

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	AUDIT & RISK
DATE	25 January 2011
DIRECTOR	Stewart Carruth
TITLE OF REPORT	Observations on Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) in practice at Aberdeen City Council
REPORT NUMBER:	CG/10/210

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform the Committee of the results of the observations by the Scottish Human Rights Commission on the Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments (EHRIs) in practice at Aberdeen City Council and to set out their recommendations.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Committee is asked to:

- I) endorse the recommendations of the SHRC report
- II) instruct officers to carry out the further training and awareness raising identified
- III) instruct report author/policy makers to participate in this training and awareness raising as required
- IV) contribute to a culture change which
 - a) promotes the impact assessment process as a customer service improvement tool
 - b) continues to prioritise early effective participation and consultation on all policy proposals, in particular on budget saving proposals
- V) instruct Heads of Service to take a more proactive role in the monitoring and review process of impact assessment outcomes.
- VI) refer this report to Corporate Policy and Performance and Finance and Resources Communities for their approval

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications other than those associated with the implementation of the recommendation which will be undertaken and financed by the services.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

This report has direct links with the following: legal, resource, personnel, as the Council has a statutory duty under equalities legislation to carry out Equality Impact Assessments on all proposals – policies, plans and procedures. An online training module is being developed to raise awareness about how when to undertake the EHRIA.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

- 5.1 This report contains the details of the report by the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) on their observations on the Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments (EHRIs) in practice at Aberdeen City Council. The report is based on interviews held in January and February 2010 with staff who had used the EHRIA tool and/or received awareness training on how to carry out an EHRIA.
- 5.2 This is an opportune time to consider the SHRC observations and recommendations, given that we have just completed a cycle of EHRIs to examine the potential impact of the options highlighted within the Priority Based Budgeting 5 year business plan.
- 5.3 The SHRC report seeks to establish whether there has been perceived added value to assessing human rights impact and begins to identify what might be done better to achieve the embedding of human rights through impact assessment.
- 5.4 The SHRC accepts that the report findings were largely based on the subjective views of 15 interviewees without the wider participation either of people who use Council services or have been affected by Council policy decisions nor of the elected members, who have the ultimate responsibility for meeting the Council's statutory duties.
- 5.5 Pages 12 to 15 cover the experience of conducting EHRIs around budget saving proposals and recommends that the consultation process, particularly around budget making decisions is carefully examined.

One interview stated that "I think they would be much more effective if we had a plan for the next 3/5 years for budget savings and how we are going to impact assess them; building in consultation."

The SHRC report goes on to say "Directors and Head of Services putting forward budget savings proposals would then have some advance feedback from communities before proposals are made."

- 5.6 Consultation with public meetings, questionnaires, community forum

engagement etc, began far earlier in the budget setting process this cycle with the options within the 5 year business plan. Aberdeen City Council is now at the forefront of all of the local authorities in Scotland in terms of community engagement in the budget setting process. The Council moved from a traditional annual approach to a Priority Based Budget approach for the next five years to identify options to deliver services differently in a sustainable manner.

The community engagement plan aimed to show the Council as open, to actively listen and encourage comments from main stakeholders, partners and members of the public.

A campaign identity highlighting “Have Your Say” was created and a number of communication channels were activated including:

- Stakeholder briefings – stakeholders identified and invited to attend briefings and scenario planning workshops. The Council Leader and Deputy Leader, Chief Executive, directors and heads of service all participated in these events
- Public survey – a questionnaire was devised to encourage members of the public to identify their priorities for future council investment. The local press published this to encourage responses.
- City Voice survey – the city’s citizens panel was requested to complete a questionnaire highlighting their future priorities
- Internal communications – the Chief Executive held senior managers’ briefings and each directorate also arranged a series of staff briefings and workshops. The Council’s Intranet is being used as a focus for information on business plan activity.
- Website – the Council’s website was used to publish the draft priority based budgeting report. Members of the public are encouraged to give their views via responses to questions and through a specific email address.
- 100 citywide “front doors” – customer relations and reception staff in libraries, community centres and the city’s information points were used to promote and encourage members of the public to complete a questionnaire.
- Community- led public meetings – the Council Leader, Deputy Leader and directors participated in a series of public meetings convened by a number of the city’s community councils.

5.7 The SHRC report found that the human rights understanding of officers varied considerably and that in the majority of cases it was felt further human rights training would be helpful. This is identified in their recommendations.

5.8 Information gathered from the interviewees suggests there is currently no system of monitoring or ongoing review of EHRIAs. While the Equalities team takes a key role in terms of quality assurance on all impact assessments that come to them, extra resource would be requested in order to carry out a further monitoring function. The report suggests that responsibility for monitoring that impact assessments are completed when needed must then lie with the Head of Service.

5.9 The key recommendations from the SHRC report are:

- a need for further training and awareness raising of all officers conducting the assessments
- a need to change negative perception about impact assessments by fostering an understanding that the impact assessment process is not about preventing people from doing things but is about improving customer service delivery
- a need for early, effective participation and consultation in all policy proposals, in particular on budget saving proposals
- a need for a more robust monitoring and review process of impact assessments

6. IMPACT

There are direct links to the Community Plan, the Single Outcome Agreement and Vibrant, Dynamic & Forward Looking as the Equalities & Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) process is the main tool for mainstreaming equality throughout the organisation.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Community Engagement Report The Next five Years Business Plan 8 December 2010

8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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