



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

Tuesday 27 February 2024

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Tuesday 27 February 2024

CONTENTS

	Col.
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
BUDGET SCRUTINY 2024-25	2

EQUALITIES, HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
6th Meeting 2024, Session 6

CONVENER

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

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

*Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab)

*Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Jamie MacDougall (Scottish Government)

Rob Priestley (Scottish Government)

Emma Roddick (Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees)

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

Tuesday 27 February 2024

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:45]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Karen Adam): Good morning and welcome to the sixth meeting in 2024 of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee. We have received no apologies.

Our first agenda item is to decide whether to take in private item 3, which is consideration of today's budget evidence. Do members agree to take that item in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Budget Scrutiny 2024-25

09:45

The Convener: Our second agenda item is the final of our budget scrutiny evidence sessions. I refer members to committee papers 1 and 2.

I welcome to the meeting Emma Roddick, the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees. The minister is accompanied by Scottish Government officials Rob Priestley, who is the head of the mainstreaming unit, and Jamie MacDougall, who is the deputy director of budget, pay and pensions. Good morning to you all.

I invite the minister to provide an opening statement before we move to questions from the committee.

The Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees (Emma Roddick): Thank you very much, convener. I congratulate you on your appointment as convener of the committee. I look forward to working with you and to your leading the scrutiny of work across my portfolio.

First of all, I want to emphasise the positive spend and the commitment to delivering equality and fairness in the budget. I point to the increased spend on the Scottish child payment, the reopening of the independent living fund, and the increase in the equality, inclusion and human rights budget.

We are committed to improving participation in the budget process, and we know that it is important to make sure that every consideration that should be taken is taken and that people can feel that the budget is relevant to them. It was very insightful to hear the committee's previous budget scrutiny session. I was pleased to note the continued improvement that is reported every year in this area of work. There was shared recognition on the part of those who provided evidence of the significant changes that we made to the internal process for the budget last year. Those changes included our new case-study approach for the "Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement 2024-25" and the first ministerial workshop, which looked specifically at that statement.

We acknowledge that there is still a lot of work to do, but I want to remain mindful of the considerable progress that is being made along the way. We are providing accessible and inclusive forms of communication and documentation to support public understanding of the budget. I appreciate fully that more work needs to be done to increase public engagement in the budget and to support better understanding, and I know that the committee is also keen to ensure that.

The financial year is extremely challenging—it is the most challenging environment for a budget since devolution. On top of United Kingdom Government underinvestment for more than a decade, our Barnett funding, which is driven by UK Government spending choices, has fallen by 1.2 per cent in real terms since the 2022-23 budget was presented.

Because the UK Government did not inflation proof its capital budget, that has resulted in a real-terms fall of nearly 10 per cent in our capital funding over the medium term. UK Government decisions such as that to prioritise national insurance cuts rather than public service investment have made it difficult for us to deliver a budget that reflects our priorities, but that is what we have done. We have taken every opportunity that we have had to mitigate the worst impacts of those cuts.

We have invested in public services, we have put money where it will have the greatest impact on the delivery of our priorities of equality, opportunity and community, and we have put money directly into the pockets of those who are experiencing poverty. We have put money into the realisation of, and the upholding and protecting of, human rights, which is in stark contrast to the £240 million that the UK Government has spent down south on its policy of deportation to Rwanda and the further £50 million that it has already committed to doing the opposite and allowing human rights breaches.

We have funded human rights and tackling poverty regardless of who is responsible for the difficult situations that many people find themselves in. For example, we are looking at how we will spend money that is allocated to refugee integration in the light of the Illegal Migration Act 2023 and its potential impacts. We know that many people who are benefiting from our social security programme have had to turn to that programme only because of the cost of living crisis, which has been pushed on Scotland and the rest of the UK by economic mismanagement elsewhere.

Our approach to considering equalities in the budget has involved extensive engagement with experts and our stakeholders. We published our response to the equality and human rights budget advisory group, and I will join the group to discuss that further on Thursday. I was the first minister to attend a meeting of the group, and I plan to continue that engagement throughout the year. The Deputy First Minister will also join me at a meeting of the group later in the year.

