CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTICLE 50: PREPAREDNESS INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM City of Edinburgh Council

What impact the Article 50 negotiations have had upon your business or organisation to date, and what preparation(s) has the Council taken for the UK’s withdrawal from the EU?

In October 2016, a report to the Council’s Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee provided an initial analysis of potential risks to the Council and the city arising from the decision to leave the EU. The report proposed that a Member Officer Working Group should be convened to lead and support the identification, planning and coordinating Council responses to the risks and uncertainties arising from Brexit.

In September 2018, the Working Group met and agreed a new work programme to be undertaken over the period of six months before 29 March 2019. During this period the group committed to actions currently in place and report on future options to provide support for non-UK EU nationals within the Council workforce and the wider city population. The group meets on a six-week basis, and adopts a themed approach for these meetings, initially focusing on the impact of Brexit on the Council’s workforce, and key Council services. Themes to be considered over the period to March 2019 include:

- Workforce planning and support for council colleagues
- Impact of Brexit on key sectors
- Procurement and contracts, and
- Finance and EU Successor funding.

Workforce planning

Following the result of the EU referendum, early concerns were raised relating to the welfare and support needs of non-UK EU nationals within the Council workforce. In particular, Council recognised the potential uncertainty faced by such colleagues as to immigration status, and leave to remain and work in the UK during and following the transition period towards the UK’s exit from the EU.

In order to identify and provide support for colleagues affected by the Brexit process, the Council’s Human Resources team conducted a compliance audit of employee records during 2017 and early 2018. This audit revealed that:

- Non-UK EU nationals account for 5.5% of the current City of Edinburgh Council workforce;
- More than a third of these colleagues have over five years’ service within the Council;
- Three service areas show a higher than average concentration of affected colleagues – Communities and Families, Health and Social Care, and Resources.
Using this information, the Human Resources team have written with support and guidance to all colleagues believed to be directly affected by Brexit. This guidance includes current information on the most up to date agreements between the UK Government and the EU on the rights of EU nationals to live and work in the UK following 19 March 2019 (the proposed date of withdrawal). The guidance further provides the most up to date information on the steps colleagues may need to take if they wish to continue working in the UK following June 2021 (the proposed end of the transition period to full withdrawal).

These communications represent the beginning of a process to provide full support and advice for colleagues affected by Brexit. Up to date information and guidance has been published on the intranet where it can be accessed by all staff, and tailored guidance has been provided through updates to all managers. Next steps include development of measures to support colleagues who may have immediate family affected by Brexit, and to continue to update and clarify guidance for colleagues as more details become available.

Throughout this process, information provided to staff has been shared with local trades unions and with COSLA colleagues, where the Council has been recognised as a leading local authority on this issue.

What impact would a “No-Deal” Outcome have on your services?
Council services have been consulted on the potential impact a ‘no-deal’ outcome would have on their services. Issues highlighted can be considered under two categories – impact on workforce, and impact on service demand.

- **Workforce:** in the event that a ‘no-deal’ outcome raised uncertainty over the implementation of the settled status scheme currently outlined by the UK Government, this could result in additional concern over the welfare and support needs of council staff across all services. To address such issues, the Council’s Human Resources and Employment Law teams are continuing to track and monitor guidance and to provide appropriate support to colleagues.

- **Service Demand:** The scale and range of potential impacts on service demand and delivery likely to arise from a ‘no-deal’ scenario remains unclear. However, in the event that a ‘no-deal’ outcome results in adverse economic impacts in the city, services cite potential increases in demand, and changes in the profile of demand for a range of citizen support and welfare services, including advice, access to benefits, housing and tenancy support, amongst others. More specifically, with regard to regulatory services, without a deal it is unclear whether goods will be allowed free movement in the UK or whether some border checks at ports will be required. This could present operational pressures, particularly in regard to increased contact from local businesses seeking advice and support on import processes and new regulations.

Across both of these issues, the Brexit Working Group provides a forum to raise and discuss responses to specific issues as further details become clear.