

## **Budget Proposals: Employability EQIA**

### **EQIA Author:**

EQIA prepared by Andy McCann, Economy and Regeneration Manager, 26 November 2014

### **Purpose of the Equality Impact Assessment:**

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) of the Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to give due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations

The protected characteristics in the Equality Act are: Age, Disability, Gender, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnerships\*, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief and Sexual Orientation. \*The PSED only applies to Marriage and Civil Partnership in relation to employment.

To support the implementation of the PSED the Scottish Governments Regulations (2012) introduced 'specific duties' to assess the potential for equality impact in all areas of its work including proposed changes to key policies and major financial decisions. Assessments should 'consider relevant evidence relating to persons with relevant protected characteristics in relation to such assessments of impact'.

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is to ensure that services policies or decisions do not create unnecessary barriers which prevent people from different groups or backgrounds accessing services and employment opportunities.

### **Context:**

The Council's Employability team deliver a range of services for individuals seeking to enter work for the first time or to return to work. The Service funds this activity through its own revenue budget, through Scottish Government funding or through European funds. In addition, as the Employability team disburse grant to organisations to deliver local employability related services, such grant is often used as match funding for other funds, for example, Big Lottery or Trust funding. The Employability team also give grant to private businesses as wage subsidy and hence the Employability funds also leverage private sector investment.

The Budget proposal is to take £230k from the core Employability budget in 2014/15 and £50k in 2015/16 and it will be for the team to manage this budget reduction across all of its activity and in response to any new funding opportunities which may arise, for example, European Social Fund. Therefore a reduction in core budget does not automatically mean a reduction in total activity. Indeed it is possible that certain activity may increase despite the budget reduction.

It is also important to note that Employability services are now typically mapped across a strategic pipeline – for which the Council and the Employability team only provide certain services. Other services are provided for by Skills Development Scotland, JobCentrePlus, Scottish Funding Council (UHI /Colleges) etc. It also means that a Budget Proposal EQIA is exceptionally difficult to undertake in such context.

### **Data Sources and Research:**

Core source for data and research is the Equality Impact Assessment undertaken by Highland Council, September 2014, on behalf of the Highland Community Planning Partnership, into Youth Employment. While this EQIA is focused on young people, the fact that young people are defined as aged 16-24 in practice therefore means that young people, those in transition and those in adult services have been addressed in this EQIA. As this EQIA (referred to henceforth as the Youth EQIA) is extensively referred to in this Budget Proposal EQIA, it is attached as appendix to this EQIA.

### **Evidence Gaps:**

The purpose of the Youth EQIA was to determine that services or policies provided by the Council's Employability team (and the Council's Care and Learning Service – Activity Agreements) did not create unnecessary barriers which prevent people from different groups or backgrounds accessing services and employment opportunities. When preparing the Youth EQIA a number of data shortcomings were identified as the data was not always gathered or available at the level required. The data issue identified here also is directly relevant to this Budget Proposal EQIA.

As detailed in the Youth EQIA Action Plan, there is an overall need for a corporate database across all Council Services (and indeed a need to establish data sharing protocols and mechanisms across public bodies) but an action directly within the power of the Employability team to procure its own Management Information System. This is actively underway with a staff Member now in place to action.

### **Budget Proposal Consultation:**

Phase 2 of the Council's budget consultation exercise has aimed to understand the effect of proposed changes to the provision of services from 2015-16. A range of survey question have asked for views from the Citizens' Panel, Communities Panel, focus groups with particular 'hard to reach' groups, engagement with third sector through the Interface, and individuals in the community completing an on line surveys. This included a question on making saving by targeting employability support more appropriately on the long term unemployed and those within disadvantaged area.

**Budget Proposal Impact:**

The Youth EQIA looked at all Protected Characteristics and concluded that Gender Reassignment; Religion and Belief; Sexual Orientation and Marriage and Civil Partnership did not require detailed impact analysis but that gender, young disabled people, race and pregnancy and maternity were appropriate to analyse for impact. In addition to the protected characteristics, Carers; Homeless and Looked After Children and Geography were also considered. The detail of this analysis is given in the Youth EQIA and the findings incorporated in the Youth EQIA Action Plan.

In general the findings made and the resulting actions proposed, relate to how employability services are designed and implemented to improve how they positively impact on protected characteristic groups. It is therefore not directly an issue of more funding required, rather using the funds available to best effect.

As detailed above in the Context section, it is difficult to determine whether over the coming year(s) there will be less, same or more funding made available by partners across the strategic skills pipeline. While the Council itself will have less funds directly available and potentially therefore not be in a position to access all the funds potentially available to it, and therefore have a scale of Programme comparable with current activity, this does not mean that the protected characteristic groups will be adversely impacted. Indeed if the activities outlined in the Youth EQIA Action Plan are implemented the aspiration would be that services are improved upon.

Comments in response to the Budget Consultation exercise have understandably been shaped by respondents or their family having had access to or anticipate having to access the employability service, i.e. needing support to enter or return to work. There was strong support (38%-48% across the Citizens, Communities and Website Panels) to the proposal to refocus support on the long term unemployed and those within disadvantaged areas but 25% of the Website Panel did note that it could cause some difficulty. This was further elaborated upon by a number of the participants in the Equalities Groups who felt that there was a need to focus beyond the long term unemployed in specific geographical locations and include those disadvantaged because of their disabilities (learning disability, visual impairment, etc.). In this context enabling these groups to access meaningful employment (and volunteering opportunities) to help them to overcome isolation and to earn a decent income was emphasised as equally important as the focus on the long term unemployed in specific geographical areas.

Recognising that it is how a service is delivered in recognition of and in response to the needs of the protected characteristic groups (and geography) and how such employability services are funded across the strategic skills pipeline by a range of funding bodies (and not just the Council) should largely alleviate these concerns.

**Impact Justification:**

The scale of employability activity delivered by the Employability team may be reduced if other employability funding does not materialise and/or the Council is unable to access. By acting on the findings of the Youth EQIA the Council can ensure however that the protected characteristic groups are not adversely or disproportionately impacted by such a budget reduction.

**Monitor and Review:**

The Youth EQIA was instigated as part of a programme of activity linked to the Single Outcome Agreement and overseen by Highland Works – the Highland local employability partnership.

As detailed above, employability activity across partners and funders is increasingly aligned around the strategic skills pipeline and all partners, including the Council, will need to plan for and demonstrate this. Council funded activity is currently (and in the future) externally and independently evaluated. By ensuring that activity that provides for protected characteristic groups at the outset including the correct collection of evidence, will also in turn ensure that appropriate monitoring and review can take place.

**Conclusion**

The employability team will manage the proposed budget reduction across all of its activity and in response to any new funding opportunities which may arise, for example, European Social Fund. It is likely that certain activity may be more targeted as a result of the budget reduction. Additionally, the scale of employability activity delivered by the Employability team may be reduced if other employability funding does not materialise and/or the Council is unable to access. However, by acting on the findings of the Youth EQIA the Council can ensure however that the protected characteristic groups are not adversely or disproportionately impacted by such a budget reduction