I hope that the fact that improvements were made during the budget process has been evident to the committee through the equality and fairer Scotland budget statement. Alongside changes to

the document itself, we held a ministerial workshop with a case-study approach, which involved challenging ministers across Government to show their working on decisions that they had used equalities and human rights budgeting to achieve.

We want to ensure that the wider mainstreaming agenda is reflected in everything that we do, and that the impact of the mainstreaming strategy, the public sector equality duty improvement activity and our forthcoming human rights bill can be seen throughout Government processes. I work closely with colleagues across Government to advance equality and the progressive realisation of rights for people in Scotland, thereby ensuring that that is a priority that can be seen in every portfolio.

I look forward to taking questions on the budget.

The Convener: Thank you, minister. I welcome your statement.

I will kick off the questions. First, I want to look at the level 4 figures. Could you explain why the equalities budget has fallen and the human rights budget has increased?

Emma Roddick: The increase in the human rights budget is a reflection of the activity that we are doing to invest in the progressive realisation of human rights. The 2 per cent change in the equalities budget is due to project delivery review—that is, things coming to an end and the timings of the delivery of particular projects being slightly different from what we had anticipated.

The Convener: There was no explanation of the fact that the connecting communities funding had been integrated into mainstreaming and inclusion. Why was that done?

Emma Roddick: Connecting communities is not a budget line that I have information on.

Rob Priestley (Scottish Government): Some of that reflects a restructuring of the directorate where that funding sits, rather than actual changes in lines. It is simply an adjustment. That mainstreaming and inclusion line includes teams that were previously highlighted as connecting communities.

The Convener: Will you talk us through the decision-making process that is used to set the equalities and human rights budget?

Emma Roddick: Much of it is designed in partnership. The convener will be aware that many of the recipients of funding in the equalities and inclusion and human rights budget line are long-term partners with whom we have developed good relationships and who can evidence that they are able to support us in delivering on our equality and community opportunities. Much of that budget is reactive to changing inequalities. The committee

will be able to see in the budget line the over-time reactions to groups that have been under threat or that have particularly been able to highlight that they are the victims of systemic inequality.

Within the human rights and equalities lines, the committee will be able to see the strong partnerships that have been developed over time.

The Convener: We move on to questions from Meghan Gallacher.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): Good morning. I will focus on the equality impacts on the back of the budget.

The Scottish Government has chosen to cut council budgets year on year, which has undoubtedly had impacts on areas of the equality portfolio. Examples of that include the threats that we have heard about of potential closures of leisure and sports facilities, as well as budget cuts to our school learning environment. Although those decisions were taken outwith your portfolio area, they will have severe consequences across your brief.

Were you consulted on any of those decisions before they were made? Did you have contact with your ministerial colleagues regarding those budget cuts?

Emma Roddick: I have lots of engagement with ministerial colleagues, as I outlined in my opening statement, but individual decisions for ministers are still decisions for them to make.

The objective of mainstreaming, and of the work that I am doing on equalities and mainstreaming to ensure that equalities and human rights budgeting is taken into consideration across Government, is that other ministers will be able to apply the same thinking and process to their decision making. In the same way that the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee would not scrutinise every piece of policy and legislation in the Scottish Parliament, it is about everyone being able to take the equalities and human rights lens and apply it to their own work.

Meghan Gallacher: To be absolutely clear, you have not been involved in discussions on issues such as education and skills and council tax with your ministerial colleagues.

Emma Roddick: Those matters would be for education and finance colleagues to take decisions on.

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): Good morning. I am interested in a similar theme—that of assessing the impact that budgetary decisions have with regard to equalities and human rights. When I asked the question of other ministers at other committees, I discovered that there was no

consistency around the use of equality impact assessments.

I will start with the broader equality and fairer Scotland budget statement, and I will then come on to discuss equality impact assessments. The equality and fairer Scotland budget statement was offered by other ministers as an indication that the entire budget and its impact was being looked at in the round, but it is fair to say that there are inconsistencies in how different portfolios have provided detail on that.

I am interested to know what guidance is given to ministers on how they complete that work. What is your view? Do you feel that you have a role, as the minister with responsibility for equalities, to support your colleagues to give as full a picture as possible?

