

Equality Issues – 2013/14 Budget & Medium Term Plans

1 Background

- a) The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against an individual because of certain personal characteristics.
- b) The Council's HR policies already ensure there is proper consultation and consideration of staffing matters and that employment-related equality issues are fully taken into account.
- c) Equality issues are considered as part of decision-making and where reductions or closures are proposed, proportionate equality analysis is carried out and published.
- d) The majority of budget savings will be achieved by internal efficiencies and additional income generation activity rather than through service cuts or disproportionate increases in charges.

2 Actions taken so far

- a) Equality issues were addressed at Policy Development and Scrutiny meetings in their consideration of medium term plans. Headline issues were identified and, where service cuts were proposed, the impact upon different groups has been assessed. This shows the impact of service changes (particularly on vulnerable people) and the staffing implications of the proposals. Where services cuts are deemed necessary, interventions are being made to minimise the effects.
- b) In implementing service cuts, consideration was given to any substantial negative impact on vulnerable people and avoided wherever possible including, for example, ensuring that cuts in voluntary sector funding (when commissioned) are kept to a minimum; that there is investment in supporting communities to gain better access to services; and that the (reduced) cuts in community safety will not affect our most vulnerable communities.
- c) Disabled people and those with mental ill health are the most frequently identified people as experiencing a detrimental impact from the budget proposals, followed by people experiencing socio-economic inequality and young people. These impacts are experienced across all services. Significant impacts have been identified against complex families and people being affected by welfare reform. Reductions in funding to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations increase over the period of the budget.

3 Mitigations; positive actions, projects and interventions

- a) The Council is committed to delivering services that meet the needs of our diverse community, and in celebrating the differences within our community. Some recent examples include:
- b) The new One Stop Shop at Lewis House has been designed to ensure customers have improved and often instant access to public services and to information. Closer working with external partners has greatly improved the way we identify and provide appropriate services for our communities.
- c) Stronger links have been forged with the local black minority ethnic community. For example - in August 2012, the Council hosted a celebration to mark Jamaican Independence Day. Over 150 members of the local Jamaican and Caribbean community and their guests attended the vibrant event at the Guildhall.
- d) The Sport & Active Leisure team were successful in their bid to host the Paralympic flame. A carnival procession carrying the Paralympic lantern made its way through Bath city to start an evening of entertainment showcasing our local Paralympian athletes just before the start of the Paralympic Games. Bath University will host the prestigious Special Olympic Games during 2013. We know this will require a large amount of assistance and energy from the local population who so enthusiastically supported the Paralympic athletes based in Bath.
- e) The Council is aware that Government *welfare reform programme* will have an impact on many people including those who are most vulnerable in our community (for example some people may be on low income, of pensionable age or in receipt of specific benefits). To mitigate adverse effects we have committed to protecting the most vulnerable people by exempting them from council tax support reductions and in accepting the delegated social fund (crisis loans) as part of our responsibility, enabling services who are dealing with people in crisis to work collaboratively.
- f) Through working with partners in our One Stop Shop we aim to provide the right intervention at the right time to help those at risk or to stop people falling more into risk. (Our key partners including Housing, Social Services, Family Information Services, Curo, CAB, Learning Partnership West and Bristol Credit Union.)
- g) We are one of 12 Councils participating in the LA led Universal Credit Pilot, assisting and advising customers who contact us seeking support resulting from of a change (life event) in their circumstances which may affect any one of the future component parts of Universal Credit. (Job Seekers Allowance; Child Tax Credits; Family Tax Credits; Employment Support Allowance; and Housing Benefits).

- DWP staff are working with us to identify the type of help that is needed through a range of case studies of different customer profiles helping us to create service packages that best meet their needs especially to the most vulnerable members of our community.
 - With better joined up services and partnership working we hope to be able to influence the design and delivery of Welfare Reforms;(including mitigating risks around the digital by default agenda; the plan to make payments monthly in arrears direct to claimants; and a growing need for financial and budget support).
- h) The Council is addressing the difficulties faced by families and households through the '*connecting families*' project. This project will focus its efforts on over 200 households with at least one young person with education absence of greater than 15% recorded as living at the address; those involved in housing related anti-social behaviour, and young offenders. Research shows there are over 300 households meeting one or more of these criteria.
- i) In order to deliver good services that meet people's needs, we use the *Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)* to work closely with our partners in providing good services that in turn help us to address inequality. The JSNA was instrumental in assisting the Council to make difficult decisions about its budget and spending priorities.

4 Government agenda for equality

- a) Brandon Lewis MP wrote to all Leaders and Chief Executives with helpful guidance for the reduction of statutory burdens; he stated: "*... equality impact assessments can be resource intensive and take staff away from planning and delivering important public services.*"
- b) *Councils should be able to pay due regard to equality without resorting to time consuming bureaucratic tick box exercises at the end of the decision making process. The key is to take a proportionate timely approach to assessing equality and that this is properly considered from the outset with a simple audit trail."*

5 Bath & North East Somerset's approach to equality & diversity

- a) Since the Equality Act was introduced B&NES has taken a pragmatic approach to equality; we recommend a proportionate approach where service leads complete, when necessary, a simple template in order to demonstrate that they have met their duty to "pay due regard". As well as avoiding claims and litigation, this approach helps to ensure that services are tailored to the needs of all service users in particular vulnerable people. B&NES was commended and used as an exemplar authority for our proportionate approach to equality by the LGID.

b) Training in equality issues is provided largely in-house by the Equalities Team (comprising 1.8 staff) through the corporate training programme with three 'standard' programmes alongside bespoke customised training, briefings and updates. Click the following link to view our [Equality analysis](#) pages.

(<http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/your-council-and-democracy/equality-and-diversity/equality-impact-assessments/financial-pla>)