

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee: Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2022/23 - Call for Views

Fife Centre for Equalities welcomes the opportunity to submit a written response to the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee on what could be in the Scottish Government's budget for 2022/23. We particularly welcome the consideration of highlighting the rights for women, disabled people, and minority ethnic communities as part of the budgeting process.

Fife Centre for Equalities (FCE), funded by Fife Council, started in 2014 with the **vision** to inspire and enable everyone we work with to take action that makes Fife a more equal, fairer place to live, work and study.

FCE's **mission** is to develop a harmonised approach to build a collective voice to champion equality, diversity, inclusion and social justice.

Our **values** are to work with honesty, integrity, respect and transparency, and strive to demonstrate a fully inclusive approach in everything we do. We want everyone we work with to share these values in the belief that they will help make Fife a fairer and more equal place.

Over the past few years, FCE has developed a number of projects that address the unmet needs of different protected characteristics in Fife. Our views in this paper are based on our experiences of working with these groups.

FCE's General Response

1. De-centralise the funding for equality initiatives

Ring-fenced funding should be allocated to local authorities for local distributions. Currently, the Equality and Human Rights Grants are administered by the Scottish Government. The majority of recipients are national organisation based in the central belt or main cities in Scotland. Equality is a matter that needs to be addressed at every corner of Scotland. We need to ensure that all those that live out with the urban areas are recognised to have the:

- right to an adequate standard of living, including the rights to adequate food, clothing and housing and the continuous improvement of living conditions
- right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health
- right to education
- right to social security
- right to take part in cultural life

It is important that people with protected characteristics feel they can thrive and fulfil a good quality of life at where they live rather than feeling they need to move / travel to the cities to access more appropriate services. For example, people should be able to access good education, good jobs, good person-centred services and live without the fear of discrimination or harassment.

2. Investment for local preventative projects that foster good relations between different protected characteristics and assist those groups to utilise their rights

FCE is a good example of a local initiative that helps bring together communities of different protected characteristics and working together to make Fife a fairer place to live, work and study. More importantly, we help build bridges on equality issues between the public sector partners and those who feel they have been disadvantaged. We won't take up the space and time in this response to cite the many examples, however we would welcome the panel to visit our website to see some of the work we have done so far, <https://centreforequalities.org.uk/>.

Re-iterating our earlier point about de-centralising the funding, without a local organisation that understands the makeup of the local communities, it will be hard for the national policy makers to clearly hear the negative impacts the budget may have on people outside of the urban cities.

We would also advocate that the investment allocation needs to be fairer. The assumption is that initiatives based in the cities will require more resources. For example, we see that national organisations will be given around £300k on an annual basis. At the regional level, an organisation with similar number of employees is expected to apply for £50k max per year. This creates a pay gap for those working in the cities in comparison to those working in the less urban areas. We should also bear in mind that the travel costs for those living in the less urban areas are a lot higher than those living in the cities. This pay gap creates a significant negative impact on local equality groups to compete for good candidates.

3. Heightened scrutiny in how Scottish Government and local authorities fulfil their Public Sector Equality Duties in preparation of their annual budgets

The public sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Public bodies should conduct impact assessments to ensure all their functions and policies are compliant with the PSED. Often the timeline of approving budgets do not allow sufficient time to conduct equality impact assessments. Hence limited information is available for the public to assess how any budgets proposed by the Scottish Government or local authorities will affect different protected characteristics.

Currently, local health and social care partnerships may aim to make savings by reducing day care services for people where people live. On paper, it may only affect a handful of people. In reality, it takes away friendship, security, local jobs, respite for their carers and connections within the community.

4. More support for people with protected characteristics to use Participation Request for them to highlight unmet needs within the budgeting process

From April 2019 to March 2020 Fife Council received 3 participation requests, we understand these were refused on the basis there was ongoing engagement. This may suggest that there is a lack of awareness and understanding regarding the process or support available to help people to prepare those requests. On researching how accessible the information was regarding participation requests we could find no easy read or other accessible versions.

It may prove a useful exercise for local authorities to consider a proactive approach and deliver awareness sessions to encourage and engage with individuals, providing accessible formats to encourage participation from individuals and groups with protected characteristics.

Since September 2019, Fife's has been undertaking a large-scale test to mainstream participatory budgeting and Fife Centre for Equalities has been supporting the involvement of individuals and groups with protected characteristics. We would advocate that this type of support needs to be invested in.

At present the support available is an add-on to an organisation's activities, leaving support for individuals ad-hoc and not a priority, which needs addressed if participatory budgeting is to be successfully mainstreamed.