Emma Roddick: A very clear expectation has been set that ministers—regardless of portfolio—should have a focus on tackling inequality. I doubt that there is a single minister who is unaware that the First Minister expects us to think about inequalities when we take all decisions, and to ensure, throughout our work, that our efforts to reduce inequality are evident. That instruction has been very clear, and the target of ending poverty and reducing inequality is absolutely clear to everyone.

As for my having a role, that is absolutely the case, and I hope that you can take reassurance from the fact that we are now in the week of stage 3 of this year’s budget, and I am already meeting the equality and human rights budget advisory group to talk about next year’s process and how we can improve things.

Of course, I appreciate that this year’s budget process has been the first one that I have been directly involved in, so I am not able to make a comparison with previous years; all I know is what we could have done differently this time. I have made it clear that I am willing to listen to the budget advisory group and to evidence that is given to this and other committees to ensure that we are continually progressing and improving.

Paul O’Kane: I appreciate what you have said about the aspiration of Government. However, we can evidence some inconsistencies. Do you feel that a better, standardised format should be given to ministers to ensure that everyone reports in the same way, or do you feel that it is up to individual ministers to make their own interpretations?

Emma Roddick: I think there has to be some leeway, and I accept that decisions are made in different portfolios for lots of different reasons. This year, I will look at examples that have worked from last year’s ministerial workshop. I will use the best examples of ministers applying equalities and human rights budgeting, which I will share with

other ministers in order to set the expectation for this year. For example, it is my plan to continue with the workshop idea, but to have it much earlier in the process, while being clear with ministers about what was received well in the previous process and what was perhaps not as helpful.

10:00

Paul O’Kane: Okay. On the point about individual equality impact assessments and their use as a tool, there have been calls from organisations relating to individual budgetary decisions. Many organisations have said that the decision on the reduction in the housing capital budget should have been subject to an equality impact assessment. I put that to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, who pointed to the broader piece of work that we have just discussed. However, organisations feel that the ramifications and the understanding of the impact that that cut will have are such that it should have been subject to an equality impact assessment. Is it your view that there should be individual equality impact assessments on specific decisions?

Emma Roddick: That is the point of them. I hope that ministers who maybe do not have as much of an idea of when to apply assessments will, as we develop a better in-the-round process for the budget, take the opportunity to ensure that they are familiar with that need and that they know when to look further at what the impacts would be on particular groups of decisions that are being recommended by others or, in the case of housing, what we are having to do due to extreme financial difficulties.

I refer back to my opening statement. We are in a very difficult position. A 10 per cent cut to medium-term capital spend is a huge thing that we cannot simply absorb without anybody being impacted.

I would not say that equalities and human rights budgeting is about never making cuts. It is about making sure that cuts are proportionate, that there is a reason for them and that all the spend is directed towards the progressive realisation of rights, and I think that that is what we have done.

Paul O’Kane: Can I infer from that answer that your view is that the decision on the 27 per cent reduction in housing spend should have been subject to an equality impact assessment and that that would perhaps have meant that there would have been more rounded consideration of that decision?

Emma Roddick: I am not familiar enough with that decision to know whether an EQIA would have been helpful. I certainly doubt that it could have made a difference to the outcome, given the financial situation that we are in. Everybody wants

to support people who face housing issues. It is a question of ensuring that cuts are reasonable, proportionate, time limited and necessary things that we have to do, and are not harmful to human rights.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Good morning, minister. Part of your job is to challenge ministers to ensure that equalities and human rights are embedded in everything that they do. You have talked about the workshops that have taken place. I know that there are many other fora in which those issues come to the fore. How do you feel about where we are at in respect of mainstreaming equalities and human rights in all that the Government does?

Emma Roddick: That is a big question. I feel that we are at a very good point in relation to mainstreaming in general, because we have reached a stage at which there is general acceptance across Government that mainstreaming is the right thing to do and is beneficial to good decision making in every single portfolio, but it is not a given. There is a real opportunity in our being at a point at which everyone agrees that progress is a good thing and that mainstreaming is the right way to go about it. It has much potential, so I am happy with where we are.

