

EQUALITY AND POVERTY IMPACT SCREENING

1. CONTEXT

- 1.1 Falkirk Council needs to make projected savings of £35 million over the 3 year period to 2016/17. In order to achieve this, we have asked our Services to identify a number of budget savings options and this report sets out the EPIA process which was undertaken.
- 1.2 The need for savings is based on forward financial planning and takes in to account other pressures on the council's budget such as an increasing demand on services from a growing and changing population. Budgets have also been rebased to exclude the effect of inherent underspends.
- 1.3 This budget has been built using a set of guiding principles that reflect the Council goals in terms of:
 - Developing a thriving, sustainable and vibrant economy
 - Improving the health, safety and wellbeing of our citizens and communities
 - Increasing our efforts to tackle disadvantage and discrimination
 - Enhancing and sustaining an environment in which people want to live and visit
- 1.4 Complementary to these aspirations the Council is committed to sound financial management as a basis for achieving our priorities, providing good quality services and protecting those who are most vulnerable.
- 1.5 At the heart of the Council's commitment to delivering our priorities will be better ways of working; improvement to service delivery; making sure that the services we deliver are the services our citizens want and need in order to create resilient communities. We will take steps to engage our managers and staff in this as well as consulting with our citizens to ensure that as a Council we are ambitious in our solutions and resilient to cope with future anticipated austerity.
- 1.6 Carrying out equality and poverty impact assessments will help us inform our financial decision making thus helping to ensure that the hard decisions we will have to make on balancing the budget are made in a way that is as fair as possible.

2. BACKGROUND – EQUALITY ACT 2010

- 2.1 The Equality Act 2010 places a General Duty on Falkirk Council to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and to promote good relations between different groups according to nine “protected characteristics” (age, religious belief and non-belief, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sex and sexual orientation).

- 2.2 The legislation also sets out a number of duties that all local authorities need to comply with in order to demonstrate that the decisions they make are carried out in a fair, transparent and accountable way and consider the needs of different members of the community. This is achieved through assessing the impact that changes to policies and practices could have on different protected groups set out in legislation. In addition the Council extended this impact analysis to include a poverty and impact assessment.
- 2.3 Assessing the potential impact of our decisions for equalities communities is an important part of our decision-making process, and we have used our equality and poverty impact assessment process against all relevant individual Service budget options. We have looked at the potential of combined or cumulative impact of the proposals as part of the assessment process and this does not present concern.
- 2.4 We understand that more people are experiencing financial pressures and worries in the current economic climate. This is for a range of reasons, including lack of employment, increased costs of living, low pay, pay freezes and reductions or changes in benefits as a consequence of welfare reform. These national changes can often impact much more significantly on equalities groups and we have taken this into account when assessing our savings options by extending our consideration not just to include equality but to include the poverty impact as well.
- 2.5 Some of our savings options involve making increases to our service charging arrangements and where this is considered, it is important to understand the potential for disproportionate impact where individuals are living on low incomes. In this regard the work which the Council is committed to in relation to welfare reform should mean that we consider the potential impact from any change to charging arrangements and how this could impact on both our concessions arrangements and our commitment to making sure that individuals on low incomes are supported to ensure that they are making the most of our income maximisation programmes.
- 2.6 The work that has been done in the equality and poverty impact assessments for all savings options indicates that there are some equalities communities that might potentially be disproportionately affected by a combination of the national and wider pressures listed above, and our proposals for 2014/2015. We have identified mitigations which will service to alleviate the impact.
- 2.7 We are also aware that there are some equality protected characteristics which we mention very little within our equality and poverty impact assessments. These include gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief and sexual orientation. This may be because some of these groups are not specifically or disproportionately affected by our options, but we recognise that this may also be because we have gaps in monitoring information. Making improvements to our equality data capture will be a priority for the Council going forward and has already been identified as part of our equality outcomes.

