

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

18th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Tuesday, 26 September 2023

Note by the Clerk

Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2024-25

Background

1. All Committees now undertake pre-budget scrutiny of the Scottish Government's draft budget which is subsequently published later in the calendar year. The purpose of pre-budget scrutiny is for Committees to produce, report and provide comment to the Scottish Government with the aim of influencing the budget when priorities are set.
2. A key feature of the full year approach to scrutiny involves each Committee writing to their respective Minister with a pre-budget letter around six weeks prior to the publication of the budget.
3. The letter sets out the Committee's views on the delivery and funding of existing policy priorities, any proposed changes and how these should be funded. The Committee intends to publish its pre-budget letter in early November.

The Committee's Approach

4. Over the past two years, the Committee has built a solid understanding of human rights budgeting and a useful evidence base and examples of how the principles of human rights budgeting can support budget scrutiny. This reflects the Scottish Government's stated intentions of incorporating the UN Convention of Human Rights into Scots' Law.
5. At its meeting on 23 May, the Committee agreed its broad approach to pre-budget scrutiny for 2024/25 which will comprise a three-year plan to look at each principle of human rights budgeting in turn – participation in year 1, transparency in year 2 and accountability in year 3.
6. This year's pre-budget scrutiny will focus on participation. As part of that scrutiny and to run alongside formal scrutiny, the Committee agreed to explore the impact

of the budget from a lived experience perspective. One of the aims of the informal participation would be for participants to suggest questions that the Committee may wish to ask the Scottish Government on their behalf.

Call for views

7. The Committee issued a short call for views over summer recess with the aim of understanding how much the general public understand about the Scottish budget. The [Call for Views](#) ran from 4 July to 25 August.
8. The Call for Views focussed on finding out how much people know about the budget, finding out which areas of the budget people think affect them most and finding out how to involve the public more in the budget process so the Committee can get a better understanding of spending outcomes and lived experience.
9. Once the Call for Views closed, submissions were reviewed and a summary of responses published. [Published responses](#) are available on the Citizen Space platform and can also be accessed via the Committee's [website](#).

Oral evidence

10. On Tuesday 12 September, the Committee took part in a deliberative workshop session with a citizens panel of participants from the Whole Family Equality Project (WFEP) who are supported by Capital City Partnership. The session focussed on barriers to participation and what more the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament could do to improve this.
11. The workshop took the form of group discussions. The first discussion focused on how and when people should be able to participate in the budget process, and where the barriers lie. The second discussion focused on the policy areas highlighted in the Committee's survey work, and which areas may be where human rights aspirations are the hardest to meet. This was an opportunity for panel members to share their lived experiences and its importance in budget spending decisions such as health, social care, local government and education.
12. At its meeting on 26 September, Members will hold a formal evidence session to explore the core principles of gender budgeting and participation in the budget process. It will hear from:
 - Heather Williams, Training Lead, Scottish Women's Budget Group
 - Danny Boyle, Senior Parliamentary and Policy Officer, BEMIS
 - Allan Faulds, Senior Policy Officer, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)
 - Alexis Camble, Policy Manager and Mirren Kelly, Chief Officer, Local Government Finance COSLA

Next steps

13. At a further citizens panel meeting on 3 October the panel will reflect on their discussions and develop a set of questions for the Committee to ask the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees, Emma Roddick MSP.
14. On 24 October, the Committee will conclude its evidence taking on pre-budget when it takes formal evidence from panel members on their deliberation process and priorities, immediately before taking evidence from the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees.

Committee Clerks
September 2023

Annexes

The following documents are included for this meeting—

- [Annexe A](#) Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (“the ALLIANCE”) response to the Committee’s call for views
- [Annexe B](#) Scottish Women’s Budget Group response to the Committee’s call for views

ANNEXE A

Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (“the ALLIANCE”) response to the Committee’s call for views

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) is the national third sector intermediary for health and social care, bringing together a diverse range of people and organisations who share our vision, which is a Scotland where everyone has a strong voice and enjoys their right to live well with dignity and respect.

We are a strategic partner of the Scottish Government and have close working relationships with many NHS Boards, academic institutions and key organisations spanning health, social care, housing and digital technology. Our purpose is to improve the wellbeing of people and communities across Scotland.