I am excited about the improvements that are being made to the public sector equality duty and about the consultation that we will do on our mainstreaming strategy, because they will have an impact on absolutely everything: they will have an impact on how we engage with members of the public and how we offer opportunities to them and to stakeholders to feed into the process, and they will change the way that all ministers make decisions, by default. I think that the broader culture change will be as impactful as individual policy changes will be.

Kevin Stewart: Often, in the past—not only in the Scottish Parliament but in councils—equalities and human rights have been seen as add-ons to any report or any decision making that was taking place. Often, and especially when I was a council member, I was told that those things were rather costly. That was probably your experience too, minister.

Would you say that mainstreaming has saved money by getting those things right? Has it also saved money in whole-budget terms? We are taking account of the impacts of budget decisions on equalities and human rights.

Emma Roddick: It is hard to prove the impact of spend-to-save processes, but inequalities drive public spending—whether that is spending on social security, on health, on education or on criminal justice. People who are subjected to the

worst barriers to accessing human rights and the worst inequality are more likely to have to use those public services. Therefore, putting money into making sure that services are designed with them in mind, and that public services are flexible enough to react to people, regardless of their background or protected characteristics, will undoubtedly save money, and it will save a lot of hassle and, potentially, trauma for people who are trying to access those services. I have no doubt about that.

On equalities being an add-on, that is the attitude that all the work on mainstreaming is seeking to challenge. That attitude absolutely still exists in many minds in public life, but as I said in my previous answer, we need culture change. We need not only a mainstreaming strategy; we also need people to think about equalities and about the impacts on individual groups of people who are subjected to inequality when they make decisions about where to prioritise spending.

Kevin Stewart: Has the Scottish Government carried out enough equality and human rights impact assessments of the cuts to budgets that have been imposed on us by the UK Treasury?

Emma Roddick: That is a fair question, and there is probably quite a lot that we could look into on that topic.

We feel the impact of cuts by the UK Government on protected groups in Scotland every day, and every day there is a need for us to put more of our budget into social security—the Scottish child payment and into other such schemes that are, as I mentioned, being accessed by people who require to do so only because of the direct impact of UK cuts. I would, therefore, be very interested to see such impact assessments.

The Scottish Government needs to check its own work first: that has to be our priority. However, I will always highlight why we are in this situation and why people are so reliant on our budget spend.

Kevin Stewart: Maybe you could bring that back to the committee, because I am interested in seeing an assessment of what damage the cuts from the UK Treasury have done.

Minister, as you well know, I am very interested in ensuring that the voices of people with lived experience are at the heart of policy making. When that happens we are much better at taking account of equalities and human rights impacts. I know that it is sometimes difficult to allow for that because of one-year budgeting and because the Government is unaware of the amount of block grant until very late on—if an indication is given—but how do you feel about listening to the voices of people with lived experience when it comes to budget making? I am not talking about the large

stakeholders; I am talking about the input of the average Joe and Josephine.

Emma Roddick: I would encourage engagement with lived experience throughout the year, at all stages of any process within Government, because it is absolutely correct to say that lived experience is valuable and should be considered when we are making decisions that impact on people's lives.

You said earlier that my job involves speaking to other ministers and supporting and pushing them to consider equalities and human rights. Part of that has involved ensuring that the lived experience of groups that fall within my portfolio—such as disabled people, older people or people who experience racism—have direct access to other ministers. It should not be the case that those people always see the equalities minister—they also have issues with health, transport and education. I have been facilitating that contact. One example is that I have been ensuring that the voices that feed into the immediate priorities plan for disabled people are able to engage directly with other ministers.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I have a quick question that follows on from Kevin Stewart's and Paul O'Kane's questions.

We are talking about equalities, inequalities and human rights. What conversations has the minister had with Angela Constance, who was previously the Minister for Drugs Policy and is now a cabinet secretary, about the availability of rehabilitation for people who are addicted to drugs and alcohol?

Emma Roddick: I do not recollect any current work in the portfolio that would involve those conversations, but if there is a particular need for input regarding mainstreaming or equalities and human rights budgeting, I am more than happy to have conversations with ministers.

Annie Wells: It is important that we look at all the areas in which people feel disadvantaged or in which their voices are not heard. I appreciate that offer and would like to have more conversations with you about the issue.

