SHRC

Scottish
Human Rights
Commission

Annual Report

2024-25

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Foreword from our Chair


Professor Angela O'Hagan

As I write this, I have been Chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission for a little over a year. At a time when human rights feel increasingly precarious, our role as Scotland's National Human Rights Institution is more important than ever.

We have completed the first year of our **Strategic Plan for 2024-28**. It has been a year of transition, of strengthening our organisation and influencing decision makers. We have delivered against an ambitious operational plan and developed a new **theory of change** to help us understand and increase our impact.

Above all else, this has been a year about people. Our new **participation strategy** puts lived experience at the heart of all we do, embedding meaningful collaboration with rights holders across our work. From the Highlands and Islands to Castlemilk in Glasgow, Tranent in East Lothian and many parts in between, I and the other Members of the Commission have met people whose experiences remind us that human rights are not about abstract principles, but the reality of everyday life. By framing their challenges not just as local issues, but as rights violations, we strengthen and amplify their voice.

We are working with people to gather evidence on how they are experiencing human rights, building our evidence base and work to hold duty bearers to account. We are practical and pragmatic in our work. We use human rights as both a framework and a mirror to understand everyday life. For example, as part of our spotlight on measuring Scotland's progress in implementing Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we collaborated with disabled people and their families to develop a tool that that uses human rights to measure progress on moving away from institutions.

We have seen real impact from this approach. Our work on deaths in custody has been central to renewed government action on Fatal Accident Inquiries. In Parliament, our work led to Scotland's first debate on economic, social and cultural rights, helped shape discussions on human rights budgeting, and guided the tone of deliberations on the Assisted Dying Bill. Day in, day out, we work to make it impossible for legislators and decision makers to ignore human rights.

Of course, none of this can happen overnight. Much of the impact we have seen this year has been the result of years of work. And we cannot do it alone. We collaborate with rights holders, duty bearers, and with our sister NHRIs in the rest of the UK and beyond to embed a human rights based approach.

As we look ahead to next year, we will be focusing our spotlight on human rights and poverty. Our influential briefings on human rights budgeting have highlighted risks to human rights in the way that resources – and money – are distributed in Scotland. I was invited to deliver the Challenge Poverty

Week lecture in October and also met with disabled people from Glasgow Disability Alliance to understand the impact of poverty on their lives. We will be building on this in the next year to gather evidence on how poverty creates barriers to rights. We will hold duty bearers accountable to make rights real for everyone in Scotland, particularly for at risk specially-protected groups, including disabled people and racialised communities.

Internationally we have been making Scotland's experience visible through the evidence we have gathered from people in Scotland and presented to United Nations treaty bodies on the elimination of racial discrimination, the rights of disabled people, and on economic, social and cultural rights, on the human rights dimensions of the ongoing cost of living 'crisis' which has become the lived normality of many people's lives. As Scotland's National Human Rights Institution, we are the bridge between rights holders and the international system, and act as the 'glue' that binds international obligations to domestic duty bearers and everyday people in Scotland.

I am very grateful to the small staff team at the SHRC for all their efforts in bringing so many issues to light, to Members of the Commission for their dedication, and to the many individuals and organisational representatives we have worked with.

Looking forward, I am excited to continue our planned work but alert to the changing external environment where rights and freedoms are under threat domestically and internationally. As the respect for the rule of law and the dignity and equality of individuals, and particularly marginalised rights holders, are increasingly challenged in political and social discourses, I call upon all of us in Scotland to 'recognise the humanity of the person standing beside us' and work together to ensure that respect is what unites us and gives common purpose to our public authorities, government and parliament and our communities.

Professor Angela O'Hagan
Chair of the Commission

We are working with people to gather evidence on how they are experiencing human rights, building our evidence base and work to hold duty bearers to account. We are practical and pragmatic in our work.

About the Scottish Human Rights Commission

Our Purpose

We are Scotland's human rights watchdog. We are the National Human Rights Institution for Scotland, with "A" status accreditation from the UN.

Our job is to work with people and communities to understand their experiences, hold public bodies to account where human rights are not upheld, and help them to do better.

Our Vision

A fairer Scotland where human rights are respected, understood, and where there is justice when things go wrong

Our Mission

To be a strong independent authority that works collaboratively to uphold everyone's human rights in Scotland

Our Values

The Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) delivers our work through the lens of a human rights based approach, known as the PANEL principles.

- **P**articipation
- **A**ccountability
- **N**on-discrimination, Equality
- **E**mpowerment
- **L**egality

Our values bring this to life.

We are accessible

We involve people in our work on issues that affect their rights and ensure that our work is understood by all.

