

Minister for Equalities
Kaukab Stewart MSP



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Karen Adam MSP
Convener
Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice
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Dear Convenor,

I am writing to you to provide an update on the Scottish Government's progress against the action plan created in response to the Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group (EHRBAG) Recommendations.

Background

In 2021, the EHRBAG provided a set of 31 recommendations for Government to consider. The recommendations called upon the Scottish Government to undertake improvements to:

- The budget development process;
- Communications – internal and external;
- Organisation and Culture; and
- Knowledge and Understanding, increasing the competence of SG officials.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the previous Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees replied in September 2023, agreeing in principle to the recommendations and committed to developing an action plan in collaboration with the Group to ensure we continue progressing our goals in Equality and Human Rights budgeting.

Based on these 31 recommendations and working with EHRBAG members, officials developed an action plan in late 2023. From 2024 officials began working to implement and report on these 22 actions. Progress was reported to the EHRBAG in May and September 2024. Out of the 22 actions, 9 have been completed and 12 are

in progress, with one yet to get underway as it is contingent upon the completion of another action.

Governance and Monitoring

Formal updates on progress against the action plan are reported bi-annually to the EHRBAG. Scottish Government Directors responsible for action delivery attend the EHRBAG meetings where action plan reporting takes place, to enable effective scrutiny and accountability.

Update and Progress

We are pleased that nine of the actions have already been achieved, with 12 in progress. Completed actions include:

- Agree in partnership with EHRBAG an approach to the 2024-25 EFSBS and wider framework for equality budgeting.
- Undertake a structured review of the 2024-25 EFSBS and discuss the findings with EHRBAG with a view to identifying and agreeing improvements for the 2025-26 process.
- As part of the 2024-25 EFSBS review the success of the PfG and Budget guidance and identify and implement improvements.
- Take forward a more integrated approach to the equality analysis of PfG and Budget, which will be discussed with EHRBAG.
- Establishing a senior leadership group which will scrutinise and bring challenge to the Scottish Government's strategic approach to embedding equality and human rights and enabling cultural change.
- Engaging the Senior Leadership Group on improvements to the system of strategic Scottish Government budget publications, with a session focused on equality budgeting with Professor Angela O'Hagan as guest speaker.
- Developing a programme plan that enables continued scrutiny of progress of the EHRBAG Recommendations, which was achieved through the creation and monitoring of the action plan.
- Publishing an Easy Read version of the Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement.
- Working with the Scottish Human Rights Commission on an update to the Open Budget Survey based on financial year 2021-2022.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government and I attended the EHRBAG meeting on 10 October 2024. We described cross-governmental collaborative working, our priorities for the 2025/26 budget and how we were working collaboratively to embed equality and human rights throughout our processes. We strongly value the advice and expertise of the EHRBAG, and look forward to continuing to engage with them as we further improve our processes.

We welcome the Committee's interest in this work, and are happy to take any questions you might have.

Kaukab Stewart
Minister for Equalities

Shona Robison
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local
Government