

2 sessions, 3 group discussions, 13 participants (demographic details at the end)

Questions for each Outcome:

- What do you think of this outcome? (Do you see progress, barriers, etc).
 - What should be done with this outcome? (Is it still relevant, considered for new equality outcomes or be changed in any way?)
 - Is there anything missing for you?
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Equality Outcome 1:

“All people with protected characteristics will access information, goods and services knowing that social and physical barriers are identified and removed.”

Overall: Consensus that this outcome is not being achieved, but it’s an important goal. ACC needs to make specific plans, co-produced with people from diverse backgrounds, making use of groups that already exist (like EPN, DEP, etc) – and following up on how those plans are being implemented. Also important to remember that **barriers are intersectional**.

Need for flexible and user-friendly services:

- Expectation of **one-size-fits-all is a barrier**. For some people, online services are easy and convenient. Others prefer to speak to someone on the phone, or in person. **Processes need to adapt to fit people’s needs**, rather than everyone being expected to interact with processes in the same way. This does not necessarily cost much money, and it saves money in the long run by reducing mistakes and problems.
- If the goal is to deliver services, **don’t make it so difficult** that people can’t use the service or don’t want to try.
- **There is still a need for face-to-face services**, not just at Marischal College (travel issues, intimidating, noisy space, appointment only, etc), but in local community centres, access points and libraries. Services at Marischal should also be reviewed to make them more accessible (e.g. having quieter spaces available, a human to speak with at the entrance, etc). “Non-digital people still pay Council Tax.”
- **Importance of local community** in supporting people to access services – building relationships, rather than speaking with a different person each time. Local spaces need to have more consistent opening hours so people can access them reliably.

Need for better awareness and communication:

- ACC needs to improve **public awareness of what services are available** and how to access them, especially for marginalised groups like disabled adults. Staff need

better understanding of services they can refer people to, and people's rights under the law, e.g. reasonable adjustments, No Recourse to Public Funds, etc.

- **A user-friendly, up-to-date central information hub would be very valuable**, especially if it can also advertise events, etc. **Leaflets or posters** are also very helpful. Visual representations of 'safety nets' would help to reach a wider range of people.
- Staff need better **awareness/sensitivity towards cultural barriers**, e.g. around religion and ethnic identity, types of behaviour associated with disabilities, etc.
- **Alternative formats available on request** – how do people request these if they can't use the internet or struggle with making telephone calls?
- ACC should **show what it's doing** to promote inclusion, not just say that barriers are removed.

Processes are too complicated:

- **Telephone access:** very long **wait times** and confusing menus; call centre staff **lacking patience**, not taking time to explain things, people end up "going round in circles." Frustration with a '**rigid**' approach to handling problems over the phone: difficult to get answers for 'non-standard' questions, speak through communication helpers, fear of losing a spot in the queue with a call back.
- **Digital services need to be simplified** and the website needs a more intuitive structure – time-consuming and complicated to find information and access services.
- Many **processes are full of stumbling blocks** that discourage people or make them give up, e.g. jargon, difficulties with uploading evidence, time limits on forms, etc.
- Many **processes are stacked together**, so struggling with one process locks people out of multiple services/supports. For example, Winter Fuel Allowance is now tied to Pension Credit. If someone is struggling financially but doesn't have Pension Credits, they don't get help with their energy bills.
- **Suggestion for future EO:** include something about systems, processes or procedures, since often the barriers aren't so much physical or social, but out bureaucratic processes.

Equality Outcome 2:

"Diverse communities in Aberdeen will have an increased sense of safety and belonging within their neighbourhood and City."

Overall: Consensus that this outcome is not being achieved. While participants felt that Aberdeen is safer than many other cities, it's been less safe in the past few years, especially at night. There seems to be more inequality and antisocial behaviour in the city centre, fewer police on foot, fewer businesses and amenities, and less sense of community.

Participants also felt that pavements are often unsafe, and public transport does not meet the needs of disabled people and those in other vulnerable groups. Sense of belonging is reduced by feeling excluded from planning processes (this will be covered under EO3). ACC needs to prioritise inclusive communication and improve consultation and co-production.

Transport and infrastructure:

- **Pavements often physically unsafe** due to **poor maintenance and poor lighting**. City centre pavements **often obstructed** by tables and chairs, signage, etc. **Lack of gritting** in winter leaves many people housebound. **'Shared space' with bike lanes** is a serious problem, especially around bus stops, due to reckless delivery riders.
- **How can people report pavement parking?** Are there steeper fines for repeat offenders? Suggestion that the council should advertise how many people have been fined, both to reassure pedestrians and warn drivers.
- Bus stops are **too far apart** for people with mobility issues, and drivers don't always stop. **'Floating' bus stops** have very little space around them. **Constant changes** make it difficult for people with sensory and mobility issues to find the correct stop.
- Bus tickets are ever more expensive, and **services are less frequent/reliable**, especially late at night. **Community bus services** have been reduced.
- Still many places with **wrong Tactile**. Still **no crossing at Upperkirkgate/Broad Street** corner by Marischal.

