

## Equalities Participation Network – 29 August 2024

**Present:** Myshele Haywood (GREC), Shola Ajide (Fountain of Love Church), Anne Esangbedo & Santanah Eshitoli (GREC/Social Workers in Training), Roslynn Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Linzi Harrow (ACC), Flora Kovacs (GREC), Marion McLaughlin (Aurora Autism Consulting), Karen Quinn (ACC), Mary Rasmussen (Guide Dogs), Judi Uhuegbu (EVAA/Cyrenians), John Whitfield (Deafblind Scotland).

**Apologies:** Fay Morrison, Carol Hannaford, Ells Mchaffie, Emily (Grampian Maternal Voices).

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### Budget Consultation – Open Until 15 September

Link: [aberdeencitybudget.commonplace.is](https://aberdeencitybudget.commonplace.is)

Linzi gave a brief overview of this year's budget consultation, which is currently in Phase 1. Later there will be a Phase 2, focusing specifically on folk with protected characteristics.

Some of the changes since last year's budget consultation:

- Slightly different interface for the online consultation – the public are not being asked to balance the budget.
- Budget is divided into categories of Culture & Sport, Communities, Citizen Services, Education, and Roads, Waste & Environment.
- There are four categories of options – change, charge, reduce or stop (change the way a service is delivered, charge a fee to use the service, reduce or stop this service provision).
- There are also separate sections considering changes to Council Tax and Capital Spending.

**There are 48 budget options – you do NOT need to complete the consultation for all of these!**

**ACC is especially concerned about any negative impacts you or your community might experience with these changes, especially knock-on or ripple effects, and links between issues they might not have considered.**

**For people who need help to take part in the online consultation**, this is available at local libraries and Marischal College during opening hours. There are also drop-in sessions at the Vaccination Hub at the Bon Accord Centre, Wednesday 4 September, 10-12 and Thursday 12 September, 2-4.

**There are also in-person and online sessions for people to discuss budget options with council officers**, and an in-person session in BSL will also be organised soon. To book a place, please click the date/time:

Date/Time	Topic(s)	Location
<a href="#">Monday 2 September 6.30 - 7.30pm</a>	Covering all service areas	Online, Microsoft Teams
<a href="#">Wednesday 4 September 10.00 - 11.30am</a>	Covering all service areas	Online, Microsoft Teams

<a href="#">Tuesday 10 September</a> <a href="#">3.00 - 4.30pm</a>	Culture, Sport and Communities	In-Person, Town and County Hall
<a href="#">Thursday 12 September</a> <a href="#">5.00 - 6.30pm</a>	Citizen Services Roads/Waste/Environment	In-Person, Marischal College Customer Service Centre
<a href="#">Thursday 12 September</a> <a href="#">6.30 - 8.00pm</a>	Education	

## Q&A

- Judi asked whether she can support service users to participate. Linzi emphasised that the consultation is open to everyone who lives in Aberdeen or comes to Aberdeen for work, leisure, etc. It's also possible to fill in the consultation on behalf of someone else – for example she's doing this for her grandmother.
- John was concerned about the proportion of people taking part compared with the proportion of people with protected characteristics which mean they can't take part (or would struggle to) – this could skew the results. Linzi said it's important for as many people and organisations as possible to take part. She also noted Phase 2 will focus much more closely on groups with protected characteristics.
- Shola attended the session last year but did not keep notes – is there a list of what's changed in the proposals? **Linzi to ask for a list;** from her impression it seems the proposed changes are not as drastic as those proposed last year. She also noted that feedback from last year will continue to be used in considering this year's budget – building a picture of how people use services and how changes will affect them.
- Shola pointed out that many of the proposals previously wanted to transfer ACC services onto the third sector, while also proposing deep cuts to third sector funding – the maths do not add up.

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## What's New? (equality issues to highlight)

- Mary heard that it's possible to skip the telephone queue by going to the customer service area in Marischal College and using a phone there. Flora, who used to work in this area, confirmed that phones in Marischal get priority. Shola pointed out that most people can't take time out of their day to get to Marischal, and Marion noted that making phone calls is especially difficult for autistic people. Everyone agreed it's important to have multiple ways of getting in touch with services (telephone, online, in-person, etc), so that everyone is able to do it. Also, Carol had mentioned at a previous meeting that people can request a call-back rather than waiting on hold for a long time – this has its own problems but is another possible option for people.
- Mary said that Libby Hillhouse has arranged for NESS to speak with First Bus drivers, and this has resulted in some positive changes, for example drivers saying hello, waiting for people to sit down, asking if people can make space for someone who needs a seat, etc. This needs to be built into driver training but it's a good first step.

- Shola said that given the racist riots in England, people were nervous about recent family fun day for the African community, but the event went well and everyone had a good time.
  - Shola was part of a CEMVO discussion with the Scottish Government Equalities Minister, which was organised in response to the riots. It was good to speak with them, but he pointed out that these discussions should not only happen as reactions – they should be happening regularly, maybe the minister meeting with each community once a year. He asked whether there's an equivalent role in the council – this would be the Equalities Team.
  - Marion said that the results have just been published of a consultation on the Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill. There are still a lot of concerns but there is some progress being made. The report (including summary and easy read) is available here: [Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill: consultation analysis - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultation-papers/collections/documents/learning-disabilities-autism-and-neurodivergence-bill-consultation-analysis.pdf)
  - Mary was recently at the AGM for the Scottish Accessible Transport Association (SATA), which is going to be closing in the next few weeks because there are not enough people (especially younger and fit people) to keep it going. **Myshela to contact Hussein Patwa for details.**
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### Planning for September meeting

- As previously discussed, the September EPN meeting will be in-person.
  - **Venue:** Linzi offered to book a Committee Room in the Town House, which everyone was happy with.
  - **Time:** Everyone agreed that an hour was too short. 4:00-5:30 was the preferred option, to avoid after-school time on the buses etc.
  - Suggestion to invite some council officers to the meeting – **Myshela to look into this** (also noted that officers will be at budget consultation events).
  - **Topic:** Equality Outcomes – but also time to chat and share some food (**Myshela to ask about dietary requirements via email**).
  - There was some discussion about the Equality Outcomes. Judi asked to see the action plan, and Karen pointed out the importance of considering both equality and equity, along with trauma informed practice. **Myshela to circulate relevant documents.**
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**Date of next meeting: Thursday 26 September, 4:00-5:30pm**

**Please note: this will be an in-person meeting! Venue likely to be a committee room at the Town House, will confirm this ASAP.**