We are independent

We hold duty bearers to account by monitoring human rights standards in Scotland, the system of accountability, and using our mandate to take action where required. We are accountable to the people of Scotland.

We uphold everyone's human rights

Human rights belong to everyone. We recognise where bias, discrimination and power dynamics have an impact on human rights violations, and we take action on rights and groups most at risk.

We educate and engage

We help everyone to understand their human rights and make sure that decision makers are fully supported to develop policy and practice which affect people's rights.

We are authoritative, expert and trusted

We keep watch over national and international human rights law to help duty bearers understand the impact of their plans and actions on their human rights obligations, ensuring that this is rooted in rule of law, and easily understood.

Our Strategic Objectives for 2024-28

Purpose

We will deliver and extend our mandate to improve accountability for human rights in Scotland; and inform the Scottish Parliament on the human rights implications of proposed legislation.

People

We will ensure that the SHRC is informed by, and works alongside, people and communities throughout Scotland who have direct knowledge of how human rights are being experienced; and use our mandate to focus on poverty, places of detention; access to justice; and the rights of at risk specially-protected groups.

Performance

We will monitor and report on how human rights are being experienced in Scotland, and play our part in embedding a stronger human rights culture.

Scottish Human Rights Commission

Purpose

Purpose

Our **Strategic Plan 2024-28** made clear our objective to work more closely with the Scottish Parliament. Our work is making a difference: the Scottish Human Rights Commission, and human rights as a concept, are gaining more prominence in the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Government and among decision makers. Independent research identified 228 mentions of the Scottish Human Rights Commission and 1,197 mentions of human rights over the course of 2024-25 in the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government publications. This is an increase of 85% from 2023/24. These key audiences are vital in making real change to realise human rights in Scotland.

In January 2025, in a first for the SHRC, the Scottish Parliament held a debate on the findings of our report on **Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Highlands and Islands**.

Parliamentarians, government officials, regulators, auditors, and civil society actors have reported gaining stronger understanding of their human rights obligations and the application of rights frameworks in areas such as legislative reform, fiscal scrutiny, service planning, and detention monitoring. Our work is helping to shift some organisations from broad values-based commitments toward more practical, evidence-based human rights implementation.

In early 2025, the SHRC provided evidence into the Scottish Government's consultation on an Equality and Human Rights Mainstreaming Strategy, where we said:

"Adopting a human rights based approach as standard informs decision making about public expenditure and resource allocation which prioritises outcomes for people to live well in their communities as their rights are respected, protected and fulfilled."

- Scottish Government officials across multiple portfolios are engaging more seriously with human rights principles, particularly in relation to human rights budgeting and public service reform discussions.
- Audit Scotland is exploring how human rights standards and principles can support their work, with our advice and collaboration.
- Parliamentary committees, including the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice and Local Government Committees, have increasingly used human rights concepts as the lens in their scrutiny work and participation, following our evidence and briefings. This year, SHRC was mentioned in fifteen different parliamentary committees.
- The SHRC's evidence and reports are informing Parliamentary business – in 2024-25 there was one Members Business Debate were two Committee evidence sessions focused solely on our findings (about ESC Rights in the Highlands and Islands, and about the realisation of independent living for disabled people under Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).
- SHRC was mentioned in four oral questions and one written question to Parliament. There were a further 47 questions about human rights.
- Our Chair met with the First Minister to discuss human rights and with Cabinet Ministers to share updates on other areas of rights in focus.
- Our Chair and Executive Director met with Lord Ponsonby in London to discuss incoming UK Government commitment to Human Rights alongside Chairs and Chief Executives of the other GB and Northern Ireland NHRIs.

What we did

We worked throughout the year to ensure that a human rights framework is at the heart of policy and practice in Scotland. You can find all of our briefings, consultation responses and letters **on our website**.

Briefings, consultation responses and letters

April 2024

- We **briefed MSPs ahead of Stage 1 Debate on the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill**

May 2024

- We wrote **a joint letter to the Lord Advocate on the Deaths in Custody Review** implementation progress, alongside His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons Scotland and Families Outside
- We **wrote to the First Minister asking for urgent clarification** on the Scottish Government's proposals for the Human Rights Bill
- We **submitted to the Scottish Government's Consultation** on the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024
- We wrote to the Conveners of the relevant Cross Party Groups and Parliamentary Committees on the **final report of the follow up procedure of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities UK Inquiry**

June 2024

- We **submitted a response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee's** National Performance Framework Inquiry into proposed National Outcomes

July 2024

- We wrote to the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise to **highlight the barriers faced by the victims of historic forced adoption**

August 2024

- We **gave evidence to the Health, Sport and Social Care Committee's Stage 1 consideration of the on the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill**

October 2024

- We gave oral evidence on Stage 2 of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill and **followed up in writing**

December 2024

- **State of the Nation: a briefing to Parliament on domestic monitoring of civil and political rights in Scotland**
- We **wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government** about the people of Castlemilk, Glasgow being denied their rights to food, transport and health
- We wrote to the Bill Team about the **Adults With Incapacity Amendment Act Consultation**

February 2025

- We **submitted evidence to the Right To Addiction Recovery (Scotland) Bill Stage1**
- We produced **an analysis of the Scottish budget for 2025-26** through a human rights lens, to inform MSPs and other decision-makers
- We submitted a **report to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**
- We gave **evidence to the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body Supported Bodies Landscape Review Committee**
- We **responded to the consultation on the Scottish Government's Equality and Human Rights Mainstreaming Strategy**
- We wrote **a joint letter to Scottish Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers on restraint and seclusion**, alongside the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, the Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland and The Promise Scotland

March 2025

- We published a **position statement on Sex and Gender**
- We **wrote to the Convenor of the Criminal Justice Committee** on our work on human rights in places of detention

SHRC in the media

Our media and communications work is a vital part of how we promote human rights.

This year, the volume of our media coverage increased by 19%, amplifying our reach and influence across human rights issues. SHRC spokespeople and publications were featured across almost every media outlet in Scotland, including STV, BBC and Channel 4 TV news, radio, and national and regional newspapers. The biggest news stories of the year were the launch of our report on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Highlands and Islands and the announcement of the appointment of our new Chair, Professor Angela O'Hagan.

Our social media presence has also grown across the year; our followers across all platforms increased by 10%. Our posts had almost half a million impressions in 2024/25. We are learning that social media content that focuses on people – on the human side of human rights – is most interesting to our audiences and these posts were widely shared by civil society organisations, public servants, and elected representatives. This public engagement is helping to shift how stakeholders talk about human rights, with some organisations and individuals citing our framing in their own advocacy, funding proposals, and parliamentary work.

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)(b)(c)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices

Scottish Human Rights Commission

People

In line with our strategic plan, we are holding the state to account on how human rights are being experienced, working directly with the people who know best: rights holders. As Scotland's Human Rights Watchdog we take international human rights standards and use these as tools to assess compliance and evidence the realities for people. This informs our findings and educates people, including duty bearers about what human rights obligations mean in practice. Our Spotlight projects shine a light on key human rights issues in Scotland which are of particular concern to us and take a deeper look at how best to address them.

Spotlight: Economic, social and cultural rights in the Highlands and Islands

What we did

Economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights are about the things we all need to live a life free from fear and want. They include things like the right to housing, food, health and a cultural life. These rights are guaranteed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which is ratified by the UK Government, and which the Scottish Government is working to incorporate into Scots Law.

We realised there was a real gap in data about whether these rights were being realised for people in the Highlands and Islands. We spent six weeks visiting twenty towns across six local authority areas and talking to hundreds of people to understand how they are experiencing these rights.

We learned that there are significant failures to meet these basic rights. Many people were unable to afford housing, to heat their homes or to travel to access healthcare.

Impact

When we released our report on ESC rights in the Highlands and Islands, people took notice. The findings gained blanket coverage across broadcast, print and online media. In January 2025, the Scottish Parliament held a debate on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Highlands and Islands, in direct response to our findings.

We now have clear evidence of the gaps in human rights – the next step is for duty bearers to take urgent action to meet their obligations. Being geographically remote must not mean that people are remote from power – or from their rights.

"Too many people in Highland and Islands are hungry, homeless, without access to healthcare, and the basics for everyday life."
Researcher

"If there is one thing we would like Parliament to know—stop ignoring us and our problems."
Teacher, Highlands and Islands

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)(b)(c)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices (1) (b)
- Section 5: Power to co-operate . with others (1) (a)
- Section 16: Publications of reports (2)


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Spotlight: Moving from institutions to independent living

What we did

Every person has the right to live independently and make choices about their life: this is enshrined Article 19 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRPD). Some people with learning disabilities and autistic people in Scotland are being denied this right: they have no choice but to live in hospital or other institutions.

The Scottish Government's "Coming Home" plan was supposed to greatly reduce the number of people living in institutions by 2024. We worked with human rights defenders to make a film about their experiences and produce a toolkit using human rights indicators to measure progress on moving away from institutions.

We learned that most of the people who should have come home are still institutionalised; we found a clear gulf between the rhetoric of taking a human rights-based approach, and the reality of putting that into practice.

Impact

People who took part in the project described feeling seen, respected, and empowered. Many said it was the first time they had been asked to share their experiences in a way that recognised their rights.

There was a lot of interest in our work. It was covered on STV and BBC news and across other media. The Scottish Parliament's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee were so concerned about what we found that they specially convened a session where we gave evidence. They have been in touch with duty bearers for progress updates. We have recommended that the Scottish Government should urgently develop a fresh action plan to deliver the outstanding commitment of Coming Home, which is concretely grounded in the CRPD Committee's guidelines and addresses all components of deinstitutionalisation, including mechanisms of redress.

"Basically, you don't get back out again. Time goes on and there is no end date in sight and it's very sad, because it's not a way to live... There has to be change, because nobody can live in that environment."

Ruth Hughes, Human Rights Defender

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)(c)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices (1)(b)
- Section 5: Power to co-operate . with others (1) (a)(b)
- Section 16: Publications of reports (2)

Spotlight: Absolute rights in places of detention

What we did

When people are detained, the state has sole responsibility for upholding their human rights.

We worked as part of the UK National Preventive Mechanism to assess human rights in prisons and forensic mental health settings in Scotland. We were most concerned with the right to life (Article 2) and the right to be free from inhuman and degrading treatment (Article 3), which are absolute rights that cannot be limited or restricted under any circumstances.

We concluded that little progress had been made against 29 international human rights recommendations.

83 per cent of recommendations had not been implemented in Scotland, with no meaningful progress over the last decade. Only five recommendations showed any progress, and not one single recommendation was marked as complete.

The research highlighted gaps in human rights protections including:

- Widespread use of segregation or solitary confinement and a failure to meet the minimum requirement of two hours of human contact per day
- Inadequate provision of mental healthcare for people in prisons
- No specialised high secure psychiatric unit for women prisoners in Scotland resulting in women not getting access to mental healthcare or being transferred 300 miles to a facility in England
- Gaps in the system for investigations of deaths in prisons
- No independent system for investigating deaths of people detained in mental health settings in Scotland

Under human rights laws, absolute rights like the right to life and protection from inhumane and degrading treatment must never be breached.

Impact

The **Review, Recommend, Repeat report** attracted widespread TV, radio and press attention, reaching over half of the population of Scotland.

Since publication, we have seen important changes. The State Hospital has begun developing high secure services for women, in line with our recommendations.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs has announced an independent review of Fatal Accident Inquiries for deaths in state custody, and the establishment of a National Oversight Mechanism to provide independent oversight of such deaths.

"Absolute rights are the most fundamental of human rights and there is no excuse for allowing these breaches or failing to act when these rights are at risk.

"The level of inaction and delay is no longer acceptable, and we want to see these important human rights concerns addressed by the Scottish Government with the urgency they deserve."

Shelley Gray, Member of the Commission

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)(b)(c)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices (1)(b)
- Section 5: Power to co-operate . with others (1)(a)
- Section 16: Publications of reports (2)

Spotlight: Access to justice map

What we did

We all have human rights. An important part of the human rights framework is being able to access justice when things go wrong. **To learn about the human rights information, advice and advocacy services available to people in Scotland, we commissioned research alongside the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland.**

- We learned that there are 262 services across Scotland, but only 38 of these offer legal representation
- People in rural areas have less access to human rights support. Many services are in the central belt
- The most common human rights issues covered include mental health, housing, disability, health, and social security or benefits.
- There are less services covering issues such as biometrics, AI, privacy, freedom of expression and workers' rights

Impact

We used the research to create maps of the human rights services available across Scotland. These will be helpful for people to learn what support is available in their area. **The map was published on our website** and was one of our top ten most viewed news items for the year. This map will also allow service providers to identify where there are gaps.

"Human rights law says that everyone has the right to access justice when things go wrong. That includes being able to access information, advice and advocacy on human rights."
Professor Angela O'Hagan, Chair of the Commission

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights (1) (3)
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)(b)(c)
- Section 5: Power to co-operate . with others (1) (a) (b)

Spotlight: Cultural recognition for Scottish Gypsy Travellers

What we are doing

We all have the right to enjoy and contribute to cultural life. However, people don't always have equal access to this right. People from the Scottish Gypsy Traveller Community have told us they were victims of the 'Tinker Experiment', where members of the community were forcibly settled into static accommodation sites from the 1940s onwards. This scheme was supported by the UK Government and Scottish local authorities.