3. EQUALITY AND POVERTY IMPACT ASSESSMENT PROCESS (EPIA)

- 3.1 In line with guidance issued by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Falkirk Council has carried out a rigorous equality impact assessment process which we have extended to include poverty in recognition of the links which exist between poverty and inequality; thus ensuring that the equality and poverty impact is taken account of as part of the budget setting process. This process will help to ensure that ‘due regard’ has been taken of the potential impact on front line services and vulnerable people within Falkirk District who have a protected characteristic. This has been achieved by:
- Requiring Services from September to October 2013 to undertake an initial equality screening assessment of all the savings options identified and based on this to carry out a full EPIA where required.
 - Briefings took place across Services on the process of assessment and a briefing was also conducted for Elected Members on the EPIA process.
 - Completed initial and full assessments were returned to the Corporate Policy lead officers for Equality and Poverty for review and discussion; to test consistency and to consider where proposals might result in cross cutting themes requiring a combined assessment across services.
 - A consistent definition of equality and poverty impact has been applied. This is set out in Appendix 5a.
- 3.2 For any savings options that were rated “Medium” through to “High” in terms of potential equalities and poverty risks Services were advised to carry out more detailed work on mitigation and management of said options and to plan for appropriate consultation with any affected service users, staff and community groups.
- 3.3 The key information used to determine the equality and poverty impact is derived from data i.e. equality monitoring data on staff and service users compared to local and national equality and poverty data captured from the Census and other research sources. Knowing who our staff and customers are in terms of the equality profile helps determine the level of potential impact from decisions.
- 3.4 Consultation is also a key requirement of any equality and poverty impact assessment process. It provides the opportunity for services to consult with staff, service users and the community on changes to the way that they plan to deliver and provide services. The results from consultation will not only provide a ‘temperature check’ in relation to any potential savings option but offer the potential to explore different delivery methods which may contribute to more mitigation of impact and which could further reduce the risk rating.
- 3.5 As can be seen from the previous paragraphs equality and poverty impact assessment is an *iterative process*. This means that for some budgetary savings proposals the full impact may not be known until it is informed by consultation or some another process such as a service review. In these cases the impact rating prior to this will be subject to those outcomes and as a consequence may be amended to a lesser impact rating.
- 3.6 Equality risk ratings were scrutinised over December 2013 and the equality and poverty risk values by Service and by impact were determined. Appendix 5b outlines this information.

4. ASSESSMENT OF SAVINGS PROPOSALS 2014/2015

- 4.1 Of the options being put forward in 2014/2015 those with no, or a low impact rating represent £2.947 million of the Council's overall saving of £5.028 million.

The definition of a low impact rating is one where mitigating actions/adjustments are readily made or not required

- 4.2 By way of example; the option to reduce the subsidy to ScotRail (DV6) which allows half fare train travel for elderly or disabled people who hold an entitlement card. This covers the Falkirk Council area during weekdays and extends at the weekend to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Stirling and Perth. Alternative concessions exist which would mitigate this reduction e.g. the local dial-a-journey (covering Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire); Scotrail card for Senior Citizens allows up to 1/3 off standard and first class travel throughout the UK. There is also the free national bus pass.

- 4.3 Of the options being put forward in 2014/2015 those with a medium impact rating represent £0.413 million of the Council's overall year one saving of £5.028 million

The definition of a medium impact rating is one where mitigating actions/adjustments have been identified and these will further inform the proposal by potentially reducing the level of risk.

- 4.4 By way of example; the option to increase bereavement charges (CN12). This proposal identifies the charges differentiated between burial and cremation. A consultation to ensure that the views of particular groups has been considered and in particular the views of faith groups. This consultation has been undertaken as part of the Policy Development Panel on Bereavement which is due to report shortly.

- 4.5 Of the options being put forward in 2014/15 those with a high impact rating represent £1.668 million of the Council's overall year one saving of £5.028 million.

The definition of a high impact rating is one where some mitigating actions/adjustments can be made however the removal of all potential impact may not be possible. Consultation could further inform/amend this potential impact rating.

- 4.6 By way of example; these options are connected to staff savings and have been grouped together across services in recognition of the need to institute statutory consultation through an HR managed process. In addition a contributory factor to this risk rating is linked to the gender differentiation which exists in different occupational groupings.

- 4.7 The effects of the budget options on staffing will be addressed using our existing severance and redeployment policies which have previously been subject to equality impact assessment.