We bring together the expertise of people with lived experience, the third sector, and organisations across health and social care to inform policy, practice and service delivery. Together our voice is stronger and we use it to make meaningful change at the local and national level.

The ALLIANCE has a strong and diverse membership of over 3,300 organisations and individuals. Our broad range of programmes and activities deliver support, research and policy development, digital innovation and knowledge sharing. We manage funding and spotlight innovative projects; working with our members and partners to ensure lived experience and third sector expertise is listened to and acted upon by informing national policy and campaigns, and putting people at the centre of designing support and services.

We aim to:

- Ensure disabled people, people with long term conditions and unpaid carers voices, expertise and rights drive policy and sit at the heart of design, delivery and improvement of support and services.
- Support transformational change that works with individual and community assets, helping people to live well, supporting human rights, self management, co-production and independent living.
- Champion and support the third sector as a vital strategic and delivery partner, and foster cross-sector understanding and partnership.

How do you think the spending decisions of the Scottish Government affect your life, and do you think this is the same or different for other people you know?

Third sector organisations like the ALLIANCE are significantly impacted by the Scottish Government’s spending decisions. In some cases, this can be due to reliance on direct funding and commissioning from the Scottish Government. In other

cases, local authorities, the NHS, Integration Joint Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships may be responsible for such decisions in the first instance, but drawing on funding ultimately allocated by the Scottish Government.

The financial situation facing third sector organisations has been difficult for several years, particularly as a result of short term funding arrangements, and the ALLIANCE have consistently called for adequate and sustainable support for third sector organisations.

The contribution of the third sector to Scotland's people, society and economy remains unrecognised and undervalued. According to the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) [1] as of 2021, there are over 46,000 third sector organisations in Scotland, with an estimated combined annual turnover of more than £8.5 billion.

The sector is also a major employer – for example, SCVO estimates approximately 135,000 paid staff work in Scotland's voluntary sector. However, the third sector has been put under significant pressure in recent years, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost of living crisis. SCVO's Third Sector Tracker [2] found that by winter 2022, two-thirds of organisations reported shortages and issues with staffing and volunteers, and the same number were facing financial challenges.

At the same time, 39% of organisations said they had difficulty planning for the future. Given the vital role that the third sector plays in supporting people across Scotland, and the scale of the workforce, it is crucial that it is adequately funded by the Scottish Government.

Although the Scottish Government has repeatedly stated it remains committed to carrying forward proposals on multi-year funding, there has been little to no visible progress on this for several years. The ALLIANCE strongly back the SCVO's 'Fair Funding for the Voluntary Sector' [3] proposals and would urge the Scottish Government to act upon them as a priority. References:

1 SCVO, Research, available at: <https://scvo.scot/policy/research>

2 SCVO, 'Third Sector Tracker – Wave 5 Winter 2022' (March 2023), available at: <https://storage.googleapis.com/scvo-documents-evidence/0693z00000ZlyVUAAZ-Scottish-Third%20Sector%20Tracker%20-%20Wave%205%20Winter%202022.pdf>

3 SCVO, 'Fair Funding for the Voluntary Sector' (January 2023), available at: <https://scvo.scot/p/56732/2023/01/16/%e2%80%8bfair-funding-for-the-voluntary-sector>

After looking at this, do you want to say anything more or different about how the spending decisions of the Scottish Government affect you, or other people?

The ALLIANCE have long advocated for the Scottish Government to adopt a human rights budgeting approach, which is outlined in more detail by the Scottish Human Rights Commission, our partners in the Human Rights Budgeting Working Group [4].

The Scottish Government has the obligation, as the UK Government does, to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. How revenues are raised, how spending is allocated, and how they are used in practice are all essential to delivering on human rights obligations. The principles of human rights budgeting go beyond simply the setting of the budget and can be applied to scrutiny, and we welcome that the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee have been seeking to embed some of these principles in its own scrutiny. Human rights should be recognised as a golden thread, relevant to all areas of government and parliamentary activity, and should be a focus for scrutiny every year.

In addition, investment in preventative measures must be a priority for the Scottish Government. The long term financial benefits of preventative approaches are widely recognised, including in a recent paper by Public Health Scotland [5], as lower cost early intervention can prevent deterioration of health and wellbeing that would necessitate more significant and expensive interventions later.

