



6 March 2018

Our Ref: FL/JS

Christina McKelvie MSP
Convener
Equalities and Human Rights Committee
T2.60
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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By email to: equalities.humanrights@parliament.scot

Dear Ms McKelvie

MAKING THE MOST OF OUR EQUALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS LEVERS

Thank you for your enquiry into East Ayrshire Council's approach to our 2017-18 Budget process and how we have taken account of equalities and human rights priorities.

Our Budget was approved by Council on 22nd February 2018. It was set against a background of increasing demand and reducing resources, but requires us to deliver financially sustainable services into the future which best meet the needs of our communities. It builds on the steps we have already taken to reduce costs through workforce planning and by reviewing and integrating services, ensuring that those most in need are not further disadvantaged.

Tackling inequalities has been a key focus for the Council and our Community Planning partners. Our Health and Social Care Partnership and Vibrant Communities Service have been at the forefront of supporting our most vulnerable residents and communities, with excellent work already underway around integrated services and asset-based approaches. However, significant social and economic inequalities remain within and between our communities, with austerity and welfare reform having a disproportionate effect on the most vulnerable. In addition, we have recognised isolation and loneliness as major challenges, with widening inequalities and social polarisation for some social groups.

In response to these challenges, our Budget aligns with our Transformation Strategy, which taken as a whole will help us to deliver our vision of a fairer, kinder and connected East Ayrshire, with people at the heart of everything we do.

Human Rights

Although we did not make a specific reference to 'human rights' in setting our Budget, the process was based on our commitment to protect and invest in frontline services, particularly for those most in need. A fairer, kinder and connected East Ayrshire will involve the Council, our Community Planning Partners, the business and third sectors in a concerted effort with our communities to tackle poverty, inequality and discrimination. Our resources have been allocated with this in mind to ensure that we make a positive impact on human rights and on reducing inequalities, whilst fulfilling our responsibilities as a Council.

The Budget process was informed by our Vibrant Voices engagement campaign, which brought together Elected Members, our workforce and communities in a joint conversation on our future in East Ayrshire. To ensure the widest reach possible, a range of engagement methods were used, each focussing on four key challenge questions:

- How do we reduce demand?
- How do we tackle poverty?
- How do we better serve you in the 21st century?
- How do we reduce costs and increase income?

This generated a broad range of feedback with in excess of 3,500 responses, by far the biggest response to any Council-wide engagement.

The campaign represented a shift away from traditional budget consultations to a more inclusive and participatory approach. It was informed by our Framework for Community Engagement, which defines engagement as incorporating a range of activity including Informing; Consulting; Involving; Collaborating; and Empowering. Our approach, therefore has been based on similar principles to PANEL – Participation; Accountability; Non-Discrimination; Empowerment and Legality - to ensure that human rights priorities are incorporated into our processes in a systematic way.

Given the focus on our people and communities, we feel that our budget reflects a human rights-based approach that demonstrates our commitment to meeting people's needs, whilst also making good business sense. Despite the financial constraints, we have based our decision making on what will deliver the best outcomes for our communities with the resources available, mitigating the impact of budget reductions.

Equalities

In setting our Budget, we have taken full cognisance of the General Duty of the Equality Act 2010, specifically to have due regard for the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and, foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Our Budget and associated Transformation Strategy were subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to mitigate any possible adverse impacts arising from our Transformation Strategy Workstreams. This exercise, was designed to identify both the intended and unintended positive impacts, any discriminatory impacts and any negative impacts.

The process helped to ensure a thorough and systematic assessment of impact on each protected characteristic, building on the work already underway across the Council to mainstream equality into policy development and implementation, and into day to day thinking and practice.

Through our EIA, we have taken account of the different needs within each protected characteristic and also considered issues which affected groups because of multiple identities, interaction across equality groups and socio economic factors.

As part of our Budget process, we also engaged with East Ayrshire Equalities Forum, which represents a range of equality groups and stakeholders from the public and third sectors. The feedback from the Forum was used to inform the Budget process and was also incorporated into the Transformation Strategy Workstreams.

Summary

In summary, we feel that our Budget and Transformation Strategy reflect both human rights and equalities priorities, and will help to reduce inequalities and promote social inclusion across our communities. Any future developments arising from our Transformation Strategy Workstreams will be considered with due regard to the Council's Human Resources Policies and Procedures and the Equality Act 2010, and will be subject to additional Equality Impact Assessments.

If you require further clarification or information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex McPhee', written over a faint, larger version of the same signature.

Alex McPhee

Depute Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer

