Equalities in the Budgeting Process

Following on from the recent request on Equalities in the Budgeting Process, Finance and Corporate Resources have compiled the response below.

Before the specific questions are addressed, it is felt important to highlight the Council’s approach to the Equality Agenda since 2007/08.

Introduction

Since 2007/08, South Lanarkshire Council has had equality impact assessment embedded into its strategy, policy and function, development and review processes to ensure that across the Council decisions are being taken with the appropriate due regard to our equalities duties. This helps to ensure that any negative impact is identified early on and mitigated against where possible.

The Council undertook a cross Resource policy review using Equality Impact Assessment in 2008 identifying 385 strategies and policies and since then has had the process as a key part of all decision making.

With specific regard to budgeting, the Council’s efficiency savings exercise has had Equality Impact Assessment as a focus for helping identify areas of concern and limiting or removing negative impact. Annually savings proposals and the budget strategy itself in the form of potential investment in Council priorities have been assessed and consulted upon: through our budget consultation process, key equality groups both within the Council and externally have been involved in providing feedback and guidance for decision makers.

The Impact Assessment process involves senior officers across the Council’s service departments who complete the necessary documentation alongside the Council’s Diversity Adviser (Equalities).

When complete, the assessments have been made publicly available on the Council’s website. Further to this, the consultation feedback and the Equality Impact Assessments themselves have been used to brief all elected members, executive directors and the chief executive throughout budget negotiations.

The questions posed, along with the Council’s response to each, are detailed below.

Equalities in the Budgeting Process

How were equalities issues taken into consideration in allocating budgets in 2012-13? (Please describe the process undertaken)
In establishing the Council’s financial strategy for 2012/13, input is requested and received from each of the Council’s Resources in terms of changes to service requirements moving forward. These changes will likely result in a financial pressure and this pressure may be limited to an equality groups within the cross-section of the population.

These changes to service requirements are informed through the work of the policy/strategy teams within Resources who work to identify service areas where demand is changing/increasing. For 2012/13, the most notable for the Council is within Social Work Resources and Older People Care. The demographics of South Lanarkshire show an ever increasing older population and this has an obvious impact on the level of Older People Care being requested/provided. Demographic change in Older People Care is an area of investment in the Council’s Strategy moving forward.

During 2011/12, the Council has implemented an approach to Home Care Delivery entitled Supporting Your Independence. This has been acknowledged in the Council’s financial strategy moving forward. As per the Council's EIA policy, this strategy has undergone assessment to ensure that the Council has due regard to its duties.

Was the approach taken for the 2012-13 budget any different from that taken in 2011-12? (If YES, please describe what changed in your approach)

No, the approach taken for the 2012/13 budget was no different to the 2011/12 process. Equality Impact assessments and the consultation process are embedded in the budget process for the Council.

Can you provide any examples of how equalities considerations influenced agreed budgets? (Please provide up to THREE examples)

An example of how equalities considerations influenced agreed budgets is shown through the Council’s savings authorisation process. Each saving proposed is assessed for relevance to equality duties and where negative impact may occur, mitigating action is identified or justification provided.

An example in recent years is the proposed closure of Public Conveniences. Through EIA and consultation with a number of equality groups such as Seniors Together in South Lanarkshire and the South Lanarkshire Disability Partnership, it was identified that whilst the public Conveniences were not statutory, removal would cause difficulties in our communities. To that end, decision makers were fully informed of the potential impact and decisions were taken on that basis.

Equalities in mainstream services

For your three most significant mainstream services (in terms of cost), please provide details of:
a) The total budget for this service in 2011-12 and 2012-13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>2011/12 £m</th>
<th>2012/13 £m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education Resources</td>
<td>284.418</td>
<td>285.990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work Resources</td>
<td>139.955</td>
<td>137.554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Resources</td>
<td>65.471</td>
<td>67.465</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) The impact (positive or negative) that this service has on equality groups

The Council takes the view that all of our citizens belong to multiple equality groups. Therefore, all services impact on equality groups. In terms of these services overall, they provide specific equality related services in line with statutory duties and budgets set. As noted previously, budgets are set and policies are implemented in line with equality duties.

c) The impact (if any) that any budget changes have had on equality groups

As noted previously, budget changes are assessed through the Equalities Impact Assessment methodology. The results are published on-line and consulted upon if required.

Equality considerations are an integral part of the decision making process where the members are made aware of the potential impact, positive or negative, in terms of the decision they take.

Service provision for equalities groups

Council View: as noted above, the Council takes the view that across the cross-section of citizens, every individual falls into an equality group. Therefore, all services impact on equality groups. The Council does not see this as an area of specific focus. With this in mind, the following questions have not been answered.

For up to THREE services with a specific focus or provision for equalities groups, please provide details of—

a) The total budget for this service in 2011-12 and 2012-13

b) The impact that this service has on equality groups

c) The impact (if any) that any budget changes have had on equality groups
Mainstreaming equalities

What specialist services or programmes have been, or are being altered, in the interests of mainstreaming?

Since 2007/08, South Lanarkshire Council has had equality impact assessment embedded into its strategy, policy and function, development and review processes to ensure that across the Council decisions are being taken with the appropriate due regard to our equalities duties. This helps to ensure that any negative impact is identified early on and mitigated against where possible.

What monitoring is in place to ensure that the relevant equality groups continue to access an appropriate service?

The Council is clear that it has obligations to meet in terms of Public Sector Equalities’ duties. In line with the recently implemented Public Sector Equality Duties, the Council is reviewing its service monitoring processes to capture all relevant equality data. However, the Council has a strong history of ongoing consultation and involvement of a broad section of its communities through its Citizens’ Panel and other representative groups such as Seniors Together, Carers’ Network, Disability Partnership, Youth Council and Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Group.

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