

## Equalities Participation Network – June 24<sup>th</sup> 2021

**Present:** Zuzana Jatelova (Communities Team, Aberdeen City Council), Carol Hannaford (Tenant Participation, Aberdeen City Council), Daniel Meinel (Ending Gender-Based Violence, Aberdeen Cyrenians), Fiona Rennie (Aberdeen Women's Alliance), Baldeep McGarry (Equalities Team, Aberdeen City Council), Myshela Haywood (GREC), Dave Black (GREC), Ana Maria (community member), Shola Ajide (Fountain of Love Church)

**Apologies:** DeeJay Bullock, Roslynn Fowler, Libby Hillhouse, Mateusz Lagoda, Marion McLaughlin, Abdalla Mohamed, Fay Morrison, Christa Reid

### Community Spotlight: Aberdeen Women's Alliance

Fiona provided an overview of the group. Aberdeen Women's Alliance has been going since 2004 – aiming to give a voice to women working or living in the City, and mainly doing this by hosting events with partners (e.g. International Women's Day). They have a very successful history group, which amongst other things identifies the important role that Aberdeen women have played in history, e.g. with commemorative plaques being displayed across the City.

Fiona asked that everyone go back to their organisations and share with their members the opportunity to get involved. The Alliance are looking to expand what it does beyond events, so they can better understand the experiences of women in Aberdeen, what are the key issues and how can they be addressed. They are keen to identify new members as well as those that can get involved in the Lead Group, which is the organising group. There will be an AGM later in the year.

Question and answers followed, available on the Zoom recording: <https://youtu.be/-yTeJCzfr68>  
Aberdeen Women's Alliance can be contacted at: [awainfo@btinternet.com](mailto:awainfo@btinternet.com)

### Issues Log & Padlet

Dave talked about the 'issues log' that we've developed to track the issues we're bringing to the Council – description of the issue, who's affected, how we raised it, and what's being done. This is to ensure that things don't get forgotten. It's in a table format and fairly formal.

Myshela talked about the Padlet we set up – similar to the issues log, but less formal, and open to everyone. It's to keep track of the issues we're discussing, and folk can add things between meetings: <https://padlet.com/aepn/issues>

### What's New?

Participants were asked to share what equality issues had been on their mind over the past month. Issues raised:

- Lack of representation of ethnic minority communities in tenant participation, despite there being a lot of people from these communities being within council housing. A potential future session focused on housing and social housing was discussed, as there was some feedback that lack of trust was perhaps an issue.

- Council tax information and paperwork can be difficult to understand, leading to financial problems that could have been avoided. It's not just a language issue – accidentally delayed payment leads to bold red text and aggressive language that makes the process much more frightening. Difficulties getting things resolved, even with support – a person needs to know exactly the right phrases, but this should be the other way around – a call handler should be able to suggest solutions. Baldeep took notes to discuss with comms people.
- Financial problems made worse by lack of digital access, especially for older people, disabled people, asylum seekers, folk with limited literacy, victims of financial abuse, etc. Not knowing about the financial inclusion team or other forms of support, wouldn't occur to someone to ask about it or search online, especially with stigma/embarrassment around money problems + fear of losing money. Reluctance to reach out to the council can stem from negative experiences with police/authorities (e.g. older gay men, folk from dictator-run countries, etc). ACC needs to consider how services are advertised to people without computers, and how they can put people at ease.
- Difficult to get mask exemption cards (for folk with medical conditions who can't wear masks) – AAD got a handful of cards from SCVO last year, but now they're only available through an individual online application, even though the actual card doesn't have any identifying information on it – AAD tried to get more cards to give to clients but were refused. As a result, some vulnerable clients are being refused entry to supermarkets, getting abuse, etc. Are other groups having the same problem? If there's no ID on the card, maybe possible to print out multiple copies and laminate? But that seems a bit dodgy – don't want folk to get in trouble.

## City Centre and Beach Masterplan

**Nigel McDowell, Senior Planner from Aberdeen City Council**, shared a presentation – the session was also recorded and is available here: <https://youtu.be/PxSxK-00rCs>

The initial city centre plan was approved 6 years ago and since then Aberdeen Art Gallery has re-opened and been massively upgraded, the Music Hall was restored/re-opened, and Marischal Sq and College re-developed. Upcoming is the re-opening of Union Terrace Gardens and the Provost Skene's House.

The past 16 months of the pandemic has impacted greatly on the City Centre. A lot of work was done quickly in terms of being reactive and the need to allow social distancing in a safe way. We are looking to understand better what we've learnt from this period – what has worked, what has not. There is now further development work being done, with a focus on Union Street, Castlegate, the West End (specifically Rose Street, Thistle Street, Chapel Street) and the Beach area. As part of the Union Street focus there are plans to replace the previous Aberdeen Market with a new, more modern market building. There is [an online survey \(simulator\)](#), closing on July 2<sup>nd</sup> which focuses on these areas and asks people to choose priorities. A report on this consultation will be going to the Aberdeen City Council, City Growth Committee on August 4<sup>th</sup>.

## Comments and Questions

There was a query about the completion date of Union Terrace Gardens. Nigel suggested it is likely by the end of 2021, but he cannot say that for sure.

The very strong international food element of the previous Aberdeen Market was highlighted. Is the new market seen as an opportunity to highlight the benefits that diversity and migration brings to the City, in terms of providing affordable spaces for ethnic minority led food businesses? Nigel said yes, we want to see this kind of thing again. There will be a development brief around this, and it's likely that food and restaurants will be part of this, including a focus on seeing a diverse offer within the space.

There was query on when the previous Market will be demolished. Nigel was not sure but thought sooner rather than later.

It was noted that one of the benefits of the previous market was the low cost in getting access to use the space – a concern that the new project could be one of gentrification. Nigel commented that he hoped that there will be this element of affordability in the new space – there are other spaces that cater for folk seeking “shiny” businesses. Also an opportunity to bring back the historical element of the use of this space for market stalls.

Shola asked whether there is a list of former business owners from the Market, so they can be consulted about their needs. Nigel said there isn't such a list, but he thought the space wasn't well utilised before. Shola also queried the viability of the new market space. Will there be opening times beyond 5pm, as this is what put off some ethnic minority led businesses. Nigel thought it very likely that the space will not be restricted to 5pm.

Nigel said this was all at the early stages and there will likely be a significant programme of engagement around all the different projects. Dave shared [the link to the equalities community directory](#) which will allow for more targeted outreach and engagement with likely impacted groups and communities.

Carol made the point that there has been disillusion from those in Sheltered Housing around transportation and bus services. Nigel agreed that we need to do better around this. He highlighted how the excellent work done at the front of Aberdeen Art Gallery shows how things can be done really well when co-designed with relevant community members (in this case, the Disability Equity Partnership).

Network members thanked Nigel for taking the time to participate.

**Next meeting of the Network: Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> August 5.00-6.30pm**

*(Note: no July meeting)*