**[Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2022/23](https://yourviews.parliament.scot/ehrc/pre-budget-2022-23/)**

**Scottish Parliament: Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee**

September 2021

**Given the main sources of government revenue should the government further increase revenue available to it, and if so how?**

The Scottish Government’s Budget for 2022-23 must ensure the human rights of Scotland’s older people are safeguarded and that there are adequate resources to allow everyone to enjoy a fulfilling, dignified and secure later life. With the number of over 65s in Scotland increasing by 256,000 in the last 20 years, the needs of Scotland’s ageing population must be met in the Budget. Efforts to reduce and tackle inequalities in Scottish society should also be prioritised.

In order to ensure the human rights of citizens and residents are protected, and enhanced, the government must understand what it will take to deliver this and not intentionally deprive themselves of the means to do this. But it is not just about the amount of money raised, but how well and effectively it is spent so that human rights are being realised to the maximum effect.

In terms of the obligation to use the maximum of the available resources, yes, but it is clearly a complex determination of what that level is or could be. Individual circumstances and the future impact of a decision needs to be considered. It circles back to whether the most effective use of the revenue raised has been made.

The Scottish Government has a range of tax raising powers, most notably income tax which generates the most significant amount of revenue of them all. Income tax varying powers on earnings are currently being used by the Scottish Government. Council Tax, Land and Buildings Transaction Tax, and Non-Domestic Rates are further significant means of raising revenue.

While Council Tax has been frozen again in the 2021/22 Scottish Budget, large numbers of older people struggle to pay this bill. In Age Scotland’s 2021 Big Survey, available at [www.age.scot/BigSurvey](http://www.age.scot/BigSurvey), we heard from more than 3,500 over 50s from across Scotland. Of the 26% who said they were financially squeezed by their bills, 46% mentioned Council Tax as one of most concern.

**How might particular groups be affected differently by efforts to raise revenues?**

It is important that revenue generation is based on ability to pay and does not further exacerbate existing inequalities, poverty and wellbeing. Decisions will have varying impacts on different groups. There is a high level of pensioner poverty in Scotland and has increased slightly in recent years. According to the Scottish Government’s own figures, 150,000 people of pension age live in relative poverty, and 120,000 of them in persistent poverty. There are many thousands of older people living just above this threshold or on low income.

As mentioned earlier, large numbers of older people struggle to pay their council tax bills and feel financially squeezed by them. Ensuring the maximum uptake of available social security and mitigating means such as Council Tax Reduction (CTR), Pension Credit, support with energy bills and energy efficiency is a vital function of any government.

It is vital that the Scottish Government are thorough in their analysis of the impact of raising any taxes at an early stage.

### Resource allocation

**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?**

This is a difficult question to answer due to the complex nature of needs across Scotland. Indeed, this is challenging for a charity focussed on older age to have a broad view because of our focus and capacity.

Through the lens of supporting and realising people’s human rights, the Scottish Government has a significant impact on this across all its work. But we don’t have sufficient information on the success of spending decisions. Although, looking at the Scottish Government’s national performance framework and the outcome on human rights, *“We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination”*,none of the indicators are improving.

There has been a huge amount of money invested and spent in response to Covid-19 and national recovery. Much of this has focussed on protecting those who are most vulnerable to the virus. But the impact of Covid-19 reaches to every aspect of society and the economy, so undoubtedly investment in the national recovery and future resilience will be required.

Covid-19 has exacerbated many pre-existing inequalities, including those to do with health. In 2020, people living in the most deprived areas of the country were 2.4 times as likely to die from the virus than those in the least deprived areas. Covid-19 has also led to a fall in life expectancy. With the gap between healthy life expectancy for men and women in the most and least deprived areas now at 25.1 and 21.5 years respectively, there must be long-term investment in preventing ill health and tackling poverty. This is particularly vital as we continue to recover from the impact of the pandemic on deconditioning and backlogs for operations, diagnosis and treatment in the health service, which will almost certainly continue to exacerbate this issue in the coming years.

Social care has long been overshadowed by the NHS in terms of funding, status and political interest, but the two work together in tandem. Social care should be seen and treated as an investment in the nation but it is clear that the current system needs increased financial investment in order to support such a critical sector. This should also ensure equity of access, choice and support people to realise their human rights. A National Care Service should also better support unpaid carers, who go above and beyond in their caring roles and are often relied on to keep the system afloat.

Scotland’s ageing population will, on average, be spending a greater proportion of their life in poor health. Our health and social care services must adapt to enable more people to live independently and well for as long as possible as they grow older. Implementing measures to help older people stay well for longer will improve quality of life immeasurably and are a valuable investment rather than a cost.