However, we are unconvinced that sufficient resource will be committed to preventative spend in areas such as mental health, social care and social security. The only reference to prevention in the Scottish Government's Medium-Term Financial Strategy is limited to a £500 million investment in whole family wellbeing.

Transparency is a core principle of human rights budgeting, key to developing efficient budgets that deliver on outcomes, and imperative for scrutiny and accountability. In relation to the Scottish Government budget, it is difficult to 'follow the money' for prevention from allocation to spend to impact. In the context of the ongoing cost of living crisis, spending that supports people to eat well and heat their homes reduces the likelihood they will need to access NHS and social care services.

An ALLIANCE report published in October 2022 investigating the impacts of the crisis on disabled people, people living with long term conditions, and unpaid carers [6], highlighted worrying examples of the kinds of cutbacks people were having to make. Some people told us they had reduced the number of meals they had each day, were heating their homes less, or even limiting bathing. All of these measures could negatively impact their health in the longer term, increasing the risk of malnutrition or infection that could lead to hospitalisation and increased social care need, but would be avoidable with adequate support through the social security system.

Similar worrying findings were shared by the UK's national human rights bodies, including the SHRC, as part of their recent report to the United Nations [7].

Whilst acute and crisis services must continue to be funded adequately, failure to invest in preventative approaches increases demand on those services, with resulting costs to public finances and to individual health and wellbeing. The costs of allowing people to reach crisis point before they receive support can also be borne by seemingly unrelated services – for example, Police Scotland have reported a near doubling of call-outs for mental health related incidents between 2017 and 2022 [8]. This emphasises the importance of a cross-cutting approach to and understanding of prevention across a range of government portfolios.

The ALLIANCE would urge the Scottish Government to make further progress towards a wellbeing economy by driving and encouraging investment in key services. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy does note that the government remain committed to the wellbeing economy, and to “economic growth for a purpose”, and it is important that this principle is meaningfully followed, for example by fully recognising the value of care.

References:

4 Scottish Human Rights Commission, ‘Human Rights Budget Work’, available here: <https://www.scottishhumanrights.com/projects-and-programmes/human-rights-budget-work/>

5 Public Health Scotland, ‘The case for prevention and sustainability of health services’ (July 2023), available at: <https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications/the-case-for-prevention-and-sustainability-of-health-services>

6 The ALLIANCE, ‘Disabled People, Unpaid Carers and the Cost of Living Crisis: Impacts, Responses, and Long Term Solutions’ (October 2022), available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/news/alliance-cost-of-living-report-calls-for-further-emergency-support/>

7 Scottish Human Rights Commission, ‘Commission warns of crisis for disabled people’s rights’ (August 2023), available at: <https://www.scottishhumanrights.com/news/commission-warns-of-crisis-for-disabled-people-s-rights/>

8 The Herald, ‘NHS strain sees police first to mental health call-outs’ (April 2023), available at: <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/23432444.nhs-strain-sees-police-first-mental-health-call-outs/>

How do you think the way the Scottish Government raises money through tax affects your life and the lives of people around you?

As the primary mechanism for raising the revenue necessary to fund essential public services, how the Scottish Government uses its powers over taxation has a significant impact on everyone in Scotland. However, these impacts are not equitably distributed. Decisions that may result in reduced expenditure in areas like health, social care and social security will have the greatest negative impacts on the groups that rely most on those services, including disabled people, people living with long term conditions, unpaid carers, and people experiencing poverty.

Similarly, whilst effort has been made in recent years to make the Income Tax system more progressive, Council Tax remains a highly regressive system where the burden of taxation falls most heavily at the lowest end of the scale rather than the highest.

Whilst the ALLIANCE does not have a position on the specific rates and forms of taxation that should apply in Scotland, we would re-emphasise our consistent calls for a human rights based approach to public finances. As stated in our initial response to the Resource Spending Review Framework consultation in 2022 [9], plans to incorporate several international human rights treaties into Scots law offer an opportune time to embed human rights budgeting principles. In particular, decisions on public finances should have due regard to two of the key principles of

progressive realisation of human rights, those of “non-regression” and “maximum use of available resources.”

In taking forward this and future year’s budgets, non-regression means the Scottish Government must ensure that any changes in spending do not result in people’s existing human rights, such as the rights to independent living and equal participation in society for disabled people, being eroded. Maximum use of available resources means the government has a duty to ensure that adequate funding is available to ensure the progressive realisation of human rights. It should therefore carefully consider how to use the tax and revenue powers it has at its disposal to maximise revenues.

