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ELECTED MEMBER BRIEFING NOTE

Gender Responsive Budgeting



Scottish
Women's
Budget
Group



Elected Members Briefing Series

The Improvement Service (IS) has developed an Elected Members Briefing Series to help elected members keep pace with key issues affecting local government.

Some briefing notes will be directly produced by IS staff but we will also make available material from as wide a range of public bodies, commentators and observers of public services as possible.

We will use the IS website and elected member e-bulletin to publicise and provide access to the briefing notes. All briefing notes in the series can be accessed at www.improvementservice.org.uk/products-and-services/skills-and-development/elected-members-development/elected-member-guidance-and-briefings

About this briefing note

This briefing aims to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of gender analysis within local authority budgetary processes.

Women and men experience the world differently and face different economic realities and challenges. They use public services differently and therefore decisions made to increase or decrease spending on services will impact women and men differently. Just like decisions on how best to spend public money, decisions about how best to raise public funds through tax and charges on services can affect women and men differently. Public spending and revenue raising decisions that do not recognise these different experiences risk entrenching inequality within our communities.

This briefing will provide facts and figures on the impact of existing gender inequalities and the need for gender budget analysis to tackle these. It will also provide suggestions, tools and questions for elected members to use during the budget process to help promote gender equality and fulfil their obligations as set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty.



What is the issue and why does it matter?

Women and men continue to experience inequalities in pay, in employment and promotion opportunities, and in the harassment and abuse they experience, with women being more likely to experience poverty at all points in their life. Women still tend to have more responsibility for unpaid work including childcare, care for older or disabled people, and domestic work. For many women, this means a greater reliance on public services and can limit the time they have for paid work and other activities. It also means that when public services are withdrawn, or social security spending is reduced, women are worst affected. The [short film produced by the UK Commission on a Gender Equal Economy](#) provides an explainer of the spirals of inequality women face.

Taking a gender analysis approach to budgets helps improve understanding of how decisions affect women and men differently because of their different experiences in family and household structures; paid employment and unpaid work; and caring and provisioning for others. These different experiences stem from established gendered norms and assumptions about women and men, including as workers, and the kinds of jobs women and men do, including traditional assumptions about parenting and caring. This in turn has an effect on the economic status which we ascribe to women and men - as earners and taxpayers - and the types of social security and other publicly funded income received or services used. Therefore, tax and revenue, spend on social security, education, health, public services and infrastructure including transport and care facilities, are all gendered issues.

Often there is an assumption that budgets are gender neutral and effect everyone similarly. However, gender budget analysis provides an alternative approach that exposes the gendered impact of public spending and ensures consideration of decisions through this lens.

What's the evidence on women's different economic realities?

- Scotland's gender pay gap is 13.3%, this is the difference between women and men's average earnings
- Full-time equivalent rate for women was 42% compared to 58% of men demonstrating women's participation in the labour market is lower than men's
- 85% of those who are deemed 'inactive' in the labour market due to caring responsibilities are women
- 8% of women in employment aged over 16 were self-employed compared to 16% of men

- Median hourly earnings for women was £11.81 per hour compared to £13.89 per hour for men
- 78% of women earned the living wage or more compared to 84% of men¹
- Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic women undertook 60% more unpaid work than men²
- Unemployment among women in Scotland increased at a higher rate than men at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.³

Women, those belonging to minority ethnic communities and disabled people are economically the hardest hit by the Covid-19 crisis and the risk of deepening existing inequalities is high. Women have been on the frontline of the Covid-19 crisis, making up the majority of health and care workers and the majority of workers at high risk of exposure to Covid-19. Other sectors which have a predominantly female workforce, such as hospitality,⁴ have been harder hit by the impact of lockdown and ongoing restrictions of social distancing, with risk of unemployment or reducing working hours remaining high.

Inequalities based on gender intersect with other forms of inequality based on class, race, disability and other factors so that some groups of women, particularly poor women, women from minority ethnic communities and disabled women face multiple disadvantage.

Unfortunately, all too often spending decisions are made without the necessary intersectional gender analysis to ensure inequalities are tackled. This can leave women in a worse position, trapped in poverty as a result of unintended consequences of decisions that are supposed to serve our communities.

Gender budgeting is not about formulating separate budgets for women and men, but rather it reveals the different impacts of public finance and policy decisions on the distinctive realities of women and men's lives.

There are some core areas where specific spending on women's services is necessary to tackle other outcomes of inequality in our society. It requires the same kind of gender budget analysis to ensure the services are working to support women and tackle inequality. Violence against women (VAW) services is a primary example of this. Public spending decisions that do not recognise the different needs of women, men and non-binary people in domestic abuse and other specialist VAW services fail to recognise the link between violence against women as a consequence of gender inequality.

1 Statistics take from Scottish Government (2020), *Scotland's Gender Equality Index*, available at <https://data.gov.scot/genderindex/gender-equality-index-2020.html>

2 Office of National Statistics (2016) *Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work'* available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldtheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10>

3 Close the Gap (2021) *One Year on: How COVID-19 is impacting women's employment in Scotland* available at: https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/1617267711_One-Year-On---How-COVID-19-is-impacting-womens-employment-in-Scotland.pdf

4 Engender and Close the Gap (2020) *Joint Briefing on the Impact of COVID-19 on Women* available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Close-the-Gap-and-Engender-Joint-Briefing-on-the-impact-of-COVID-19-on-women-with-childcare-responsibilities-in-Scotland.pdf>



What does this mean for elected members?

Each budget decision made at local authority level can affect women and men differently. It is the role of elected members to interrogate these decisions and ensure quality analysis is used to inform decisions on public spending and revenue raising.

