

Call for evidence on the Budget Strategy Phase 2011-2012
Response from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities welcomes this opportunity to comment on the Budget Strategy, the more especially since we have some concerns about its impact on minority communities in Scotland.

How do we ensure that the provision of public services aimed at equality groups is adequately maintained during a period of tightening public expenditure?

The proposed withdrawal of central funding in favour of block grants to local authorities would impact disproportionately on minority communities and in particular isolated individuals from those communities, particularly those living in rural areas. This "localisation" of budgetary decision-making fails to address the situation of minority communities in Scotland. By their very nature, there are unlikely to be significant numbers of any minority community in most local authority areas, so they will not be regarded as a spending priority at local level. At best, a local authority may fund an umbrella "minority community initiative" in their area, but this can be little more than a tick-box exercise. The fundamental point is that there is not a single homogenous "minority community" – indeed some individual communities may not be homogenous – but rather many minority communities each with individual, diverse, and sometimes even conflicting needs. An elderly non-English-speaking Chinese woman, for example, has as little in common with a Muslim teenager of Pakistani descent, as with the indigenous majority. Some, such as the Jewish and Sikh communities, have both ethnic and religious facets to their identity, whilst others may depend only on ethnicity or religion. A generic approach to consulting with, and providing services to minority communities cannot but fail to meet the needs of those that are minorities even among the minorities; failure to take account of the diversity of diversity must inevitably condemn any project to failure.

By its very nature, equality must be universal. Equality that excepts some from its provision is not equality. We are, therefore, concerned that localisation is likely to result in a postcode lottery, whereby individuals living in one local authority area have access to effective support, whilst those, perhaps from the same minority community, in another area, do not. For example, whilst the Jewish community in East Renfrewshire is large enough to be visible to service providers, the small numbers of Jewish people living in the Western Isles are not.

National networks, and national funding of those networks, are, therefore, the only means by which minority communities can receive appropriate services and support throughout Scotland. Activities, whether national or local, that could not take place if not funded nationally, must be funded nationally.

What are the positive economic benefits of spending on equalities issues?

Aside from the overarching human rights issues, appropriate provision of facilities and services permits everyone, whatever their ethnicity, religion, age, gender, sexuality, etc, to engage effectively in wider Scottish society, in education, the job market, and in business, and thereby to maximise their contribution to the economy.

How will the (general and specific) duties for public authorities under the Equality Bill be achievable within the financial environment of the next few years?

It is notable that the majority of current Single Outcome Agreements say little or nothing about delivering on the equality duties¹. This must clearly be improved in the next round of SOAs. However, not only can equality policy objectives be better and more effectively provided nationally, as already stated, in many cases they simply cannot be delivered through local provision, and should, therefore, be treated as an exception to the general localisation agenda.

Are there examples of good practice in collaborative working and working across boundaries in delivering public services for equality groups which can be further developed?

Within the Jewish Community, Jewish Care Scotland² has developed a unique partnership with East Renfrewshire Council which enables it to provide a full range of social services with a strongly Jewish ethos not only in the settled Jewish communities of the Central Belt, but throughout the whole of Scotland.

Calderwood Jewish Education³ works closely with East Renfrewshire Council and Calderwood Lodge Primary School⁴ to provide pupils in Scotland's only Jewish school with culturally and religiously specific education which is fully integrated with the Curriculum for Excellence Outcomes and Experiences. This is a unique example, because the localisation policy already in place with regard to schools results in an uneven approach and so is either not replicated elsewhere, or at best requires duplication of effort across different local authorities. The resulting uneven provision demonstrates that our concern in relation to budgetary localisation is not without foundation.

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities⁵ works to provide support to the smaller communities and isolated individuals throughout Scotland, amongst other activities by providing information and advice on request to local authorities, health boards, police forces, etc. It is of the nature of this provision that, except in the larger cities, it can only be provided nationally. An isolated Jewish single mother in the north-west of Scotland has no local support mechanism, but can only be given any sense of security by being connected to our national network.

What possibilities are there for innovation and the use of technology in delivering public services for equality groups?