The ALLIANCE have nonetheless previously specifically highlighted Council Tax as an area of concern, including in both written [10] and oral [11] evidence to the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee as part of pre-budget scrutiny last year. Council Tax is highly regressive by design and has only become more regressive in the three decades since it was introduced. The regressive nature of Council Tax, combined with the fact that local authorities can only set the Band D rate with all other rates being defined in statute as multiples of that value, significantly impacts the ability of local authorities to raise the revenues necessary to deliver public services in a fair and equitable manner.

A range of prospective replacements for Council Tax were investigated in depth through the Commission on Local Tax Reform in 2015 [12], which included representatives from four of the five parties currently present in the Scottish Parliament.

Whilst the Medium-Term Financial Strategy states the Scottish Government’s intention to further progress local tax reform, it is important that this is taken forward at pace. Given the existence of a prior evidence base in the Commission’s report, the scale of financial pressures, and the increasingly regressive nature of Council Tax, legislating for a replacement in some form must not be delayed.

References:

- 9 The ALLIANCE, ‘Response to Resource Spending Review Framework’ (March 2022), available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/resources/alliance-response-to-resource-spending-review-framework-consultation/>
- 10 The ALLIANCE, ‘Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2023-24 – Alliance Response’ (September 2022), available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Equalities-Committee-Pre-Budget-Scrutiny-2023-24-ALLIANCE-Response.docx>
- 11 Scottish Parliament Official Report, Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, ‘Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2023-24’ (October 2022), available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/search-what-was-said-in-parliament/EHRCJ-25-10-2022?meeting=13946&iob=126407>
- 12 The Commission on Local Tax Reform, ‘Just Change: A New Approach to Local Taxation’ (December 2015), archived at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20160303000220/http://localtaxcommission.scot/download-our-final-report>

What do you think would make it easier for people to understand and have their say on how well public money is used?

The Scottish Human Rights Commission has produced a series of papers on human rights budget work in practice. One of these papers focuses on procedural principles, including how to involve the wider public in the budget process [13]. Core to this is the active participation of rights holders in the process according to the PANEL principles – participation; accountability; non-discrimination and equality; empowerment; and legality.

The Government should also make space to listen to the voice of lived experience, providing proper facilitation and support of their engagement. This should include (although not be restricted to) funding for accessible communications on the budget process and decisions, and any assistive technology or support costs required to enable lived experience representatives to take part in and contribute to the work of the care boards.

Existing resources such as the National Standards for Community Engagement [14] and learning from current groups such as the People Led Policy Panel should be used to help embed active participation in the budget process. It is important to consider inclusive communication in all aspects of developing and communicating the budget.

Inclusive communication should follow the Six Principles of Inclusive Communication [15], and should be publicly available in multiple formats, including Community Languages, British Sign Language (BSL), Braille, Moon, Easy Read, clear and large print, and paper formats.

The ALLIANCE recommends involving relevant experts – including BSL and language interpreters – at the earliest opportunity to ensure communications and information provision is inclusive for all. Good quality audio-visual content in accessible formats, can be a particularly effective way of conveying information, and could be used for example to describe what the budget aims to achieve in key thematic areas, and what changes have been made relative to the previous year's budget. This should be promoted alongside general resources which outline how the budget process works.

Whilst recognising that the Cabinet and civil servants involved in the budget are extremely busy at budget time, it may be worth considering imaginative means of opening up the process beyond parliamentary scrutiny to allow some degree of public scrutiny, for example through engagement events related to individual portfolios. These various methods should form part of an overarching, clear and consistent communications strategy, which puts a duty of transparency on the Scottish Government.

References:

13 Scottish Human Rights Commission, 'The Budget Process and Human Rights Procedural Principles' (September 2019), available at:
<https://www.scottishhumanrights.com/media/1915/hrbw-paper-6-vfinal.pdf>

14 Scottish Community Development Centre, 'National Standards for Community Engagement', available at: <https://www.voicescotland.org.uk/national-standards>

15 Scottish Government, 'Principles of Inclusive Communication: An information and self-assessment tool for public authorities' (September 2011), available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/principles-inclusive-communication-information-self-assessment-tool-public-authorities/documents/>

ANNEXE B

Scottish Women's Budget Group response to the Committee's call for views

The Scottish Women's Budget Group

How do you think the spending decisions of the Scottish Government affect your life, and do you think this is the same or different for other people you know?

The Scottish Government is responsible for a wide range of policy areas which have a direct impact on people's lives. The Scottish Budget reflects in monetary terms the priorities of the Scottish Government for the upcoming year.

However, differences in spending across policy areas affect people in a variety of ways depending on numerous factors, including class, gender, age, disability, access to public services or religion. For example, increasing funding on the Scottish Modern Apprenticeship Programme between 2008 and 2013 saw a 25% rise for new starts.

During this five-year period, women's share of new starts also increased from 27% to 43%. However, the level of gender based occupational segregation did not vary significantly. If anything, female domination in health and social care became more entrenched, with women accounting 87.7% of all apprentices in 2013 from 80.3% in 2008 (Campbell & Gillespie, 2017). As a result, the Scottish Modern Apprenticeship Programme did very little to deliver greater equality outcomes.

The Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG) has long drawn attention to these issues, particularly in relation to how revenue allocations have a different effect on women and men, and the implications of this for gender equality.

The SWBG advocates for the use of Intersectional Gender Budgeting as a key tool for gender mainstreaming within the budgetary process. On top of analysing the effect that public spend has on women and men, Intersectional Gender Budgeting also recognises other characteristics that may affect women and men's lived realities, such as age, socioeconomic situation and background, disability, race, ethnicity, religion and rural or urban location. By using this tool, local and national governments can identify opportunities and priorities for budget allocations.

Furthermore, Intersectional Gender Budget Analysis can help avoid any unintended consequences that could hamper progress towards gender equality goals, ensuring that fiscal decisions do not result in widening inequalities. Women and men continue to experience inequalities in pay, in employment and promotion opportunities, and in the harassment and abuse they receive, with women being more likely to experience poverty at all points in their life (WBG, 2022).

In addition, women still have more responsibility for unpaid work including childcare, care for older or disabled people, and domestic work. For many women, this means a greater reliance on public services and can limit the time they have for paid work and other activities. Intersectional Gender Budgeting turns the spotlight on these key issues which are often overlooked in policy, particularly the uneven distribution of unpaid work and how policies impact on this.

In their latest briefing titled 'The macroeconomic and fiscal benefits of gender equality, and how gender budgeting can support their achievement', the OECD recognised the social, environmental, and economic implications that spending decisions can have for a country, influencing people's choices regarding work and economic participation.

The briefing focused on how Gender Budgeting can help identify measures that support gender equality and economic growth. For example, adjustments to paid parental leave policies or subsidies for childcare and long-term care costs have a positive impact on women's participation in the labour market, which subsequently increases economic activity (OECD, 2022).

A case in point is Canada, where the government, following its Gender Results Framework introduced in 2017, increased support for childcare in the 2021 Budget with the overarching objective of dismantling women's barriers to access the labour market (OECD, 2022). More specifically, the Budget included provisions to reduce fees for parents by 50% on average by 2022, with the goal of reaching \$10 per day on average by 2026.

In Scotland, the extension of the funded childcare entitlement from 600 to 1140 hours a year for all three- and four-year-olds (and for two-year-olds who meet eligibility criteria) was partly designed to improve parents' opportunities to be in work. However, analysis by Close the Gap points out that for many women 'the need to purchase additional hours remains an insurmountable financial barrier to education, training and employment' (Close the Gap, 2023).

The above examples prove how spending decisions, budgets and fiscal policy more broadly are not gender neutral. Therefore, it is particularly important to incorporate a gendered perspective to spending decisions to either advance gender equality goals or to, at least, avoid deepening existing gender inequalities and worsening outcomes for women, both in the short and long term.

Intersectional Gender Budget Analysis brings to the fore the role of care as a key enabler of economic activity, making it visible. As such, it calls for greater public accountability to valuing care, for including people's caring needs in decision-making, and for spending decisions to consider the role of care in society, and its links to building a fairer society.

After looking at this, do you want to say anything more or different about how the spending decisions of the Scottish Government affect you, or other people?

Following the evidence gathered throughout the past year, the SWBG would like to draw attention to the gendered impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. Using this evidence and understanding what it means from an intersectional perspective is key to evaluating how the spending decisions of the Scottish Government could improve the lives of women living in Scotland.

