

Consideration of Equalities as part of the Budget Process

Background

1. The budget report has been constructed on the basis that the majority of savings will be achieved by efficiencies rather than through service cuts or disproportionate increases in charges.
2. Only 10% of the required savings are proposed to come from service cuts, the vast majority of the remaining savings being derived from efficiencies.
3. The importance of equalities was considered by PDS meetings as they considered the medium term plans. All members were briefed on the equalities duty and the relevance of this to the budget process in November. The medium term plans, and the presentations of those plans, started to identify the headline issues.
4. Where service cuts have been proposed equalities impact assessments have been completed. These have been put together alongside the service action plans that have been reviewed by PDS panels scrutinising the budget in their January meetings.
5. Cabinet members and all Directors have been considering the impact of potential savings throughout the process. The budget proposals are supported by:
 - Budget impact statements that were attached to medium term plans and updated as service action planning took place – these show the service impacts and the staff impacts
 - Equalities impact analysis that looks in more detail at all equalities issues
6. The Council's HR policies ensure there is proper consultation and consideration of staffing matters and that employment related equalities issues are fully taken into account.
7. Cabinet has developed a vision and values to help with prioritisation. Where services cuts are deemed necessary mitigations are being put in place to minimise the equalities impacts.
8. In implementing necessary service cuts consideration was given to recent case law. Cuts that would have a substantial negative impact on vulnerable people have been avoided wherever possible including, for example, ensuring: cuts in voluntary sector funding (when commissioned) are kept to a minimum; that there is investment in supporting communities and also better access to services; and that the (reduced) cuts in community safety will not affect the most vulnerable people. Where cuts have been necessary we have identified steps that will be taken to

address negative impacts. These 'mitigating actions' are included in equality impact assessment action plans.

Public Sector Equality Duty

9. It is unlawful to discriminate against an individual because of their protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010.
10. The equality duty enables equality matters and good relations to be integrated into day-to-day council business. Compliance with the duty is a legal obligation; we must, in the exercise of our functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
11. Having due regard for advancing equality involves:
 - Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
 - Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
 - Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
12. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, sexual orientation, religion or belief and marriage and civil partnership.

Equality impact assessments / equality analysis

13. The Council has a written record of the equality considerations that have been taken; our decision-making processes include a consideration of the actions that would help to avoid or mitigate any negative impacts on particular protected groups; our decisions have a stronger evidence base through the use of equality mapping, making our decision-making processes more transparent.
14. Equality analysis / impact assessments are available to view at <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/communityandliving/equality/Pages/Equality%20Impact%20Assessments.aspx>