The substantive part of my question is about the accessibility of, and participation in, the budget process. Why was the easy-read version of "Scottish Budget 2024 to 2025: Your Scotland, Your Finances—a guide" not published at the same time as the standard version of the budget documents?

Emma Roddick: In order to fully answer the previous question, I point to the fact that the objective of mainstreaming is that people should apply equalities and human rights budgeting to their own portfolios. It is not for me to make decisions for other ministers, although I am more

than happy to have conversations about mainstreaming, about the “Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement 2024-25” and about how best to prepare for that throughout the year to ensure that equalities and human rights are visible throughout the process.

I will hand over to Rob Priestley to talk about “Your Scotland, Your Finances”.

Rob Priestley: I have two points to make. “Your Scotland, Your Finances” is a condensed and simplified version of the current budget. A number of improvements have been made in it—in particular, to align it with international best-practice principles of citizens budgeting,

The document that we are waiting to publish is the easy-read version of the “Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement 2024-25”, which will be published this week, possibly today. That has been delayed because it is the first time we have published an easy-read version of the equality and fairer Scotland budget statement. I am aware of previous committee discussions about how much information should be contained in that statement and that some people have said that too much information has been provided. One of our key discussions has been about how far the easy-read version should go in explaining the content—annex B is more than 150 pages long.

What we learn from this year’s EFSBS will inform better practice next year about publication timings. It is not ideal that we have not published at the same time. We have the two things going on at the same time—“Your Scotland, Your Finances” and an easy-read version of EFSBS.

10:15

Annie Wells: Thank you very much for that answer, Rob.

Minister, what can you do to help citizens understand better how the Scottish Government’s spending and taxation plans will impact on their communities?

Emma Roddick: We are doing the work on the EFSBS exactly for that reason. I am hopeful about the changes that we have been making. Since the statement was introduced, the content has not been the same every year because we are taking on board feedback and reacting to the input of the budget advisory group and people who have, over the years, given evidence to this committee and the Social Justice and Social Security Committee on what they would find more helpful.

It is a constantly evolving piece of work, but its objective is exactly as was just described: it is to help people to understand the impact on them of budget decisions, and to bring politics and the

decisions that we make in the Parliament closer to the lived reality of people everywhere in Scotland.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Thank you, minister, for being with us this morning. I welcome you and your officials.

I have some questions on accountability for equalities and human rights. In some ways, they follow on from Kevin Stewart’s questions and points that he picked up. They are about how we understand the impact of decisions on people who use services, whether or not they are vulnerable and marginalised.

One of the questions for us is how we track analysis of impact from previous decisions into future decisions. Will you say a little bit about what we need to do to better understand impacts from past decisions before we even begin to think about future decisions?

Emma Roddick: I will follow on from a previous answer. What we are doing is the right thing to do. Reviewing the budget and asking ministers to report why they made decisions and how they used equality and human rights budgeting is the right thing to do. The question is how effective it has been and whether we are going far enough or doing it effectively enough each year.

The fact that we are being so reactive and changing the process, the documents that we put out and the format and type of information—in addition to, as I said to Paul O’Kane, considering a ministerial workshop and other points that we have for showing our work and scrutinising each other as well as our own decisions—will strengthen the process year on year. We were never going to get it right and be perfect in the first year because we are tackling ingrained, systemic inequalities and changing attitudes in a very large institution and a representative body. That is a hard thing to do, but we are making improvements every year.

I would focus on that. Yes, we need to improve, but we are doing the right thing.

Maggie Chapman: I appreciate that we are at the beginning of the process and that, although we have done a lot of mainstreaming, there is still a lot of work to do. However, one of the challenges is that, when we look at what is happening in communities and neighbourhoods around Scotland, we see rising inequality and more people being threatened with exploitation at work and modern slavery-type situations. Are we on the way to following the pound—to better understanding that a particular investment will mean that someone does not fall into modern slavery? Do we have mechanisms for tracking such specific impacts?

Emma Roddick: Equality impact assessments and the work that went into producing the “Equality

and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement 2024-25" have allowed us to track Scottish spend. However, as Kevin Stewart pointed out, much of the growing inequality is impacted, or even driven, by decisions that are not made in the Scottish Parliament. It is difficult to track how our spend balances against cuts that are made by a different Government, because the two institutions have separate reporting mechanisms and different reasons for making decisions.

I will look at whether we can do more in relation to tracking. We have information from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and other organisations that look at the impact of UK decisions on Scotland. We are trying to be more alive to that. I point to the debate that I took part in last year with Christina McKelvie, the then Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development, in which we looked specifically at the impact on Scotland of UK decisions on asylum and immigration and at how such decisions affect where we need to spend our budget. There is tie-in, but it is far more difficult to track spending by the two Governments when the decisions that have been made are so opposed.

Maggie Chapman: I appreciate that. It is worth saying that, if it was easy to track the impact of spending, we would have been doing it by now. I appreciate that the process is not easy.

However, I sometimes wonder whether we look at equality and human rights accountability from the wrong end of the telescope. Last week, there was an interesting discussion in the Scottish Parliament on different strategies for tackling poverty. Somebody posed this question: what if our starting point in every budget was to look at everything through the lens of eliminating or reducing child poverty? If the starting point for everyone, whether it is the Cabinet Secretary for Transport or the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy, is that every decision that is made needs to address child poverty and other such issues, we will start to get very different types of decisions.

Over the coming year—in some ways, next year's budget process starts now, as we conclude this year's budget process—will there be space for those conversations, not only with your Government colleagues but with external stakeholders who have routes into understanding the impacts and who have experience of assessing every decision that they make through a rights-based lens, because this is about rights realisation? What are your thoughts on that?

Emma Roddick: Absolutely. I am already feeding into next year's budget process. I already have written notes on things that I felt went well and things that did not. As I said, I will meet the equality and human rights budget advisory group again this week. We will probably talk about how

the budget process has gone, but we always look forward and think about what we could do better next time and what needs to change, because that is why we are all here.

The First Minister has challenged all his ministers to think about how every decision will reduce child poverty. When we make spending decisions, we have to think about the impact on tackling poverty, reducing inequality, creating a wellbeing economy and providing growth that does not contribute to further inequalities. There is a challenge. Last year, for example, we looked at the impact of Scottish Government spending specifically to reduce child poverty, such as the Scottish child payment and other schemes. The information that we got is that child poverty is increasing at a slower rate in Scotland than in the UK.

That brings us back to mitigation. It is difficult to be positive and optimistic about a budget that is so focused on mitigation, instead of thinking about how much more of an impact those measures would have on our goal of tackling child poverty if we had control over the whole lot and were not reacting to cuts in other places.

Maggie Chapman: I understand that. I appreciate your openness towards considering how we can get better at this, because everybody would probably agree that nobody does this right. We are trying to do something quite important in Scotland in focusing on rights realisation through our budget.

My final question is linked to what you have said in reference to the Scottish child payment and tackling child poverty. How confident are you that gendered inequalities and inequalities related to other protected characteristics are being considered by the Government and the strategic leadership team in ways that look at more than just economic poverty and inequality? Are we asking each other the right questions? Have we got the right information? Are we collecting the right kind of data to understand poverty that is more than economic?

Emma Roddick: Yes, I think that we are. There are opportunities for improving that in the review of the public sector equality duty and, importantly, in the conversations around and the introduction of the human rights bill, which will bring into Scots law not only economic but social and cultural rights and the right to a healthy environment. Having those conversations even before the bill's introduction will undoubtedly have an impact on the culture of considering human rights and equality throughout Government and—I certainly hope—throughout the whole public sector. There will be work to be done to ensure that all duty bearers are aware of the duties that we are putting on them.

Once, as I hope, the bill passes, subject to the Parliament's approval, we will see change on the ground for people in terms of their being aware of their economic, social and cultural human rights and their being able to challenge when those rights are not being realised.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Good morning to the minister and her officials.

I have a brief question, because, although the session has been short, it has been pretty full, and the minister has given detailed answers. My question is on an area that other members, particularly Kevin Stewart, have asked about, which is how the Government ensures that it captures the views of people with lived experience when making budget decisions. Will the minister elaborate a wee bit on how that is done and put it into the context of the work of the committee?

I know that the minister takes a great interest in the work of the committee and always has done, probably even prior to her appointment as a minister. She will be aware of the experience panels that the committee has engaged in and what we feel has been their success. When looking at budgets, does the Scottish Government take into account the work of the committee in engaging with people with lived experience?