People were forced to live in culturally unsuitable accommodation in the form of wooden huts – which lacked proper heating and plumbing until the early 2000s – and made to attend schools where they say they experienced significant discrimination, including the removal of children from families.

In 2024 we started working with victims to understand their experience and the impact it has had on their human rights, past and present. In partnership with **Rajpot** – a voluntary organisation working to give indigenous and cultural communities a voice – and an archival researcher, victims are collating evidence to develop an archive documenting the 'Tinker Experiment'.

Several human rights treaties protect the rights of Gypsy Travellers to preserve their culture and seek redress. These include the **United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)** and the **Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM)**. The UK Government has ratified both treaties (CERD in 1969 and FCNM in 1998) which means they have agreed to uphold the rights contained within them.

What's next

After 15 years of campaigning and advocacy, the victims of the experiment finally received an apology from the First Minister of Scotland in June 2025. The SHRC will use the evidence from the victims, alongside our legal analysis, to produce and publish a Human Rights Assessment of the 'Tinker Experiment', its ongoing impact and steps to redress for its victims.

"When I got showed the Tinker Experiment thing, I just burst out crying, I thought: how could they do this to us?"
Project participant

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)(c)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices (1)(b)
- Section 5: Power to co-operate . with others (1) (a)(b)
- Section 16: Publications of reports (2)

Performance

Our strategic objective focused on performance includes monitoring and reporting on how human rights are being experienced in Scotland and playing our part in embedding a stronger human rights culture.

Impact

Our monitoring work has an impact in Scotland and beyond. Within Scotland, parliamentarians, government officials, regulators, auditors, and civil society actors have reported gaining a stronger understanding of international human rights obligations through our work. Beyond Scotland, our engagement in UN and Council of Europe monitoring processes reinforces accountability beyond domestic structures. Our work has been held up as an international example of good practice. For example, we were invited by the Council of Europe to present at a training session for NHRIs and Equality Bodies on our engagement with Council of Europe Social Committee. We shared our approach to engaging and directly involving rights holders in our monitoring work at the ENNHRI Leadership Academy in Poland, and with the UNCRPD Working Group in Berlin. Finally, our **Strategic Plan 2024-28** has been highlighted by the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions as an example of best practice in communicating about the role of an NHRI.

Our international work

What we did

The Scottish Human Rights Commission is accredited as the United Nations (UN)'s trusted organisation to provide impartial evidence on the enjoyment of human rights in Scotland.

We promote human rights within Scotland and monitor how rights are being realised domestically. We report on these findings to contribute to international human rights treaty monitoring. This year, we:

- Promoted the final outcomes of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as part of the follow up to their 2016 inquiry
- Submitted evidence to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) review, alongside a supplementary lived experience report
- Submitted evidence to the UK review by the Committee who monitor the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- Met with the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) as part of their convention monitoring visit to Scotland
- Spoke at the UN Human Rights Council, the most senior UN dedicated Human Rights body, to share our findings on disabled people's human rights
- Submitted a report to the Council of Europe Social Committee on the cost of living crisis
- We are proud to be part of international networks. We work closely with our UK sister NHRIs as part of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) and the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).
- We presented at the GANHRI Annual Assembly (Conference) on the rights of women and girls and non-discrimination, and on Scotland's application of the UN International Principles on Human Rights and Drug Policy.
- We submitted an update on the state of the rule of law in Scotland, as part of the ENNHRI report on the Rule of Law in Europe.
- SHRC attended the four NHRI meeting in Dublin in February 2025 to discuss emerging issues of human rights concern with our counterparts in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Ireland.

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights (1) (b) (3) (4)(b)
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices
- Section 16: Publications of reports (2)

The State of the Nation

What we did

In our strategic plan, we committed to hold public bodies to account where human rights are not upheld and help them to do better.

As part of this, we produced our first ever **'State of the Nation' report** for Human Rights Day on December 10. It gives a big-picture snapshot of human rights in Scotland, to support the Scottish Parliament and other public bodies to understand and meet their obligations under human rights law.

This first report focused on civil and political rights: the rights that protect people from harms by the state and rights to participate in decisions fairly. These include the right to a fair trial and to freedom of assembly and expression. We found a vast array of challenges for human rights, including failures to take action to protect people from violations, often for many years. The report urged all state institutions to pay attention to the human rights implications of all their decisions, from planning and budgeting to delivery and review.

Impact

The State of the Nation is part of our wider work engaging with the Scottish Parliament. In the last year, we saw an 85% increase in mentions of the Scottish Human Rights Commission at the Scottish Parliament and almost 1200 mentions of human rights.