Women and men have different lived experiences, which consequently impact on their levels of income and wealth, with women being more likely to experience poverty. This is particularly true for women from Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black ethnic groups, disabled women, single parents (of which at least 90% are women) (OPFS, 2020), survivors of abuse, unpaid carers, and women with no recourse to public funds (WBG, 2022).

Women are also often the shock absorbers of poverty, as they tend to have the main responsibility for the purchase and preparation of food for their children and families and for the management of budgets in poor households (WBG, 2022). It is thus unsurprising to learn about the difficulties encountered by women as they navigate the challenges of the current cost-of-living crisis.

Last year's SWBG and Poverty Alliance research into the experiences of low-income women in Scotland found that these women were taking increasingly challenging decisions to manage the impact of rising costs. These decisions included going without food, reducing or cutting off energy use, taking on more debt, working increasing hours despite impacting on health and becoming increasingly isolated from friends, family and services.

Our Women's Survey 2023 echoed those findings, exposing the implications of costs being higher than prior to the pandemic and some of the mechanisms that women are currently using to cope with these. Some of the key findings showed us how:

- 23% of women respondents are taking on more debt. This figure rises to 40% for single parents.
- 41% of women stated that they are using their savings to make ends meet.
- The areas with the greatest impact of increased costs for women were energy and food costs with 46.3% of our respondents telling us they are struggling with energy costs and 37.1% with food costs. For disabled women, these figures are even higher, with 56% and 51% respectively.

An intersectional gendered analysis of these figures makes it obvious that women, especially disabled women and single parents, are at the losing end of the current economic crisis.

The Scottish Government could prioritise spending on policies designed to protect women from the effects of inflationary pressures. These must include:

- Widen eligibility for cost-of-living support, including the review of thresholds for means-tested entitlement (the Carers Allowance being an obvious one), and considering the additional costs that disabled people experience.
- Mitigate the young parent penalty and the two-child limit through additional payments as part of the Scottish Child Payment.
- Ensure adequate funding for the Scottish Welfare Fund.

Shrinking local budgets also have implications for women's equality. Analysis by Audit Scotland has highlighted that revenue funding for local government has not kept pace with other parts of Scottish Government revenue spending. COSLA analysis indicates that there has been a £69.6million cash increase once all national level government commitments are covered. With high inflation rates, increased costs of energy and fuel, increasing demand on some services and higher than anticipated pay rises in 2022/23, this level of cash increase means most local authorities are still struggling to cover costs and sought to make savings within the 2023/24 budget.

Local authorities play a key role as service providers of which women depend most, such as Early Learning and Childcare provision, social care services and others. For example, research carried out in North Lanarkshire showed that cuts to environmental services were 'felt most by women living in poorer neighbourhoods' (Audit Scotland, 2023). Women ended up making most of the requests for environmental services contributing to their invisible 'third shift', instead of the council scheduling routinely services as had previously been the case (Audit Scotland, 2023).

Local government is also a source of women's paid employment. According to figures from the Women's Budget Group (2020), 78% of council employees are women. In light of this evidence, the Scottish Government should review their approach to local budgets to reach a fair settlement that allows for the continuation of key services for women and guarantees fair pay for local government workers. In addition to protecting women from the effects of the cost-of-living crisis (particularly those in the groups referenced further above), prioritising investment in care would be key from an equality's perspective.

Scotland's social care sector is in a critical state and needs urgent investment: services are understaffed (Scottish Social Services Council, 2022) with recruitment and staff retention difficult at current pay levels; (Fair Work Convention, 2019) people are unable to receive the care packages they need; and wider unmet needs are likely to be extensive, resulting in additional caring pressures being pushed towards unpaid carers.

Investing in care as critical social infrastructure is central to securing Scotland's goals of a wellbeing economy, and key to delivering women's equality and Net Zero targets. Our care cost modelling research found that an increase in social care

funding of £3.3bn is vital to realise the ambitions of a transformative scenario which would see:

- Increasing access to free care to those with critical needs and moderate needs.
- Increasing qualifications and pay to Nordic levels, with care workers paid an average of £15.21 per hour. This scenario assumes that higher take-ups would relieve informal care needs further and eliminate unmet needs.