- 4.8 Another consideration for the 'high impact' rating is that once the staffing changes are understood in more detail this will inform the potential direct service delivery impact and allow for the identification of further mitigation actions in order to reduce the level of risk.

- 4.9 The high concentration of low equality risks and the low ratio of medium level impact risks against the proposed savings options indicate the added value which the equality and poverty impact assessment process has contributed to the budget setting process in determining the level of equality and poverty risk against financial decisions.

- 4.10 The result of the EPIAs mean that only 3 options require further work under the terms of the EPIA. The first of these is the review of abuse services which is covered separately in the budget report. The second is charging for bereavement services which has already been subject to consultation with stakeholders. The results of this will be reported back to the Executive as part of the full review of bereavement policies. The third is a review of Registration Services. This proposal involves service re-design proposals of Registration Services and offices. Data usage is currently being captured on the level of footfall along with information on building repair and maintenance as well as information available from previous customer surveys. Whilst it is estimated that the impact is likely to be low internal discussions are taking place at the moment on the preferred method of public consultation.

5. PUBLICATION OF EQUALITY AND POVERTY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- 5.1 Within the terms of the Equality Act 2010 there is a requirement to publish impact assessments once they are finalised. We will be publishing our budget related impact assessments on the Council website. It is anticipated that the low rated assessments can be published in March with medium risk assessments following thereafter. High risk assessments will be dependent on the results of other statutory consultation.
- 5.2 The first report to be published will be this overall screening assessment covering the EPIA process as part of budget decision making; providing information on risk and assessment against the year one proposals as well as contextualising the outcome as per the process against the legal duty.
- 5.3 The individual EPIA's publication will be confirmed after the February budget meeting. The budget proposals identified as low risk will be the first to be finalised, signed off and published. Those rated as medium/high will follow in line with different consultation processes (e.g. some options will require statutory consultation processes) and timeframes.

6 ASSESSMENT OF SAVINGS PROPOSALS

Savings by Service Area

- 6.1 The Council has sought to balance the impact of service savings across the range of Council functions unfortunately in order to secure a balanced budget difficult decisions are necessary which means that not all services could be protected. Where these services have budget options rated medium/high impact we will work to ensure risks are mitigated as far as possible. Indeed a great deal of work has taken place since options were identified to mitigate any potential risk.

Assessment of workforce implications

- 6.2 The Council's various Services put forward options to make efficiencies through changes which result in a reduction of workforce numbers. Section 6.12 of the budget report provides further information on how this process will be managed.
- 6.3 For equality purposes the information thus far has identified the possible net employee changes included from each Service proposal. This information is still subject to clarification through the steps being taken with the Trade Unions as outlined in section 6.12. As this work progresses, it will lead to a better informed service delivery impact assessment. Equality and Poverty Impact Assessments will be refined as the individual Service savings proposals are implemented.

- 6.4 The Council's HR Service is committed to ensuring that the Council is as capable as possible to deliver services to our diverse communities by reflecting that diversity in the make-up of the work force. To minimise any unwelcome impacts resulting from these proposals, HR will undertake appropriate impact assessments, as required, in consultation with the Trade Unions as part of the discussions on progressing the workforce changes necessary to implement any decisions taken by Members. If issues were to arise as a result, these would of course be highlighted.

7. SUMMARY OF EQUALITY IMPACT SCREENING

- 7.1 The general assessment is that the Council's budget for 2014/2015 and in particular the savings options could have an impact upon people because of age, disability, and gender. However, public sector austerity creates a climate for significant savings requirements and through the process of equality and poverty assessment every effort has and will be made to identify and act on mitigation where it is possible.
- 7.2 The Council can demonstrate a robust process of development, implementation and review of the EPIA process and as such is confident that it has complied with duties set out within the Equality Act and has taken into consideration the protected characteristics in considering the implications for its budget and has charged Services to put in place actions to minimise the equality impact of its 2014/2015 budget.
- 7.3 In terms of the identified mitigating actions these will be subject to Service monitoring in order to assure their effect.
- 7.4 This process will also produce lessons to be learnt to improve the equity of arrangements for impact assessing our 2015/16 budget and beyond. As a result we believe that this report has satisfied the requirement to assess the equality and poverty impacts of our 2014/2015 Budget.