We secured a high profile editorial in a Sunday newspaper about the State of the Nation, as well as news stories in other press. The State of the Nation and our other work is giving parliamentarians the information they need to address these very real human rights challenges. Next year, our report will focus on economic, social and cultural Rights.

"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home".
Eleanor Roosevelt, 1958

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights (1)(b) (4)(a)(b)
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1)(a)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices
- Section 16: Publications of reports (2)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Incorporation

What happened

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) protects the human rights of children. In July 2024, Scotland was the first UK nation to incorporate the UNCRC into law. It means that public bodies have a duty to embed children's rights and that breaches of those rights can be challenged in court.

Impact

As part of the incorporation, SHRC gained new powers, alongside the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. For the first time, we have the power to intervene in legal proceedings or to bring proceedings in our own name.

We have recruited a Legal and Policy Coordinator for UNCRC. We are working to develop a litigation strategy to support this work.

"Incorporation of children's rights is essential for children and young people to secure accountability when the rights that they already have under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are not adequately considered by public bodies in Scotland. That is also the view of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child."
Jan Savage, Executive Director, SHRC

How it meets our mandate

The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 granted new powers for the Commission to take legal action in relation to children's rights. Section 4A of the Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act 2006 was inserted as follows:

"For the purposes of its general duty, the Commission may: (a) bring proceedings under section 7(1)(a) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 (b) intervene in proceedings in which a person claims that a public authority has acted (or proposes to act) in a way which is made unlawful by section 6(1) of that Act.

Human Rights Bill

What we did

For more than a decade, SHRC called for the development of a Human Rights Bill for Scotland. We were disappointed that the Scottish Government chose to delay the introduction of the Bill until the 2026 session of Parliament. We are concerned that the commitment to incorporation may not be upheld. Human rights become real when government bodies and public services are accountable for violations of human rights. Greater legal protection can help by providing a clear baseline for human rights enjoyment by people in Scotland – and access to remedies when rights are violated.

Impact

We gave evidence to the Equalities, Human Rights, and Civil Justice Committee of the Scottish Parliament to explain the significant impacts the delay of the Human Rights Bill would have to rights holders. Our Chair has publicly shared our disappointment, including writing newspaper editorials and making keynote speeches at conferences. We continue to offer guidance to the Scottish Government through our membership of the Incorporation and Implementation Oversight Board and the Human Rights Capability Building Working Group.

"The incoming parliament following the 2026 elections has the opportunity to bring rights home for people in Scotland and to honour long-standing commitments to incorporate human rights."
Professor Angela O'Hagan, Chair

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights (1) (2)(b) (3)
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)(b)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices (1) (a)

Human rights budgeting

What we did

Scotland's budget is more than a financial plan — it is a statement of values and priorities. Taking a human rights based approach means considering the impact on people's rights when deciding how money is raised, allocated, and spent.

We assess Scotland's budgetary process in line with the **International Budget Partnership's (IBP) Global Open Budget Survey (OBS)**. In July 2024, we published our second **report on Scotland's performance in the OBS**, looking at transparency, public participation and budget oversight.

We also produced an **analysis of the budget for 2025/26** through a human rights lens and ran a series of briefings: Rights at the Heart of Scotland's Budget.

Impact

We are seeing a shift in the way that decision-makers approach budgeting. Scottish Government officials in fiscal, equality, and budgeting directorates have engaged more seriously with human rights principles and rights-based frameworks. Specifically, Audit Scotland is exploring how human rights standards and principles can support their work, with our advice and collaboration.

There has been progress, but challenges persist. We will continue to push for budget decisions to be tied to international human rights obligations.

> **"Budgets are a key sign of a government's values. So, if human rights are not in there, what's being said is that they are not a value worth counting."**
> **Professor Aoife Nolan, President of the Council of Europe's European Committee of Social Rights**

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights
- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights (1) (a)(b)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices (1) (b)

Strengthening our organisation

What we did

To meet our mandate to realise human rights in Scotland, we need to be a strong, high performing organisation. We have worked hard to improve our governance, staffing and processes.

This year, we welcomed the chance to demonstrate our effectiveness and call for a further strengthening of our mandate as part of the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body Supported Body Landscape Review. The SHRC briefed this Committee with written evidence, and our Chair and Executive Director provided Oral Evidence at the end of April 2024.

Governance Review

In 2023, we undertook an independent governance review to clarify governance roles and responsibilities through new standing orders, a revised code of conduct for commissioners, and structured delegation protocols.

