

Delivery of national equalities and human rights in partnership with the third sector

SCVO response to Scottish Parliament's Equality and Human Rights Committee

22 August 2019

Our position

For many of Scotland's charities and community groups delivering essential services, the outlook for 2019 remains 'unsettled'. Respondents to our 2019 Sector Forecast Survey are concerned about the overall financial picture – for the voluntary sector, the public sector and Scottish economy as a whole.

We need dynamic relationships between government, the voluntary sector and communities to deliver on the equality needs and rights of Scotland's people. The Scottish Government and COSLA - as the voice of local government in Scotland - must rise to more open governance approaches that embrace our interdependence.

This must include creating space for true co-design, collaboration and meaningful user involvement to give Scotland's voluntary sector greater equity within partnerships characterised by trust, cooperation and understanding.

Scotland provides the public with minimal opportunities to engage in the budget process. Appropriate mechanisms and inclusive processes should allow the voluntary sector and the public to have a meaningful say in all stages of the budget process, a prerequisite for human rights-based and environmentally responsible budgeting.

Outcome expectations and evidence of what works should drive policy planning and budgetary decisions. Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF), now linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provides an excellent starting point for agreeing our spending priorities.

Further iterations of the NPF should reflect core international human rights and environmentally sustainable frameworks and commitments and more closely align with the SDGs. Including the transparency, inclusion and accountability of Scotland's budget process as indicators of performance would strengthen our National Outcome on Human Rights.

Our response

In 2015, the First Minister [pledged](#) to embed human rights and the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) within the process of how Scotland measures national progress.

"Doing that will make Scotland a world leader. It means that we will truly – not just in words but in action - be putting human rights at the heart of how we assess our national performance as a country."

SCVO understands that equalities and human rights are a priority not only of the Scottish Government but for the Scottish Parliament too. While this prioritisation is welcome, the ability to embed this commitment in practice relies on a complex web of systems, processes and behaviours that need urgent attention.

SCVO's response considers the importance of dynamic relationships that give greater equity to the voluntary sector, open budgeting, and aligned national priorities and policies for delivering human rights-based and environmentally sustainable approaches to Scotland's budget.

Dynamic relationships between government, voluntary sector and right holders

Both the government and the voluntary sector are under pressure. We must be efficient and effective and deliver services that are less expensive while also meeting the wants, needs and rights of people and communities across Scotland and adopting environmentally sustainable approaches.

Recognising this is part of the empathy we need to build mature relationships that help us form new open governance approaches in Scotland. We must understand and embrace our interdependence, as it is only by doing so that we can work together to deliver the best outcomes for people, communities and our environment in Scotland. The onus is on government, COSLA and organisations like SCVO.

We must move beyond debates over limited discretionary spend that serve little of good for the equality needs and rights of people in Scotland. For many charities and community groups, the outlook for 2019 remains 'unsettled'. The sector continues to face challenges of increasing demand against a backdrop of limited funding. Shrinking public sector budgets and the direct and knock-on effect of local authority cuts on voluntary organisations and the communities they work in is hitting people and communities hard. Confronting the challenging funding environment and the unpredictable economic forecast requires the government to work with the voluntary sector in innovative ways.

Respondents to our [2019 Sector Forecast Survey](#) are concerned about the overall financial picture – for the voluntary sector, the public sector and Scottish economy as a whole. 34% think their own organisation's financial situation will deteriorate. 75% believe that the economic situation for the sector will worsen, and 82% are worried about the

Mansfield Traquair Centre, 15 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh EH3 6BB
Tel: 0131 474 8000 • Web: www.scvo.org.uk • SCVO Information Service: 0800 169 0022.

challenges created by funding cuts. 81% of respondents expect demand to increase, up from 72% in 2017.

The balance between efficiency and meeting the wants, needs and rights of communities requires a visible commitment to a new, dynamic relationship between government and the voluntary sector, including involvement in the budget process. All levels of government must support partnerships to develop new ideas, explore person-centred services, and evaluate the impact of public funding. Trust, cooperation and understanding should characterise these partnerships, similar to those mentioned in our parallel submission on the [long-term financial sustainability of local government](#).

Scotland's voluntary sector appears more upbeat about rising to the challenges as budgets tighten and looking for new ways to support people and improve what they do. However, our sector needs more equity through co-design, collaboration and user involvement throughout policy and budget decision making to support the delivery of rights-based budgets and services.

Open budget process that is inclusive, transparent and accountable

Scotland provides the public and voluntary sector with minimal opportunities to engage in the budget process. These dynamic relationships rely on the voluntary sector's ability to scrutinise and shape future budgets in an open and participatory way. Appropriate mechanisms and inclusive processes should allow civil society and the public to have a meaningful say in all stages of the budget process, a prerequisite for human rights-based budgeting.

Increased financial inclusion, transparency and accountability around the budget would give recognition to the significant role the voluntary sector and communities play in achieving better outcomes for people across Scotland. Shifting the conversation from budget reductions to one focused on what Scotland needs to accomplish through its budget and how to realise this would lead to a fundamental change in how the government works with the voluntary sector.

Although Scotland is a member of the global [Open Government Partnership](#), there is still a long way for both national and local government to travel in the area of open budgeting. The [Open Budget Survey](#) is the only global, independent, comparative measure of budget transparency, participation and oversight of national governments. The draft results for the 2019 survey (undertaken by the [Scottish Human Rights Commission](#) following the OBS methodology) reveal that Scotland only provides the public with limited budget information. Of the eight key budget documents assessed as necessary, Scotland only published half of these for the budget year under review with no pre-budget statement, citizens budget, in-year reports and mid-year reports.

Mansfield Traquair Centre, 15 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh EH3 6BB
Tel: 0131 474 8000 • Web: www.scvo.org.uk • SCVO Information Service: 0800 169 0022.

The draft survey result also indicates a low score for public participation in Scotland's budget process, highlighting the minimal opportunities for the voluntary sector to engage. Genuine involvement in the budget process is as significant as budget transparency; it is a crucial principle of taking a human rights-based approach to budget setting and implementation. Budget documentation that is clear and engaging should be made available to citizens, and the government should actively engage vulnerable and marginalised communities during the development and implementation of the budget.

Open budgeting is now internationally accepted best practise adopted by governments of all sizes. Scotland will realise its ambition to adopt a human rights-based approach to the budget only by taking this approach. Some examples of best practice include:

- Mexico's [budget transparency portal](#). This "one-stop-shop" for budget information ensures citizens and decision-makers have the tools to monitor the use of public resources, improve their allocation and ultimately increase their social value.
- '[Decide Madrid](#)' - a participatory budgeting tool. The Spanish capital has reserved 60 million euros for investments assigned to the yearly budget for the people of Madrid to decide how to spend the money.
- Each year the city of [Cincinnati](#) asks for citizens' feedback on the proposed budget. As part of that process, the City looks for ways to better engage with the community and broaden its outreach. The budget engagement process includes 'budget basics' presentations, videos, surveys, public forums and a summary of what people have submitted as an idea for a project in their community.

Alignment of national priorities and policies with human rights

The Scottish Government's and local government's management of public finances should provide an adequate allocation of resources to strategic priorities. Open budgeting would make it possible for the voluntary sector to see where public money flows. The positive impact of the budget on society as a whole relies on spending decisions aligning with Scotland's [National Performance Framework](#) (NPF).

Outcome expectations and evidence of what works should drive public policy and spending decisions. The NPF, now linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provides an excellent starting point for setting priorities. This alignment between policy outcomes and budget process is a vital part of taking a human rights-based approach.

It must apply not only to the Scottish Government's budget setting but at the local level, too. The impact of local government budgets on achieving Scotland's National Outcomes should be clear. The same applies to the ways local people and voluntary organisations are involved in the budget process to meet genuine local priorities. The Community Empowerment Act requires Community Planning Partnerships to prepare and publish a

Mansfield Traquair Centre, 15 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh EH3 6BB
Tel: 0131 474 8000 • Web: www.scvo.org.uk • SCVO Information Service: 0800 169 0022.

local outcome improvement plan (LOIP). They must also review and report publicly on progress, and ensure local outcomes are consistent with those at a national level. Unfortunately, there is no formal requirement for local government to demonstrate how it is contributing to the Scottish National Outcomes.

An [independent evaluation](#) of [Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights](#) (SNAP) 2013-2017 reported that 'progress on human rights outside SNAP has been significant.' It based this reflection on the Scottish Government's revised National Performance Framework and the inclusion of specific outcome on human rights:

'We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination'.

SCVO welcomes the move to place human rights at the heart of how government measures its performance. Ensuring national development policies are aligned with international human rights frameworks is essential for adopting a human rights-based approach to the budget. Aligning the NPF with the SDGs and the Scottish government's collaborative work with the voluntary sector to produce Scotland's first national review on its performance towards the SDGs are also welcome developments. The 17 SDGs seek to realise everyone's human rights with more than 90% of the targets reflecting core international human rights and labour standards.

However, [independent analysis](#) by Newcastle University found that only 15 out of the 81 (19%) Scottish National Outcome indicators had a 'closely aligned' SDG indicator. Twenty-nine of out of the 81 NPF indicators (36%) had 'relevant' SDG indicators. One implication is that Scotland could potentially deliver on the NPF without achieving its commitment to the SDGs that have international human rights standards at their heart.

The budget process itself must also form part of how Scotland measures its performance. Existing indicators used to track performance towards the National Outcome on Human Rights do not account for the vital role that spending decisions play in people's lives. Human rights indicators must be improved to include the budget process, as this provides insight into resource-related decision making that impacts on the most vulnerable groups across Scotland. Transparency is essential for the realisation of socio-economic rights. Data collected by the Open Budget Survey provides a suitable indicator to measure inclusion, participation and accountability of the Scottish government's budget process. The availability, accessibility and transparency of budgetary information at a local level are also important indicators.

Mansfield Traquair Centre, 15 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh EH3 6BB
Tel: 0131 474 8000 • Web: www.scvo.org.uk • SCVO Information Service: 0800 169 0022.

Conclusion

SCVO welcome the Equality and Human Rights Committee's focus on the delivery of national equalities and human rights in partnership with the third sector. Our response has considered the overall system in which the Scottish budget is set. This includes the importance of dynamic relationships between government and the voluntary sector at all levels that give greater equity to national and local voluntary organisations within partnerships characterised by trust, cooperation and understanding. SCVO is also calling for appropriate mechanisms that allow the voluntary sector and the public to have a meaningful say in all stages of an open budget process, a prerequisite for human rights-based and environmentally responsible budgeting. Finally, the Scottish budget must be aligned to Scotland's national priorities and policies for delivering human rights-based and environmentally sustainable approaches.

About us

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) is the national body representing the third sector. Supporting 45000 third sector organisations, 2000 members, 100,000+ staff, £1m volunteers. [View the latest sector stats](#)

SCVO's policy works to ensure that the needs and concerns of the third sector in Scotland are represented in the Scottish, United Kingdom and European Parliaments.

By acting as an authoritative and trusted voice for the sector, SCVO's policy and research output is delivered through a strong evidence base and an engaged membership.

Further details about SCVO's policy and research can be found at <https://scvo.org.uk/policy-research>

Contact

Paul Bradley

Policy and Campaigns Officer

Email: policy@scvo.org.uk / Tel: 0131 474 8000

Mansfield Traquair Centre, 15 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh EH3 6BB
Tel: 0131 474 8000 • Web: www.scvo.org.uk • SCVO Information Service: 0800 169 0022.

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Registration number SC003558.