5. Better dialogue between MSPs and their constituents as part of the budgeting process

It would be more advantages for regional MSPs collectively to hold budgetary conversations with their constituents. This will remove the tension created by party politics, instead the public will feel their MSPs are working together to act in the interests of their constituents. These conversations will also help promote the value of being involved in the budgeting process.

These conversations would require to be open, transparent, accessible and constructive. They will likely expand the opportunities for the general public to engage with elected politicians. Co-producing, or opportunities, allow constituents to set the priorities and will help move away from the general public providing feedback on structured consultations, instead the constituencies will shape the agenda based on local needs.

6. Partnership

As an organisation that works with honesty, integrity, respect and transparency, and strives to demonstrate a fully inclusive approach in everything we do, we sincerely hope we can support both the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government in helping Fife's people with protected characteristics to better understand and engage with the national budgeting process.

Response to Key Questions at <https://yourviews.parliament.scot/ehrc/pre-budget-2022-23/>

1. Given the main sources of government revenue should the government further increase revenue available to it, and if so how?
 - The government would gain not by tax revenue, but also in its fulfilment of Equality and Human Rights by enabling people from protected characteristics to fully participate economically. This should be done by addressing systematically the barriers equality groups face in accessing education, health, employment and full participation in public life.
 - We consider all protected characteristics in this respect, but highlight the persistent and economic quantifiable gaps (such as pay gaps) women, disabled people, and minority ethnic communities continue to face today.
 - When everyone is given the opportunity to thrive, we will experience an increase in household earnings, a reduction in unemployment, more tax contributions and less dependency on benefits to mitigate income poverty.

2. How might particular groups be affected differently by efforts to raise revenues?
 - We are of the opinion that raising revenue through taxation in earned income, where individuals are employed in valuable and worthwhile work is fair, redistributive and will have a positive impact on life outcomes.
3. What kinds of analysis are necessary to ensure that resources are raised (and allocated) in such a way that supports the progressive realisation of rights?
 - Analysis on long-term persistent trends (e.g. sustained positives destinations; gender, race and disability pay gaps, community safety, life expectancy, health and wellbeing outcomes) would be necessary, alongside with short-term measures at particular life points.
 - FCE's Different Paths project demonstrates that the quality of life each person has is determined by a series of opportunities / barriers afforded to the individual.
4. In terms of resource allocation what areas do you think are: sufficiently resourced, and/or under resourced and where resources need to be redirected to?
 - We do not hold any opinion on this question.
5. How might resource allocation address inequalities and the gaps in the realisation of human rights for all?
 - Each of the significant policy areas such as early years, education, employment, housing, community amenities, safety, health, social care, transport and so on should be able to demonstrate how they address equality and inequalities within their resource allocation.
6. Overall, how effectively is public finance in Scotland being used to achieve economic, social and cultural rights (as outlined above)? What improvements are required?
 - It is evident that the Scottish Government and all local authorities are working hard in putting measures in place to tackle poverty. However, economic, social and cultural rights for people with protected characteristics are not always systematically taken into consideration when deciding public finance. The work of tackling inequalities and promoting equality and inclusion need to

be more aligned with one another to ensure that indeed 'no one is left behind' and we are getting it right for every person.

7. SPICe have set out the standard budget process. How easy is it for people to engage with the budget process? For example:
 - a) How easy is it to navigate and find the necessary information on the budget?
 - b) Is there specific information or access to different information that would improve understanding and scrutiny?
 - The budgetary system is much clearer in terms of overall process (e.g. Fiscal Framework, Scrutiny) however this is still very far from being directly accessible or relatable to the daily experiences of different communities.
 - Improved understanding and scrutiny would derive from information about repartition of resources for:
 - mainstream provision (intended to provide universal access)
 - specialist provision (providing support for specific protected characteristic)
 - repartition of these resources at national as well as local level
 - and finally, information about the deployment of resources (not headline figures of amount allocated, but instead number of people from various communities benefitting)
 - This last point matters as funding that is allocated to national organisations does not always translate in tangible or sustainable services beyond the central belt. Improved understanding, scrutiny as well as better recognition of the work done would drive better equality for all across Scotland.
8. Do you feel that you, your organisation, and the evidence you gather, can genuinely influence government decisions on the budget?
 - FCE is a very small organisation to have any influence over decisions on the budget.
9. How can the links between policy commitments, allocations and achievements of rights be made more transparent?
 - As above, our position is that a clear evidence trail, would derive from accessible information and scrutiny about repartition of resources across:
 - mainstream provision (intended to provide universal access)
 - specialist provision (providing
 - repartition of these resources at national as well as local level
 - deployment of resources at local level (communities and localities)

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