



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Finance and Public Administration Committee

Shona Robison MSP
Deputy First Minister and
Cabinet Secretary for Finance

By email

All correspondence c/o:
Finance and Public
Administration Committee Clerks
Room T3.60
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Tel: 0131 348 5219
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
FPA.committee@parliament.scot

21 September 2023

Dear Shona

As you are aware, the Finance and Public Administration Committee has an ongoing interest in enhancing the transparency of budgetary and fiscal information in order to better support effective Parliamentary scrutiny and accountability.

The Committee therefore welcomes the Scottish Government's recent developments which seek to provide greater transparency and enhance scrutiny, including publication of additional explanatory information with annual budget revisions and analysis of budgetary information by Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG) to enable comparison of data based on OECD standards. We also note the progress made in developing a fiscal transparency portal as part of the Scottish Government's Open Government Action Plan 2021-2025.

Further to an offer made by the Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance, the Committee was pleased to discuss with Scottish Government officials on 31 August how the transparency of budget documentation provided to the Committee can be further improved, including the types of information that might be useful to include in future Guides to budget revisions.

In follow-up to this discussion, the Committee now asks you to consider and respond to the following proposals:

- Whether there is scope to provide greater explanation in the Guide to budget revisions to promote greater understanding on the reasons why decisions involving significant spend have been taken by the Scottish Government. This could include the reasons why certain amounts have been ‘written-off’, why capital projects have slipped, and why the same transfers between portfolios take place in year annually rather than the portfolios being adjusted at the start of the year.
- Publication of the Guides to budget revisions in a more prominent section of the Scottish Government’s website.
- Adopting a similar approach to that of the UK Government in presenting alongside the Scottish Budget 2024-25 (1) what has actually been spent in each area in 2022-23, (2) what the Scottish Government expects to spend in each area in 2023-24, and (3) what the planned spending is for each area in 2024-25. This same comparative approach can then be followed in subsequent years.
- How changes to multi-year spending plans can be presented in budget documentation to enable organisations to better plan their spending, and support Parliament to scrutinise these changes effectively year-on-year.
- Ways of presenting the reserve balance and allocation plans in a more transparent and understandable manner.
- How greater transparency can be achieved in relation to the level of resource funds that might be available for allocation during the Budget process, rather than “finding new money” at Stage 3 of the process.
- When the remaining barriers to producing whole of government accounts, which was committed to in 2018, will be addressed.

I look forward to receiving an update on how the Scottish Government’s is considering these issues by 19 October 2023.

Yours sincerely

Kenneth Gibson MSP
Convener
Finance and Public Administration Committee