Additionally, our care cost modelling research draws attention to the potential that investing in care has for revenue generation. For example, it calculates that additional direct and indirect tax revenue would yield an estimated additional £1.5bn annually (or 46% of the estimated additional investment required in the transformative scenario).

Investment in care would also yield important social benefits in the long-term, especially in the context of an ageing population in Scotland. Demographic spending pressure will increase according to the latest projections of the Scottish Fiscal Commission. Prioritising investment in care would prepare Scotland for the challenges ahead while delivering on Scotland's Net Zero and Gender Equality targets.

Another area where spending could make a huge difference to women's lives is childcare provision. Preliminary data from our currently ongoing 'Childcare Survey 2023' shows how couples, and mothers more specifically, are increasingly struggling to juggle work and childcare responsibilities. Women are telling us "We cannot currently afford any extra childcare costs, I have had to decline extra working hours because childcare would not be covered by the extra pay" or "I feel very strongly that I have not been able to progress in work, and have been held back as I don't have the time to dedicate to work. If a child is ill or unable to attend school due to disability, my work is the first thing to be affected, which means I am letting others down, it directly affects my mental health and wellbeing as well as income".

These initial findings are in line with the latest research conducted by Close the Gap (2023) and demonstrate that the spending decisions of the Scottish Government affect women and men differently.

Most importantly, further evidence indicates that the way in which funded childcare is implemented in local areas provides less benefit to those in lower income groups and/or working in sectors that do not adhere to the traditional 9-5 office hours. As a result, the government's childcare scheme could be doing nothing to alleviate the squeeze felt by those families and women already managing tight budgets. This again proves how government spending decisions affect social groups differently, and the need to include Intersectional Gender Analysis as part of the policy-making and budgetary processes.

Finally, it is worth noting that spending decisions are key for the successful implementation of policy plans. For example, while the publication of the Women's Health Plan 2021-2024 was a welcomed and necessary step to close the 'gender

health gap' as part of the Scottish Government's broader objectives on gender equality, the plan did not include any specific funding allocations towards its delivery. Instead, the Plan was conceived to be implemented alongside Covid-19 recovery and renewal plans (Scottish Government, 2021).

This raises questions as to how effective the plan will be in matching its ambitions if not enough resources have been allocated to ensure its delivery.

How do you think the way the Scottish Government raises money through tax affects your life and the lives of people around you?

How our revenue is generated has an important role to play in tackling inequality. Just like decisions on how best to spend public money, decisions about how best to raise public funds through tax can affect women and men differently. Additionally, regressive taxes place greater pressure on those on lower incomes, with wealthy men the most likely to benefit.

Women make up a higher proportion of those on low incomes and therefore tax changes to realise a more progressive tax system will improve efforts towards gender equality.

A gender budgeting approach to the tax system analyses how the tax system can be used to promote equality in society more widely. This means ensuring that the necessary data and analysis are brought into the decision-making process to consider the differing impacts of tax decisions on men and women, the differing experiences faced by women, and how those decisions can work to promote equality. Understanding these effects and analysis is needed in the decision making and prioritisation process.

While Scotland does not hold the levers of power on all tax decisions there is more that could be done to realise a progressive tax regime in Scotland. Evidence from the Office of the Chief Economist demonstrated that changes made in Scottish income tax in 2021-22 compared to a scenario of no tax changes since 2016-17 meant that in 2021-22 85% of women paid less tax, compared to 72% of male taxpayers (Scottish Government, 2022).

A continuing priority for the Scottish Government is to maintain commitments to a progressive income tax regime and continuing to use powers on income tax to provide increasingly progressive rates. However, other taxes within Scotland are more regressive in nature.

Council Tax is a particularly regressive form of taxation that is within the control of the Scottish Government. According to data from the Office of National Statistics households in the bottom quintile pay 4.6% of their income on Council Tax, whereas those in the top quintile pay just 1.4% of their income on this tax (ONS, 2020)

In a recent survey we carried alongside the Faside Women and Girls Group and Making Rights Real seeking the views of women and girls in East Lothian about the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on them, respondents expressed that increases in council tax "will make us cut back – eg we'll have cheaper meals", or "increase in council tax means less food on the table". Efforts to reform Council Tax into a

progressive form of local taxation would benefit those on low income and are a necessary step if taxation is to promote a more equal society.

Local taxation is an area long overdue for reform, to ensure local authorities are funded to provide vital public services that women disproportionately rely on and to tackle the regressive form of taxation currently in place. This should be considered a priority within what's left of the current parliamentary term.