These changes aim to increase role clarity, strengthen decision-making processes, and provide a more constructive and transparent framework for strategic discussions. We published our **new Code of Governance** in 2024.

Our Internal Auditors provided a Strong Assurance report on the progress we are making to deliver on these recommendations in 2024-25, with 85% of recommendations achieved. This work continues into 2025-26.

Theory of Change

We developed a **Theory of Change** to measure and articulate the impact of our work. This framework guides SHRC's actions through our 2024-28 Strategic Plan.

The Theory of Change Map plots out specifically and simply:

- What we do
- Who with
- How they feel
- What they learn and gain
- What they do differently
- What difference does it make?

We plan and monitor our work to understand how our activities contribute to measurable improvements in the realisation of human rights. This annual report is informed by ongoing data collection, project pathways, and feedback mechanisms, with the Theory of Change as a framework.

Participation Strategy

We are committed to ensuring that all people – human rights defenders and, most critically, victims of rights violations – can meaningfully engage in our work. In 2024, we published a four-year **Participation Strategy**. In this first year, we have built staff capacity through trauma informed and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills training. We co-produced work alongside disabled people and carers as part of **our work on deinstitutionalisation** and we are co-designing and co-delivering a Spotlight Project on the **Cultural Recognition of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers**.

We are working to listen to and amplify the voices of rights holders and communities. Members of the Commission met with the Castlemilk Housing and Human Rights Lived Experience Board, to learn about their campaign to bring a supermarket to the area. By framing this as part of the right to food set out in Article 11 of the United Nations Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the group have strengthened their ask and even brought it to the attention of the UN. The group has since released a human rights handbook for communities, which includes a foreword from our Chair. Our Chair also provided the foreword for and attended the launch of the Cable Wynds residents human rights monitoring report, highlighting the unacceptable conditions of housing in this part of Edinburgh. We believe that we are stronger when we work alongside people, communities and organisations.

Accessible and inclusive

We have been working to make our work more accessible and inclusive. We produced **our second six-year British Sign Language plan** to empower BSL users to name and claim their rights. We have also done an accessibility audit of our publications, and all of our new publications are available in a format that is accessible to people who use screen readers.

"Any meaningful commitment to human rights must start from the ground up, with recognising the humanity of the people standing beside you."

SHRC Community Stakeholder

Strengthening our team

We have worked to strengthen our team: both the membership of the Commission and the staff who support them.

Commission

We were delighted to welcome Professor Angela O'Hagan as the new Chair of the Commission in August 2024. Since then, the Scottish Parliament has appointed two new Commission Members. Rosemary Agnew and Aaliya Seyal will begin work in September 2025. They will serve alongside Shelley Gray and Dr Claire Methven O'Brien, who were appointed in September 2022, meaning the Commission now has a full team of five Members including the Chair leading our strategic direction. Commission Member Jim Farish stepped down in November 2024, after making a significant contribution.