Inclusion and belonging:

- ACC needs to do a better job **removing racist and bigoted comments** on its social media posts. Suggestion of promoting **more 'good news' stories** about marginalised groups, especially immigrants and people seeking asylum, to counteract all the hatred in the mainstream media. Many people have lived here for decades, own homes, etc, but still feel that others think they're 'not really Scottish.'
- Schools need to **adapt more for neuro-diverse children**, rather than expecting all pupils to conform to neurotypical behaviour and act like they're not disabled. Some schools have done well with this, others less so. ACC needs a new autism strategy.
- Education as a key site for **teaching children to be less prejudiced**.
- **Re-opening community spaces** will help tackle social isolation and improve a sense of community and belonging.
- Many problems arise from things being in separate budgets (health, police, housing, youth work, mental health, etc) – a **joined up approach** would work better and ultimately save money.
- **Two-way communication to help understand issues**. Instead of threatening people, ask why they're struggling – it might actually solve the problem.

Equality Outcome 3:

“Representation and civic participation of people with protected characteristics will be improved by ensuring our leaders, staff and organisation champion the equality agenda in the City.”

Overall: Consensus that this outcome is not being achieved. Representation needs to be improved, but until then, decision-makers need to listen to people – they don’t need to look like everyone, but they do need to listen to everyone. Effective representation is more important than optical representation. Two-way communication is key – ACC needs to tell people what it’s doing and why. People understand they can’t have everything they want, but nobody wants to be ignored (repeatedly).

Need for improved engagement:

- Many issues could be avoided if people with diverse experiences were involved with planning. At the moment, **consultation seems to happen after planning** – “by the time we’re involved, it’s too late.”
- Services work better when they’re **designed in collaboration** with the people who use them. It doesn’t make sense to have decisions being made by people who don’t have experience using services, e.g. decisions about buses being made by car drivers. “They’re not thinking about the knock-on effects of their decisions.”
- **Need to explain WHY decisions are made** – at the moment, people engage in consultation, but their views don’t seem to be taken into account. The assumption is that decision-makers don’t care – people would feel much better (and more inclined to continue participating) if they knew why their views were ignored (e.g. there wasn’t the budget for xyz).
- There needs to be more **engagement with genuine lived experience** – collaborative work and paying for people’s time to enable them to participate. Making it easy for people, e.g. holding events at times and in places they can attend. Remember that **consultation fatigue** is an issue.
- Important to avoid expecting everyone from a marginalised group to be an ambassador for their community – it’s a lot of pressure – need to have **diversity of voices from different demographics**, not just one or two token people.
- **Humility is very important** – decision-makers don’t know everything! But they can **approach new perspectives with curiosity** instead of treating them as a threat.
- Decision-makers need to **prioritise people’s needs** rather than political games or making the city ‘attractive’ for business investors. Nobody wants to invest in a place where people are struggling – **prioritise people and investment will follow.**

Participant Demographics (13 total)

Sex: 8 Female; 3 Male; 1 Genderqueer; 1 Other

Age: 1 person in their 50s; 2 in their 20s; 3 each in their 30s, 40s and 60+; 1 left blank.

Ethnicity: 5 White Scottish; 2 White British; 1 each African, Arab, British Indian, White Lithuanian; 2 blank/Prefer not to say.

Nationality: 6 Scottish; 2 British; 1 each Lithuanian, Nigerian, Welsh, Yemeni; 1 left blank.

Religion: 3 Other Christian; 2 each Catholic, Church of Scotland, Muslim; 1 each Buddhist, None, Other.

Sexual Orientation: 7 Heterosexual; 1 each Bisexual, Pan, Other; 3 left blank.

Gender Identity: 9 not trans; 1 trans; 3 blank/Prefer not to say.

Disability: 6 non-disabled; 5 disabled; 2 blank/Prefer not to say.

Type of disability: 4 Long-term illness; 3 Physical; 2 autism/neurodivergence; 1 each mental health and sensory; 2 blank (most disabled participants selected more than one option).

Reduces ability to carry out everyday tasks: 3 'a lot;' 2 'a little;' 6 n/a; 2 blank.

Carer: 5 each yes and no; 3 blank/Prefer not to say.

Marital Status: 4 Single; 3 Married; 1 each Separated, Divorced, Widowed; 3 blank.

Employment: 4 Working part time; 3 Working full time; 2 each Retired, Volunteer, Unemployed/Looking for work; 1 Prefer not to say.