Commitment on local tax reform must go beyond holding a Citizens' Assembly, that was set out in by the Scottish Government in 2021, and the considerable work undertaken by the Commission on Local Tax Reform should be reconsidered as part of this process.

Regarding options available to councils to raise money through parking and other taxes, it is important to consider how women's caring responsibilities influence their experiences of travel. Our Women's Survey 2023 found that, particularly in rural settings, women have higher car dependence, with 50% of women in rural areas expressing being very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with public transport routes, with 64% dissatisfied with timetables, compared to 36% and 48%, respectively, of women in the survey overall. What's more, these women frequently highlighted the lack of choice in transport options, irregular bus timetables, significantly longer journeys by public transport and expensive services.

Therefore, local authorities looking at introducing parking taxes need to take into consideration the experiences and lived realities of their citizens, including women's caring roles, and ensure that any such measures are coupled with the provision of fit-for-purpose and affordable public transport.

What do you think would make it easier for people to understand and have their say on how well public money is used?

There are several ways in which the Scottish Government can make it easier for people to understand and have their say on how well public money is spent. As per previous consultation responses, improving transparency in relation to budgetary decisions would be a welcome step to increase public engagement.

The Resource Spending Review made the commitment to greater transparency in future budget processes through steps such as publication of all Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) from the 2023-24 budget processes onwards. This is an important commitment to ensure that these are meaningful. It is critical that considerations of equalities start at the very beginning of any process and is not something which is undertaken after decisions are taken.

As yet publication of all these EQIAs for the 2023-24 budget process is still to be delivered. This will be an important step and must be complimented by ensuring that the process of completing EQIAs includes ongoing monitoring and review to ensure policies have the impact intended. There is a concern that EQIAs can often be retrofitted to the policy process rather than being an integral part of the decision-making process.

The Committee has an important role to play in ensuring the Government meets its commitments to transparency and holding Government to account in the forthcoming budget cycle. In this regard, the Committee should:

- Ask the Scottish Government for evidence as to how EQIAs influenced the different revenue allocations in the Budget.
- Ensure that EQIAs include a plan to monitor progress towards intended outcomes
- Follow up any monitoring reviews planned by the Government and provide feedback.

Alongside this, how information is presented is crucial. Producing a Citizen's Budget document annually to provide budget information in a clear, accessible way that links to everyday life would be an important step forward for the Scottish Government and make it a leader within the UK in transparency of budget information. Recent work by the SPiCE unit offers good examples of trying to make budget information more accessible, which range from the detail as to how decisions are made to the format of Budget Documentation.

Tracking budget spend once the budget has been delivered is an important step which at present there is a serious lack of public information on. This makes scrutiny and evaluation of budget spend difficult for external organisations or individuals.

Transparency could be improved by monitoring spend, particularly by publishing monthly reports showing progress in implementing the budget (OECD, 2002), and how this spend impacts on progress towards Government's goals, including National Outcomes.

SPiCE also highlights the challenges in making comparisons to previous budgets, which consequently interferes with any potential monitoring of changes in revenue allocations. The complexity of spend in some areas through multiple public bodies contributes to the difficulty in accessing clear information.

As part of wider budget scrutiny measures the Committee should look at budget review processes and tracking the impact of spend against national outcomes. By having transparent processes in place and clear information as to what motivates budgetary decisions and their alignment with policy objectives, including the Programme for Government and the interlinks between this and the National Outcomes, citizens can reach a greater understanding of how public money is used and what for.

In such a scenario, citizens could feel more empowered to use the mechanisms already in place to have their say about alternative ways to spend public money, for example, through their MSPs.

With regards consulting the public about their views, it's important that this is meaningful and that there is a clear link between the consultation process and decisions made so as not to waste the time of those who respond. Having a clear plan for how information will be collated and used to inform decisions as well as ensuring that these processes are inclusive and hear from as many different groups

as possible is essential if decision makers are to fully understand how their decisions will impact on some of the most vulnerable groups in society. Whether this is done on an annual basis or as part of deeper participation processes, knowing who is being heard through consultations and who might not be through collection of some demographic data, will allow for better analysis of data and the identification of differing needs within the community.

Future processes ensuring meaningful participation that reaches a wide cross-section of the population is critical.