Emma Roddick: Absolutely. That is why I talked a little bit in my opening statement about the work that the committee is doing to bring people with lived experience into the process of scrutiny. It is important that ministers speak with people with lived experience throughout the year, get feedback on policies that we introduce and listen to individuals and communities through consultation processes and by speaking face to face.

My portfolio is very people heavy. I speak to people every day because, with equality issues, we must, by default, think about people when making decisions. My challenge, and that of everybody who works on mainstreaming, is to ensure that other ministers feel that need as well, and that, throughout the year, their diaries and engagement processes on their bills and on the strategies that they are producing force them to speak to individuals who are directly impacted by the things that they are doing.

The committee's use of citizens panels—specifically, when you are using them as a way of finding questions to put to ministers—is very helpful, because that does the same thing. That is not part of the process of Government—it is not what I am working on and trying to work into every minister's routine—but it has the same outcome: people are more engaged with the process, and you can see the impact that people's lived

experience and the things that they are saying in evidence is having on what the Government is doing.

The Convener: Two members have indicated that they would like to come in with questions. We will go to Annie Wells first, then Kevin Stewart.

Annie Wells: I have one quick question. When I was elected to the Scottish Parliament in 2016, I was a member of the then Equalities and Human Rights Committee, which I sat on for about four years. We heard that equality impact assessments were a tick-box exercise. Have things changed over the past eight years, or is more work still to be done to ensure that equality impact assessments are carried out correctly?

Emma Roddick: We recognise that more work is to be done across the board on equality and mainstreaming, and I have been pretty open about that throughout the whole session. However, if, for example, the equality and human rights budget advisory group tells us that it cannot see our workings out or how we have reached a decision, we take that on board.

I am trying to target that approach. Throughout the coming year, in the run-up to the next budget process, I will be working hard to ensure that we are reacting to such feedback. I want to ensure that ministers are, by the next budget process, able to explain fully—as many are able to now in regard to decisions that have been taken in this budget—and more widely how they came to decisions and how they engaged equality impact assessments, equality and human rights budgeting and all the other considerations that can help them to make a better, well-rounded decision that completely takes into consideration the impact on those with protected characteristics in particular.

The Convener: We now go to Kevin Stewart.

Kevin Stewart: Thank you very much, convener, for allowing me to come back in. The minister said earlier that she looks at everything through an equality lens—I do not think that anyone could doubt that.

Today, we have had lines of questioning about what the minister would do if she was compiling a budget from scratch. Does she see a bigger role in future for priority-based budgeting, not only in her portfolio but across Government, to ensure that those priorities are at the very forefront of budget work?

Emma Roddick: I do not pretend that the systems and policies that are in place are the problem. Even if we started entirely from scratch, we would still be dealing with what needs to change: people's attitudes and habits. With mainstreaming, we are trying to make it a habit to

think about equality and about impacts on groups and on human rights-progressive realisation. That takes time and it takes work.

We could start from scratch, but we would still have to do all that work to change attitudes and the wider system. However, what we are learning right now through feedback from the advisory group and through scrutiny by this committee and the Social Justice and Social Security Committee in particular on equality and human rights budgeting will be very helpful. The lessons that we can take from the likes of the Covid inquiry will also be important, because we must ensure that our processes are resilient enough to enable us to spend on priorities when reacting to emergencies and, in the case of this budget, when reacting to significant cuts by the UK Government and a very challenging financial situation overall.

The Convener: As there is no indication that anyone else wants to come in, that concludes our formal business this morning. I thank the minister and her officials for their attendance.

We now move into private session to consider the remaining items on our agenda.

10:35

Meeting continued in private until 11:30.

This is a draft *Official Report* and is subject to correction between publication and archiving, which will take place no later than 35 working days after the date of the meeting. The most up-to-date version is available here:
www.parliament.scot/officialreport

Members and other meeting participants who wish to suggest corrections to their contributions should contact the Official Report.

Official Report
Room T2.20
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Email: official.report@parliament.scot
Telephone: 0131 348 5447
Fax: 0131 348 5423

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Wednesday 27 March 2024

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot

