

Equalities Participation Network – 26 October 2023

Present: Myshele Haywood (GREC), Ru Carroll (Four Pillars), Roslynn Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Linzi Harrow (ACC), Fay Morrison, Mary Rasmussen (Guide Dogs). **Apologies:** Carol Hannaford, Zuzana Jatelova, Mateusz Lagoda, Hussein Patwa.

Open Consultations

ACC has several important consultations open at the moment, and community members are encouraged to take part:

- **Council Budget – open until 11 November:** aberdeencity.budgetsimulator.com (more details below)
- **Library Closures – open until 6 November:** aberdeencity.gov.uk/consultation-cornhill-cults-ferryhill-kaimhill-northfield-and-woodside-libraries
- **Bucksburn Swimming Pool – open until 6 November:** aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/leisure-culture-and-parks/sport-and-leisure-facilities/consultation-bucksburn-swimming-pool

All consultations are listed on the **ACC Consultation Hub:** consultation.aberdeencity.gov.uk

Mary noted that she went to a focus group on the libraries consultation, which was well-attended. People had lots of interesting and innovative ideas. Everyone agreed it's important to take part in these exercises and try to keep services open.

Black History Month Event – 31st October

EPN members were invited to an ACC event to mark Black History Month and Year of the Black Worker, on 31 October, with guest speakers, music and opportunities to speak with ACC leaders, managers, and decision-makers.

Budget Consultation – How to Take Part

Linzi explained that the Council has a shortfall of £83 million in the next 4 years, so they are asking the public to decide where to make cuts.

Phase 1 was over the summer, identifying investment priorities. 3000 people took part, but feedback indicated they thought it was very vague.

Phase 2 is currently open until 11 November, and it's much more detailed.

Linzi demonstrated how the interface works – video available here: youtu.be/8Wu9M-Z2aal

Some key points:

- You don't need to complete every question or section – leave as much blank as you wish.
- You can submit your response even if you don't move the simulator into 'green' – the goal is to identify priorities.

- The comment boxes are very important – it's not necessarily clear from the interface, but people should write about the impact of proposed cuts to services for your community.
- There is a box for final comments at the end – this is where you can make suggestions that are not covered elsewhere.

Discussion

The process was called 'ghastly,' and being 'dumped on' – the opposite of empowerment, being asked where to make cuts to essential services, especially for people who had no say in where the money was spent. Where did the overspend come from? Who was responsible for it? Everyone agreed it was unfair to ask people to cover mistakes in the past.

It was noted that many of the current problems are down to political decisions. For example, councils are told to create more nursery places, but without enough funding to provide them – or they use the funding to build a new nursery, rather than using an existing building nearby.

In the 60s when teachers couldn't get paper and books, they used wallpaper samples. Today's teachers still buy supplies with their own money, food for children, etc.

It was noted that there is a time and place for personal responsibility – but it's damaging to shift responsibility for the cuts onto the victims of austerity. The narrative that we all share equal responsibility misses the point that the decisions that led us here – and the benefits of those decisions – were not shared equally.

There is something insidious and cynical about telling people their choices make any difference at this stage.

Everyone agreed that if the Council is in debt, they should not spend money on unnecessary projects, like doing up the Beach Ballroom and building a new pier at the beach. Even if they draw from different budgets, surely if there's a crisis on, some flexibility can be found for essential services.

What's New? (recent equality issues to note)

RAAC – Council residents in Torry received letters saying there might be aerated concrete (RAAC) in their homes. There were two public meetings advertised, but rather than someone speaking to a group, everyone was seen individually. This meant people were waiting for hours to find out what was happening. Ultimately they weren't told anything specific, just asked to give their details and to wait for further information. An engineer visited some residents at home, not to inspect anything but to tell them they might be picked for an inspection in the future. No time scale was given. It was also noted that roof inspections, which should happen every decade, have not taken place in 40 years. It is unclear who will be responsible for inspections and repairs, especially for people who bought their council houses without knowing about the RAAC.

Bus pass scheme – the Scottish Government has put out guidance that people seeking asylum should be given bus passes. This was based on a successful pilot scheme in Aberdeen.

Date of next meeting: Thursday 30 November, 4:00-5:00pm

Topic: TBC