Even before the pandemic, fuel poverty impacted around 1 in 3 older households in Scotland – roughly 222,840 households. Age Scotland’s Big Survey, which 3,562 people over the age of 50 responded to, found that energy bills were by far the greatest financial cause for concern, mentioned by 82% of respondents. In addition, two thirds of respondents (67%) said that the requirement to stay at home over the last year had resulted in higher home energy bills than previous years, with 13% struggling to pay increased bills, 4% in arrears and 38% taking measures to use less energy. We are very concerned that those who were only just scraping by before the recent spike in energy prices will be pushed into fuel poverty. It is likely that many vulnerable older people will now have to make difficult choices between heating their homes sufficiently and other essentials. Further efforts to drive down fuel poverty and increase energy efficiency in homes is required to improve the wellbeing of people in Scotland.

**How might resource allocation address inequalities and the gaps in the realisation of human rights for all?**

Ensuring that human rights and equality is built into the budget process and decision making is key to this. Identifying the groups of people most at risk of not realising their rights, face barriers in doing so, and supporting the services and organisations who help them is important. Thoroughly considering the digital access divide and actively seeking to support people who aren’t online access their rights without struggle, such as the 500,000 over 60s in Scotland in this position, should be invested in. However, one of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the vast, and almost overnight, shift to a primarily digital public service provision particularly so by local authorities. This makes it considerably challenging for people to access information, speak to people who might assist them in realising their rights and get the services that they need.

Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on the health and wellbeing of older people in Scotland, demonstrated by the fact that almost 90% of deaths have been among those over the age of 65. There are numerous other ways in which older people have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic, including care home residents being left without access to loved ones; the removal of social care packages; inappropriate Do Not Attempt Resuscitation decisions; concerns about restricted access to medical treatment; ageism; loneliness and isolation; access to food; and shielding. We believe the treatment of older people during the COVID-19 pandemic has, more than ever, demonstrated the need for an independent commissioner who works to protect and promote the human rights of older people. An Older People’s Commissioner for Scotland, appointed through the Scottish Parliament, would be able to hold public bodies to account, have legal powers, and take up casework on behalf of older people. They would be a key figure helping to tackle age discrimination and ageism across Scottish society.

Everyone should be able to access the information, advice and advocacy services they need in an accessible way, and in a way which suits them. This means a choice of going online, using the telephone, face to face, and obtaining paper copies of leaflets and guides. In order for everybody to enjoy their rights as they should, the Scottish Government’s Budget should look to support organisations who provide this kind of support so that people can access their rights.

### Budget Process

**How easy is it for people to engage with the budget process?**

It is not an easy process and unless you have been immersed in it or have previous experience it can be daunting and inaccessible. If you are a member of the public it is hard to see how you would effectively engage, or be heard. If you are not digitally connected, it is even harder to engage with the process or access documentation in the first place.

There are clearly a huge number of competing priorities and voices for the Scottish Government to consider in the budget process, manifesto commitments to deliver, and reacting to unplanned events such as the Covid-19 pandemic. An individual doesn’t really have an effective way to get involved and knowing where to start is a maze. For organisations or charities, this all depends on available resource and capacity, often with singular focus on a department or specific line in mind rather than in the broader context.

Ensuring that documents and publications are written in accessible language, easy to navigate, better demonstrates the purpose of the budget line, and with the public in mind would increase understanding and scrutiny.

**Do you feel that you, your organisation, and the evidence you gather, can genuinely influence government decisions on the budget?**

As a national charity with a broad range of policy interests affecting older people and representing a large proportion of the public, we have the opportunity to work with the Scottish Government and influence policy decisions. We are able to achieve this through the development of positive relationships, demonstrating challenges faced by older people though research and their experiences, and offering insights and solutions. We work in partnership with other charities, organisations and individuals on government action groups and forums to influence change. With regard to budget decisions, these are largely reserved to individual initiatives and lines within department budgets as the broader budget work is already set within government.

**How can the links between policy commitments, allocations and achievements of rights be made more transparent?**

Ensuring the information is available and accessible in the first place is a good start and written in a way which obviously links the initial purpose, commitment, spend and outcome as it relates to rights. Clearer information about what an increase in allocation is intended to achieve and rationale for reductions would offer greater transparency and understanding.

The National Performance Framework could be a mechanism to better link the budget and rights outcomes. Understanding the impact of budget spending is important and accessible department reporting on this would help people better understand success of previous budgets or where further improvement is required.

**Want to find out more?**

As Scotland’s national charity supporting people over the age of 50, Age Scotland works to improve older people’s lives and promote their rights and interests. We aim to help people love later life, whatever their circumstances. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

Our Policy, Communications and Campaigns team research, analyse and comment on a wide range of public policy issues affecting older people in Scotland.

Our work is guided by the views and needs of older people themselves.

**Further information**

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