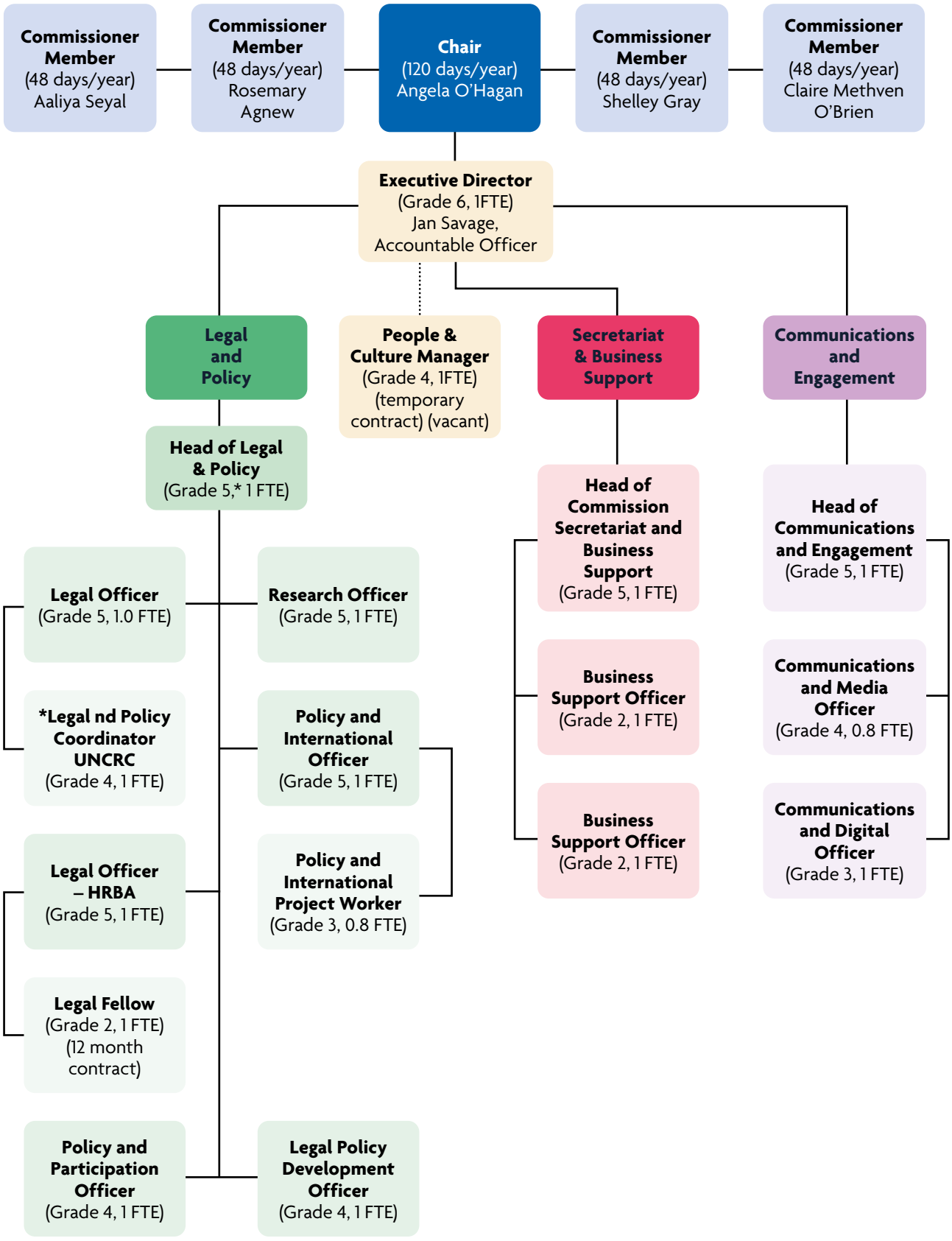
Staff

In 2024/25, we recruited for a number of senior posts in our staff team including a new Interim Head of Legal and Policy and an Interim Head of Communications and Engagement. We also recruited a Legal and Policy Coordinator for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was incorporated into Scottish Law in 2024. All of these new staff members began working with the SHRC in spring of 2025.

We also recruited a second Legal Fellow, who joined our Legal and Policy team for 12 months from September 2024. Following this success, we are extending our Legal Fellow programme into its third year.

Scottish Human Rights Commission

Diagram 1: Organisational Structure Chart at 1 September 2025



Financial summary

The SHRC is funded through the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body (SPCB). For financial year 2024-25, the SHRC was originally allocated a budget of £1,495k (2023-24; £1,378k). This included an allocation of approved Contingency Funding of £39k (2023-24: £37K) for the recruitment of a new 12 month fixed term Legal Fellow position to the Scottish Human Rights Fellowship scheme. The SHRC surrendered £35k following agreement of the pay award in June 2025, which reduced the amount available for drawdown to £1,460k.

	2024-25 Budget £'000	2024-25 Expenditure £'000
Comprehensive Net Expenditure	1,495	1,435
Capital Expenditure	-	-
Total Expenditure	**1,495**	**1,435**
Accruals adjustments:		
Non-cash items		(2)
Working capital (including cash)		(28)
Cash Funding from SPCB		**1,405**

Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2025

	Notes	2024-25 £'000	2023-24 £'000
Staff costs	3	1,156	1,018
Depreciation	6,7	2	4
Other Expenditures	5	277	281
Total expenditure for the year		**1,435**	**1,303**
Income		-	-
Net expenditure		**1,435**	**1,303**

Other expenditures

	2024-25 £'000	2023-24 £'000
Operational costs	76	63
External Engagement Costs (Non-Consultancy)	35	88
IT costs	24	24
Website	13	12
Training, conferences and subscriptions	29	15
Auditor's remuneration	25	25
Printing, stationery & library costs	21	4
General office costs	10	20
Travel, subsistence and hospitality	26	19
Legal and consultancy fees	6	8
Recruitment Costs	12	3
	277	**281**

The above total includes £20,070 for external auditor's remuneration for 2023-24 of £20,460 (2023-24: £20,070). There were no non-audit fees for 2023-24 (2023-24: none).

This report is laid before the Scottish Parliament under Section 15 of the Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act 2006

SHRC

Scottish
Human Rights
Commission

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