish Government responses has been to flag upcoming work, including anticipated legislation. In some cases, anticipated work and responses have come forward – this includes [the Government's responses to the EHRBAG recommendations](#) and the [National Advisory Council on Women and Girls](#), and the establishment of the [Equality and Data Improvement Programme](#). In others, the course of action anticipated to address concerns has been aborted or delayed long term. This includes the anticipated legislation on incorporating human rights into Scottish law, [which has been delayed until after the election](#), and the refresh of the National Outcomes, which was ultimately not implemented following [the Government's decision to conduct a wider review and relaunch of the NPF](#) (anticipated in the next Parliamentary session). Several programmes and projects have been referenced without further or recent update, and there are few references to the outcomes and successes of planned work used earlier in the session as evidence of Scottish Government action.
12. As a progression to the work carried out in 2023 with the Whole Family Equality Project (WFEP), the Committee held a workshop on 2 September this year with members of that Project who have gone on to establish [the Commission Advocating Rights for Minorities \(CARM\)](#). The purpose of the session was to provide a collaborative opportunity to:
- Reflect on the long-term impact of the participation work with WFEP.
 - Explore what demonstrating accountability against human rights obligations looks like in the Budget.
 - Test a new participation approach by examining a case study together and collaborating on conclusions.
 - Use minimum core responsibilities as a scrutiny tool.
 - Feed into the committee's consolidation and reflection of using human rights as a budget scrutiny approach - has it helped in holding the Government accountable?
13. The workshop provided three main areas of output – a shared understanding of what both success and accountability look like, an evaluation of the impact of the 2023 work, and conclusions and recommendations following collaborative exploration of the Employability case study used in last years' equality and fairer Scotland statement (EFSBS). The Committee will be reflecting on these areas during both evidence sessions.

Next steps

14. It is expected that the Committee will publish a report setting out its conclusions and recommendations next month.

Conclusion

15. The Committee is invited to consider the above information in its evidence sessions with both panels of witnesses.

Clerks to the Committee
September 2025