

Equalities Participation Network – 28 May 2025

Present: Myshele Haywood (GREC), Matt Carter (ACHSCP), Roslynn Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Linzi Harrow (ACC), Ross Mackay (GREC), Ells Mchaffie (Guide Dogs), Marion McLaughlin (Aurora Autism Consulting), Mary Rasmussen (Guide Dogs), Faye Torabi (GREC).

Speakers: Fiona and Laura from Licensing. The person from Education did not turn up.

Apologies: Fay Morrison, Carol Hannaford, Karen Quinn, John Whitfield.

Q&A and Action Plans for Equality Outcomes

The purpose of the session was to meet folk from Licensing and Education, hear about what they do, and discuss their Equality Outcomes for 2025-29 – specifically what **actions** can be taken to achieve those outcomes.

Licensing – New Equality Outcomes:

- **Equality Outcome 1:** Review and maintain the licensing process to ensure fair access for all, including the continuation and development of hybrid Licensing Board meetings.
- **Equality Outcome 2:** The community of Aberdeen City are able to engage effectively in the exercise of the Board's licensing functions.

Fiona and Laura started off by explaining Licensing and how it works.

- The **Licensing Board** deals with businesses that sell alcohol, as well as gambling establishments.
- The **Licensing Committee** deals with all other types of licensing, including taxis, public entertainment, street vendors, short term lets, etc.
- Both are made up of Councillors, who consult with the **Local Licensing Forum**, which includes members from the Police, Community Councils, NHS, etc. There are also **Public Consultations** about specific applications and issues.

Q&A

Linzi – are there any consultations open currently or upcoming ones we should know about? **Laura** – review of sexual entertainment licensing policy should be live soon. The committee planner is available online, and information goes out on social media when new consultations open.

Ross – do you usually get a lot of feedback? **Fiona** – depends on the topic, there's lots of feedback on popular issues like street traders.

Mary – are there still exemptions for taxi drivers who are allergic to dogs? **Fiona** – yes. **Mary** – the proof used to be a large yellow tactile 'E' so it can be understood by people who don't read braille.

Roslynn – there have been issues recently with taxi drivers refusing to load shopping into their cars, or helping disabled people with their bags. There should be a process for getting exemptions for back pain, etc. **Fiona** – there's a complaints procedure through the website, and enforcement officers will investigate – need to note the driver's license number or other ID information.

Mary – lots of older people don't use internet. **Fiona** – people can also phone licensing, if no one is in the office they can leave a message: **01224 070808**.

Ross – is equalities data gathered in the consultations? Are there any gaps in terms of who is participating? **Fiona and Laura** weren't sure. There are statutory guidelines for Licensing Board members in terms of gender balance, etc.

Ross – a comment we often hear speaking with community members, is that there's a lack of cafés open in the evenings, or places to socialise that aren't pubs. Is this to do with licensing? **Fiona** – cafés don't need a license unless they're serving alcohol, or open after 11pm.

Roslynn – some bigger cafés are open slightly later, but the doors of the shopping centres close at 6pm. There's no encouragement to open later. **Marion** – you can get coffee and dessert in a restaurant, but people don't often think of that.

Matt – EO2 – issue with phrase “are able to.” **Roslynn** – who's allowed to engage? What is fair access? Especially for people who struggle with communication, etc. **Mary** – people need to have access and tools. **Ross** – shouldn't the goal be that people do engage? At the moment it looks like the only way to be involved with the process is to be on a community council.

Ells – how many objections do there need to be before an application is rejected? (discussion about complaints from people who buy flats above nightclubs, like the Malt Mill)

Linzi (after Fiona and Laura left) – the Licensing folk will draw up an action plan and share with us.

Education – New Equality Outcomes:

- **Equality Outcome 1:** Pupils with disabilities experience better access to services that meet their needs through more frequent and systematic involvement in the design of service delivery across the council.
- **Equality Outcome 2:** Young people and families will have improved access to the resources needed to support their mental health and wellbeing.
- **Equality Outcome 3:** Staff, children and young people will have a greater awareness of how they can support equality through delivery of curriculum.

The person from Education did not come to the meeting, but the group discussed the EOs anyway.

(notes organised by theme)

Training and Continuing Professional Development

Marion – ‘pupils with disabilities’ should be disabled pupils. Also, who is designing the services? Who is implementing changes? Disabled adults need to be involved in the process, alongside professionals who know about education and disability.

Mary – was involved in 1978 with the integration of children with recorded needs. There were regular meetings, teachers got training, etc. Now, teachers have an impossible job, with six kids with additional support needs in one class, very few Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs), no support for teachers.

Roslynn – NHS funding doesn't allow for appropriate levels of assessment and support for kids with additional needs, plus education cuts to PSAs, lack of training, etc. **There needs to be updated CPD.**

Linzi – training should be prioritised? (maybe the most achievable part?)

Myshele – most CPD is organised by schools and teachers themselves (*note: some CPD is centrally organised by the council – this approach is not popular, likely because it's expensive to get all the teachers in one place*).

Marion – teachers are often taught outdated and even dangerous ideas about disability – the autism course at Aberdeen university is particularly bad, leading to damaging behaviour for kids. Most schools are not aware of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (though they all know about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

What does a disability and neurodivergence policy look like? Need to get input from autistic teachers and build links with community – not just parents of autistic children (although there is overlap). **Important to include lived experience of autistic adults AND professional expertise.**

Mary – teachers don't have the capacity to be experts on everything – there are so many kids with so many different needs, it becomes a juggling act in classrooms.

Ross – GREC gets contacted by teachers about training for antiracism and LGBT+ issues. There's scope to make much more effective use of CPD time.

Resources (including for Mental Health)

Roslynn – AAD has seen a lot of parents seeking support because they can't get support through their kids' schools.

Marion – need to ensure resources are appropriate for the person – often kids given the wrong kind of support, like CBT (autistic people have anxiety about different things than neurotypical people – supporting them is more about how to accept their neurodivergence and work with it). **Schools are in a position to suggest reasonable adjustments, rather than parents having to come up with them.** Fixes don't need to be expensive.

Roslynn – aware of lots of kids who are excluded or end up self-excluding because they can't cope with school.

Marion – need to make sure internal exclusions are properly recorded.

Ross – what's the baseline?

Matt – what resources are actually available? How do parents or pupils find out about them?

Ells – example of ‘mental health Alexa’ for older people, a device that checks in on someone periodically, asks how they’re doing, reminds them to take meds, etc. Maybe appropriate in some contexts but definitely not all.

Marion – people who ask questions or have opinions are seen as problems.

Roslynn – things were better before so many PSAs were withdrawn. It’s also a problem that teachers aren’t allowed to discipline kids at all.

Marion – kids went through Covid, which set them back on developing social skills, and schools are expected to do more with less.

Myshale – maybe an audit of resources would be useful? Then share with communities and see what they think?

Marion – some Education Scotland materials are very problematic – for example the Autism Toolkit bullying section, written without input from autistic teachers. Or the ‘we were expecting you’ resource for trainee teachers, not vetted, written or delivered by autistic people – refused feedback from autistic people when offered.

Roslynn – there’s lots of similar examples with people who are blind, deaf, etc.

Ross – so, something like a professional and lived experience systems review?

Marion – must include lived experience of actually being disabled.

Myshale – experience vs. expertise.

Matt – lived experience vs. vicarious experience.

Date of next meeting: Thursday 26 June, 4-5pm, online.

Topic: NESCAN (North East Scotland Climate Action Network).