To some extent web-based resources, forums, etc may be of use in providing support to scattered minority communities – but again this has to be at a national level. A

¹ *Single Outcome Agreements 2009-10* (Scottish Parliament Information Centre, 10/18, February 2010 <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/research/briefings-10/SB10-18.pdf>)

² www.jcarescot.org.uk

³ <http://www.ea.e-renfrew.sch.uk/calderwoodlodge/pages/CJE/cjeaims.html>

⁴ www.calderwoodlodge.e-renfrew.sch.uk

⁵ www.scojec.org

local-authority based support service for minorities cannot possibly provide adequately for all the diverse minorities in their area.

In any event, this is not a cheap and easy solution, since many people still do not have internet access. In particular, many elderly people do not own a computer, and, even if they are inclined to learn computer skills, the distance to public facilities, for example in a library, combined only too often with a dearth of public transport in rural areas, make this an unrealistic proposition. Unless part of a wider strategy, online networks are often no more than a tick-box exercise and cannot provide genuine support across a whole community.

Is there a greater role for the third sector in delivering an equality agenda during a period of tightening public expenditure?

The third sector plays an important role at all times in delivering an equality agenda, but this is not only, or even mainly their responsibility. In order to be effective, an equality agenda must be "mainstreamed" throughout all policy and service areas in public, private, and voluntary sectors. Moreover, the third sector ought not to be viewed as a means of getting things done "on the cheap", and neither should the achievement of equality be regarded as cost free.

There may sometimes be a temptation to regard third sector organisations as though they were representative of all minority groups, in order to avoid the effort of genuine consultation. This is simply not the case. For example, as its Chief Executive has pointed out, the Scottish Interfaith Council exists to facilitate dialogue between faith communities, and whilst it may be an address through which many - but not all - of these may be contacted, it does not, indeed, cannot, speak on their behalves, with the consequence that consultation with the SIFC does not constitute consultation with faith communities. Similarly Regional Equality Councils cannot always be presumed to be engaged with all relevant groups in their area, and those that are a minority even among minority groups, will inevitably be overlooked when the focus is solely local.

What impact have recent reductions in public spending had on equality groups in countries such as Ireland?

We do not have any knowledge of the Irish experience.

What is the likely impact of demographic trends such as an ageing population on delivering public services for equality groups?

Demographic trends must always be taken into account both when considering what services are required in any area, and how to deliver them. For example, an influx of young families from Eastern Europe will require appropriate ESL provision in schools, whilst, as we have already stated, an aging rural population is unlikely to benefit from the provision of online resources.

It is important to note that past demand may be no indication of future need – individuals from minority communities may live very happily in an area for many years without making any demand for culturally specific services. However, as they become more elderly, and particularly if they find themselves alone, perhaps widowed, and with children having moved away, many seek to re-establish links with their

community of origin. Some, particularly those suffering from dementia, may revert to their childhood language, if English is not their first language.

It is unfortunate that the question relating to religion of upbringing has been dropped from the proposed 2011 census questions, and that the Scottish census asks “what religion ... do you belong to?”, rather than, as in England and Wales, “What is your religion ...?”, since these would enable service providers to take note of the numbers of people who might require a culturally specific service, even if not all are currently actively involved with the relevant community.

What impact will the tightening of public expenditure have on the delivery of mental health services to women in prison?

We do not have any experience in this area.

Conclusion

We have grave concerns that the blanket extension of the localisation agenda will isolate members of minority communities, including the Jewish community, particularly those living in rural areas outwith any settled community. As the Scotland-wide representative body of the Jewish communities in Scotland, our Council is currently able to provide a measure of support to these, and to foster a feeling of community that transcends locality. We have been enabled to do this thanks to funding initiatives that view the Scottish Jewish community nationally, rather than merely scattered individuals and small groups. This cannot be done adequately by generic provision to an imagined single “minority community”, so to change that view would be to condemn many people to isolation, and, given the increasing level of antisemitism⁶, often anxiety.

Whilst we do not criticise localisation as a general policy, we urge that an exception should be made to ensure ongoing national support for minority communities.

Note: The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland comprising Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Dundee as well as the more loosely linked groups of the Jewish Network of Argyll and the Highlands, and of students studying in Scottish Universities and Colleges. SCoJeC is Scottish Charity SC029438, and its aims are to advance public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community. It works with others to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality, and represents the Jewish community in Scotland to government and other statutory and official bodies on matters affecting the Jewish community.

In preparing this response we have consulted widely among members of the Scottish Jewish community.

⁶ *Antisemitic Incidents Report 2009* (Community Security Trust)
<http://www.thecst.org.uk/docs/CST-incidents-report-09-for-web.pdf>