



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

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Ms Christina McKelvie
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writer : Malcolm Burr
our reference : MB/LMC/L0903
your reference :
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Dear Ms McKelvie,

EQUALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS WITHIN THE BUDGET PROCESS

Thank you for your letter of 16 February 2018 requesting information on the Comhairle's approach to its budget process.

The Comhairle developed a two year Budget Strategy in 2016/17 and this was subject to extensive consultation. As well as a series of public meetings and online consultation, the Comhairle Leader and Director of Finance and Corporate Resources held question and answer sessions through the Comhairle's Facebook page. This received strong public engagement, both through meetings, online and in public Facebook sessions, and resulted in changes to the final budget proposals.

With a new five year term beginning, the Comhairle established a Budget Board in June 2017, comprising Councillors from all Wards and Parties, to oversee the implementation of the Comhairle's next Budget Strategy, with a clear remit and expectation of engagement with communities. The Comhairle then set its 2018/19 budget on 7 February 2018.

The 2018/19 budget set out savings of £684k from efficiencies and £2m from a programme of service redesign. Service redesign aims to achieve a 25% (nearly £10m) reduction in relevant service costs over the term of the Comhairle that will enable it to achieve a balanced budget in a measured way. The priority order for service redesign has been recommended through the Budget Board with all Members having the opportunity to contribute to the ranking. Public engagement will form part of service redesign process.

While each proposal within the efficiency savings is relatively straightforward, service redesign is more complex and will be subject to appropriate governance arrangements throughout the duration of the redesign process. Equality impact was considered by each service as part of efficiency savings proposals and was again considered by Policy and Resources Committee alongside the Budget and Council Tax Setting 2018/19 Report. The service redesign projects will each require careful consideration of possible equality impacts and each service area will be required to undertake an EQIA on the redesign proposals they put forward.

The Comhairle's Mainstreaming Report 2017-21 will be used alongside service redesign, wherever possible, to ensure that change supports the Comhairle's mainstreaming equalities ambitions. In addition, the Comhairle further developed its consultation page in 2017/18 to include a *We Asked, You Said, We Did* approach to feedback and also equality monitoring on consultees. This provides detailed

information demonstrating that consultation feedback is considered and to enable the public to see what feedback was received by the Comhairle. Equality monitoring enabled the Comhairle to consider how representative feedback received was, and whether additional steps are now required to engage the community more fully. In this way, the information and strategic objectives set out through the Public Sector Equality Duty are being used to support the budgetary process.

Our commitment to the principles of a human rights' approach to budgeting starts from a needs based budget that then shapes and influences policy. Human rights' budgeting tends to follow the PANEL principles with people able to participate through the entire budget process, especially in developing goals and priorities for spending money. Within this budgeting approach, all budgeting decisions must be measureable, so that need can be assessed and progress and outcomes in meeting need can be evaluated. We believe that the processes set out above will continue to ensure that the Comhairle exceeds statutory requirements in how it involves our communities in budget strategy.

The Comhairle's Budget Reports are available to the public and equality aspects are included in this. In addition, the Comhairle has equality webpages that detail EQIAs.

I consider many aspects of our approach to budget decision making to be good practice and great care is taken by both officers and Members of the Comhairle to minimise any equality impacts from budgetary decisions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Malcolm Burr', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Malcolm Burr
Chief Executive
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar