Minutes of the Equality Budget Advisory Group (EBAG) meeting held on 29th October 2018.

Attendees and Apologies

Attendees
Angela O'Hagan, WiSE, Glasgow Caledonian University (chair)
Liz Hawkins, SG (Communities Analysis)
Sean Stronach, SG (Equality Policy)
Tim Ellis, SG (Performance and Strategic Outcomes)
Joseph Ritchie, SG (Communities Analysis)
Alison Hosie, Scottish Human Rights Commission
Jim McCormick, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Apologies
Chris Oswald, Equality and Human Rights Commission
James Fowlie, COSLA
Mhoraig Green, COSLA
Fiona Page, SG (Finance)
Uzma Khan, SG (Office of the Chief Economic Advisor)

Notes
- Unfortunately, owing to the announcement of the budget following the initial meeting planning, several colleagues were unable to attend.
- For future reference, Monday is generally a day to avoid, and for the remainder of 2018 Wednesday and Thursday will be teaching days for Dr O'Hagan.

1. Introduction, welcome and remit going forward.

The meeting welcomed Angela O'Hagan as the new chair, and introductions were made amongst the attendees.

The Chair introduced the meeting by emphasising that in her view the Equality Budget Advisory Group (EBAG) had become a group which commented on budget proposals rather than being involved in their formulation. Her view was that it was necessary to develop more thorough ways to ensure that human rights and equality analysis were integrated into the budgets directly. In effect, she saw the role shifting from a responsive one to one more firmly embedded in the technical procedure of equality goal setting and monitoring within the budgeting process.

In this context, she thought that there is work to do to reformulate the groups' focus and goals. In her view an important goal was figuring out how to connect the various mechanisms for equality budgeting, i.e. human rights reports, Equality Budgeting and the National Performance Framework into a combined form of budget analysis.

2. Review of EBAG work plan 2017–18

The meeting then read through the work plan for EBAG [see attached].

It was perceived generally that the 'deep dives' into policy areas had been helpful and there was a desire to have more of these, and soon, particularly concerning Early Years Learning and Childcare (ELC) and processes for equalities consideration in revenue generation policy.

It was observed that the deep dive activity in the past had been useful, but it wasn't clear that there was a robust mechanism for feedback and developing an ongoing process.

The Chair was keen to emphasise that it was important to develop the capacity of the organisation more broadly to understand inequality of outcome and to take that forward into policy making.

A further important task noted by the Chair was clarifying an understanding of how the Equality Budget Statements could be improved, and how the relationship between the EBS, Fairer Scotland Duty, and the NPF could most effectively work in concert.

Actions going forward: Schedule a 'deep dive' on ELC in November. Schedule a 'deep dive' with tax & revenue colleagues in January.

3. Practical Dimensions of Developing an Equalities Process

For the Chair, the question that should shape the ongoing process was: "how do you start the budget analysis with equality at the start?" Then, "how might this progress be measured or captured by governments?" Would it be possible to have a process that, rather than responding to the budget and developing a reaction to it, would be able to engage with the budget directly at the level of formulation?

The next section of the meeting considered the practicalities for advancing the equalities agenda more broadly. Tim mentioned that, given the potential for mutually reinforcing equality dimensions, it would probably make sense to identify the areas with the most potential purchase.

Tim noted that there were few examples of outcomes budgeting although some projects had been identified in Sweden and New Zealand.

Jim suggested that, in terms of identifying the most important areas for intervention, the EHRC report on equalities – 'Is Scotland Fairer' (2018) – might make a good starting point. This report helps to identify the most pressing areas for intervention, both in terms of where gaps are closing and where there is resistance to change. If these problem areas can be identified along with consideration of budget spend then there is certainly scope for improvement.

The Chair linked this back to the question of process, i.e. what kind of process could be developed for assessing the budget in terms of equality outcomes, which could in turn be used to refine the process. The challenge is, therefore, finding the correct equality 'product' which best meets the requirements of policy and process, i.e. recording outcomes while also feeding back into the process. It might be possible therefore to develop within EBAG the scope for scrutinising the equality analysis data, identifying gaps in the existing processes in terms of coverage and data and, in turn, developing recommendations for improving upon them.

4. Was Additional Capacity Necessary?

Alison emphasised the importance of developing capacity. She noted that, for instance, 'human rights budgeting' was not always clearly understood and developing mechanisms to ensure that these concepts were effectively being put into practice was important. International examples and comparisons could also be made and developed for looking at transparency within the budgeting process.

The Chair noted that, in this context, it's also important to determine what the function of the group is in relation to the budget process from the perspective of determining what skills and additional membership might be needed, i.e. whether more technical knowledge/skills are available, and whether further contributions from, for instance, Audit Scotland, COSLA, Finance, the NHS, and so on, would be of assistance.

EBAG meetings would be best scheduled for every 2 months or so to update on the ongoing process.

Actions Going Forward: Schedule next EBAG meeting.