

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

3rd Meeting, 2024 (Session 6), Tuesday 30 January 2024

Note by the Clerk

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'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 2023, the Committee agreed its broad approach to pre-budget scrutiny for 2024/25 would 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. The Committee's pre-budget scrutiny focussed on participation. As part of that scrutiny and to run alongside formal scrutiny, the Committee explored the impact of the budget from a lived experience perspective. One of the aims of the informal

participation was for participants to suggest questions that the Committee may wish to ask the Scottish Government on their behalf. Another was to understand the practical opportunities and implications of Scottish Parliament committees more routinely involving citizens in the budget scrutiny process.

7. The Parliament's Participation and Communities Team (PACT) identified a group it was in the process of building a relationship with as ideal to work with, and both the Committee and the group agreed to working over three deliberative sessions.

Call for views

8. 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.
9. The Call for Views focused on finding out how much people know about the budget; which areas of the budget people think affect them most, and how to involve the public more in the budget process so the Committee could get a better understanding of spending outcomes and lived experience.
10. 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

Panel Process

11. The **Whole Family Equality Project** is supported by [Capital City Partnership](#) and delivered by [Children 1st](#) and [CHAI](#). The project aims to bring about significant and measurable improvements to the lives of individuals and families from ethnically diverse communities across Edinburgh, and to empower people by giving them a leading role in the decisions that are made about the project's design and delivery.
12. A group of 12 participants agreed to take part. The process the Panel followed was as follows:
 - On 29 August 2023 the Panel attended a session delivered by the Participation and Communities Team (PACT) with support from SPICe and the committee clerks. This session focused on building capacity among panel members, and covered the role of the Parliament and Government, and the Committee, and an introduction to the budget process. This was followed by an online drop in discussion to help the Panel prepare for the next steps in the deliberative process.

- On 12 September 2023, the Panel and Committee (along with the Convener of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee) worked together in groups to discuss how and when people should be able to participate in the budget process, what the barriers to this are, and policy 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.
- Finally, on 3 October 2023 the Panel, supported by PACT and SPICe, used the discussion notes from 12 September to form questions for the Minister in groups, then worked together to agree how to merge, re-word and prioritise these questions. SPICe was asked by the group to apply the agreed changes to form a final set of six questions, and the Panel agreed these unanimously by correspondence.

Formal Evidence

13. In addition to the panel process, the Committee held a formal evidence session on [26 September 2023](#) to explore the core principles of gender budgeting and participation in the budget process. It heard 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

Panel evidence session on 24 October

14. At its meeting on [24 October 2023](#), five representatives from the Panel spoke to the Committee during a public session. They gave an opening statement and then read out a set of questions that the Panel developed and agreed. Committee members then put those questions to the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees on the Panel's behalf later in the evidence session.

15. At that meeting, the Committee heard from:

- Citizens Panel representatives from the Whole Family Equality Project and then from
- Emma Roddick MSP, Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees and Scottish Government officials Rob Priestley, Head of Mainstreaming and Strategy Unit, Directorate of Equality Inclusion and Human Rights and Fi Robertson, Fi Robertson, Head of Scottish Budget Team, Directorate of Budget and Public Spending.

Committee letter and Scottish Government response

16. The Committee issued and published its [pre-budget letter to the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees](#) on 15 November 2023.
17. That letter was complemented by a [letter to the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise](#), also issued and published on 15 November 2023.
18. The [Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees replied to the Committee on 19 December 2023](#), on the same day the Scottish Government announced its budget.
19. The [Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise replied to the Committee on 18 January 2024](#).

Today's evidence session

20. Today's session provides an opportunity for the Committee to hear from stakeholders about how the Scottish Government's budget and the Minister's response reflects on and addresses the conclusions and recommendations set out in its letter of 15 November 2023, and whether long-held aspirations of stakeholders are being met.
21. The Committee has agreed to focus on transparency in its pre-budget scrutiny for 2025-26. This session will be an opportunity to identify key areas of focus. These might include exploring how funding allocation decisions are reached; what impact they have; how impacts are measured to aid transparency and accountability, and the value of including and engaging with citizens as part of the budget process.
22. The Committee will hear from:
 - Clare Gallagher, Human Rights Officer, CEMVO (Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations) Scotland
 - Professor O'Hagan, Chair, Scottish Government's Equalities and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group (EHRBAG)
 - Heather Williams, Training Lead, Scottish Women's Budget Group.

Committee Clerks
January 2024