

*Bob Doris MSP,
Convenor
Public Service Reform Committee,
The Scottish Parliament,
Edinburgh,
EH99 1SP
Via email only psr.committee@parliament.scot*

Date: 8 October 2026
Our reference: SHRC202674

Dear Convenor,

Report: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the South of Scotland

On behalf of the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC), I would like to formally share with the Committee the SHRC's report on the current enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights in the South of Scotland. This is the second report in our programme of local monitoring of economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights across Scotland, following our 2024 report on the Highlands and Islands. The monitoring work was undertaken under section 4(1)(b) of the Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act 2006.

These findings are particularly relevant to the work of the Public Service Reform Committee. The report provides direct evidence of how people experience public services in practice and highlights a number of issues that will be important to consider as Scotland develops and implements its public service reform agenda. In particular, it demonstrates how a human rights framework can help assess whether changes to public services are delivering better outcomes for people and communities.

The report draws on direct testimony from rights holders alongside a review of more than 200 reports and policy documents. It identifies significant challenges in the enjoyment of ESC rights across the South of Scotland and shows where services

and policies are progressing, where rights are deteriorating, and where current provision appears to fall short of international human rights standards.

Across all the rights examined, we did not find a single right for which all the conditions of adequacy required under international law are fully met. In practical terms, this means that services, goods and systems are not consistently available, accessible, affordable, acceptable, adaptable or of sufficient quality.

This is particularly important in the context of public service reform. The report identifies three recurring barriers across different services and rights: accessibility, affordability and fragility. People told us about services which may formally exist but cannot be reached because of transport, geography, digital exclusion, poverty, disability or caring responsibilities. We also heard about the financial costs associated with accessing essential services and about increasing reliance on third-sector organisations, volunteers and short-term funding to fill gaps in public provision.

The findings demonstrate the importance of putting the realisation of rights in people's everyday lives at the heart of public service reform. A human rights approach provides a framework for doing this.

The report also illustrates the importance of flexibility and local responsiveness in public service design. The experiences of rights holders in the South of Scotland demonstrate that a single model of provision will not always produce equal outcomes across different communities. We therefore recommend that national policy allows services to respond to different geographic and community circumstances, and that public service reform avoids centralisation where this would create additional barriers to accessing rights.

More broadly, our recommendations call for public bodies to take clear, strategic and measurable action to improve the accessibility, availability, acceptability and quality of services. The monitoring framework used in this report can provide a practical tool for assessing whether plans, strategies and reforms are translating into improved outcomes for people.

We encourage the Public Service Reform Committee to consider the findings of this report as part of its scrutiny of the public service reform agenda. In particular, we hope the Committee will consider how human rights can provide both a guiding framework for reform and a means of measuring whether reform is succeeding. Ensuring that lived experience, equality, accessibility, accountability and the progressive realisation of rights are embedded in reform will be essential if changes

to public services are to deliver meaningful improvements for people and communities.

The SHRC would be very happy to provide further evidence to the Committee on the findings and recommendations in our report.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'A O'Hagan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Angela O'Hagan
Chair

Enclosed: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the South of Scotland Report