Asking questions about the impact of decisions helps to ensure there is compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Under the PSED, local authorities need to identify, mitigate and eliminate inequalities and promote equality by conducting equality impact assessments (EQIAs) of policies, programmes and budgets. EQIAs are a tool to ensure that decisions do not discriminate against or disadvantage people, and that decisions aim to eliminate or at least mitigate existing inequalities. It can also help to ensure compliance with the Fairer Scotland Duty given that budget decisions are strategic and socio-economic disadvantage and the inequality of outcomes it causes should be considered.

Therefore, it is vital that elected members have access to data and analysis to support their decision-making process. If this analysis is not available then you should question this.

We cannot build gender equality without understanding the gendered nature of budget decisions. Local authority budgets have an impact on huge areas of our lives and on areas that can have different impacts on women and men. Recognising the important role of gender and equalities budgeting when making public spending decisions is a vital role for elected members.



What does 'good practice' look like?

Good practice for building a gendered analysis into the budget making process is ensuring appropriate data and assessments are used, that there is necessary understanding and staff capacity within the local authority, and providing leadership in the need for strong equalities analysis.

Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) are one of the most important tools for delivering good practice in gender budgeting. Through these assessments elected members can ensure that the different impacts of policy are taken into account in the decision-making process. EQIAs should be undertaken before decisions are made and not filled out retrospectively. The information provided through a well completed EQIA will help you make informed decisions.

EQIAs are also a transparent way to demonstrate that public bodies have met their legal obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty and to show your communities how you are working to tackle inequality.

To conduct good EQIAs there is a need for good data collection on how services are used, who uses them - including a break down by sex and other protected characteristics. While there may be little data available to show the differential impact of policy decisions it is very unusual for there to be no differential impact on men and women given the differences in how men and women experience life.

Leadership is crucial to good practice on equalities issues and to embed practices across the local authority. By requesting information and ensuring necessary analysis, including EQIAs, is provided you will be demonstrating leadership in the importance of gender budget analysis.

Even in areas that seem completely gender-neutral, analysis and data can show us otherwise. Towns in Sweden carried out an analysis of how snow clearing is conducted and this led to a complete change to the order in which roads and streets were cleared. Analysis had found that drivers were mostly men and pedestrians were mostly women, with women suffering the majority of accidents in the snow. The new approach prioritised clearing pavements and cycle paths around schools, day centres and the large workplaces before roads. As a result this has reduced hospital admissions due to accidents in bad weather and saved money within the health service. Several local authorities in Scotland have started to consider current snow and ice clearing schemes. Watch a [short film about this example](#).

Good practice is about considering all elements of the budget and ensuring that an analysis has been conducted to consider the different effects of funding and policy decisions on different groups of women and men. This might include unexpected areas where you can make positive change.



Key issues and questions to consider

Key issues and questions to consider can be split into two sections. Process areas to look at if and how analysis has been conducted, and practice areas of some specific questions for elected members to consider on Local Authority budgets.

Process questions

- How has local data and information been used to inform spending proposals and make spending decisions?
- Have these decisions been subjected to equalities impact assessment?
- Are the EQIAs publicly available? If not, why not?
- What actions are taken to ensure that spending decisions at departmental levels are consistent with commitments to gender equality?
- What is the knowledge and understanding across stakeholders in the local authority of duties on equalities? Do teams have the capacity and time to complete the necessary analysis? If not, are there equalities champions that can support across departments?
- What progress has been made in advancing equality and in tackling underlying inequalities?

Practice questions

- Bearing in mind the diversity of women, who is benefiting most from expansion or losing most from cuts in this year's budget?
- How has public expenditure on services been distributed between women and men, girls and boys?
- Has adequate funding been provided to cover urgent needs of women for health, care, housing and VAWG services, for themselves and for those they care for?
- Does this policy look at differences within particular groups of women and men? For example, age, race, socio-economic circumstances.
- Does the initiative have unintended impacts on, or create barriers for, specific groups of women and men?
- How will this policy impact people in the long-term? For example, policies that make it necessary for women to stay doing unpaid care may have negative impacts on women's life time earnings and pensions.

- Is spending on public services that promote gender equality expanding, or is it being cut?
- Are working conditions in the public sector (pay, career prospects and work patterns) conducive to greater gender equality or hindering it?

There are many more questions to help you consider how budget decisions are being made in your area but these offer a good starting point which can be built on in successive budget processes.



Summary

Gender analysis of budgets aims to:

- Challenge the assumption that budgets are gender-neutral – that is that budgets do not have impacts that reinforce gendered outcomes;
- Examine how budgetary allocations affect the economic and social opportunities of women and men;
- Redistribute resources to achieve more equal outcomes and to advance equality.

It is the role of elected members to ensure that local authority budgets take appropriate account of the impact of budget decisions on women and men, your action and leadership has a key role to play in tackling inequality in our communities.

Further support and contacts

The Scottish Women's Budget Group offers training in gender budget analysis to help increase understanding of the what and why of gender budget analysis as well as looking at practical uses and tools. If you would like further information or to access training please contact us via info@swbg.org.uk

You can find our latest information at <https://swbg.org.uk>

iHub
Quarrywood Court
Livingston
EH54 6AX

Tel: 01506 282012
Email: info@improvementservice.org.uk
www.improvementservice.org.uk

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The logo for Improvement Service, featuring the letters 'is' in a dark blue, lowercase, sans-serif font. A small red dot is positioned above the 'i', and another red dot is at the end of the 's'. Below the 'is' is the word 'improvement' in a dark blue, lowercase, sans-serif font, followed by the word 'service' in a red, lowercase, sans-serif font.
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