



Subject:	The Executive Office Budget for 2023 and Associated Equality Impact Assessment Consultation
Date:	26th June, 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>To seek retrospective Committee approval for the attached officer response to The Executive Office Budget 2023-24 and Associated EQIA Consultation</p> <p>The Department ('TEO') invited responses within an initial 4-week consultation period, which was launched just days after an election and before the Council had held its AGM. It was therefore not possible to take this response through the Council's formal decision-making structures.</p> <p>This officer response was, therefore, submitted to the TEO with the caveat that it would be subject to approval by the Committee on 26th June and ratification by the Council on 3rd July 2023.</p>

2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is requested to approve the attached officer response.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>On 11 May 2023, The Executive Office ('TEO') Department published its Budget for 2023-24 for consultation, along with its Equality Screening Form and invited comments from interested stakeholders.</p> <p>TEO indicated that whilst the consultation would run until August it requested responses by 7th June 2023 as part of a first phase of consultation. Views received during this time will be used to inform TEO's initial allocation of funds to its business areas and Arms' Length Bodies, as well as any early mitigations that can be put in place.</p> <p>Any further responses received before the consultation closure date on 2 August 2023 would be used to consider further mitigation measures, to inform in-year budget reallocation processes or to direct any additional funding (or further reductions) that emerge over the course of the financial year. A copy of the consultation documentation can be accessed here.</p> <p>As set out above, the consultation commenced on 11th May, a week before the local government elections. Members will also recall that the Council's AGM did not take place until 5th June. In the circumstances, it was not possible to seek Committee approval of a draft response before 7th June.</p>
3.2	<p>As appears from the consultation document, TEO's expenditure requirements have increased substantially, to £85.2m. However, based on the Westminster Ministerial Statement, it expects its budget to be reduced to £75.8 million. This means a budget reduction of some £9.5m (11.1%) against planned baseline requirements. Committee will note that there are a number of spending areas which are ringfenced in their budget, for example, Victims' Payments, Historical Institutional Abuse services and redress, work on supporting victims-survivors of Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries.</p>
3.3	<p>The consultation documentation states that TEO has considered the general approach to reductions across it's business areas. Two options were identified:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. apply a common reduction of 11.1% across all non-ringfenced business areas. This would include, for example, Good Relations and the Victims' budget, which funds VSS's work with victims and survivors and support for victims' groups (but not Victims' Payments). 2. use the EQIA to inform decisions on where cash releasing savings could be realised in a way that limited the impact on the most vulnerable people served by TEO. <p>TEO indicated that it prefers Option 2 as being more in line with its equity ethos and was of the view that applying a fixed amount would have an adverse impact on disability, age and dependants Section 75 categories disproportionately.</p>

3.4	<p>After internal officer consultation, the City Solicitor submitted a response on 7th June. A copy of that response is attached to this report. The Committee will note that this response was caveated as being a draft officer response which would have to be subject to agreement and ratification by the Council at its meeting on 3rd July.</p> <p>Members will see that the consultation response recognises that the TEO is facing significant budgetary pressures. However, it raises significant concerns about the impact of the proposed cuts and about the consultation process generally.</p>
3.5	<p>Officers are of the view that the decision to implement a policy and then subject it to an EQIA is counter- intuitive. The purpose of the EQIA should be to assist in developing policy positions and actions and should not be used to retrospectively. It appears to officers that the budget allocations will negatively impact on services for all 9 equality grounds and seriously impede the ability of the Council to actively promote good relations in the city.</p> <p>Officers also raised concerns regarding the lack of evidence to support the reduction of 47% of the District Council's Good Relations Programmes.</p> <p><u>Recommendation</u></p> <p>The Committee is asked to consider the attached draft Officer response.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The proposed measures include a 47% reduction in good relations budget which will severely impact on the Council's ability to provide that lead which central government and 'TEO' have requested previously.</p>
3.7	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The proposed measures will lead to an adverse impact on Good Relations within the City. This is particularly relevant to the work supporting some of the most marginalised communities in the city such as Asylum Seekers, people living at interface areas or young people at risk of becoming involved in conflict and disorder.</p>
4.0	<p>Document Attached</p>
	<p>Draft Officer Response</p>