

Women vs Local Cuts

Challenging Gender Equality
Impact Assessments & Local
Government Budgets



A Toolkit for Women's Groups



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This toolkit has been produced by the UK Women's Budget Group (WBG) on the basis of training sessions facilitated by Adele Baumgardt with two local organisations, WENS in Taunton and WEETU in Norwich. It has been drafted by Diane Elson, Adele Baumgardt, and Polly Trenow, with inputs from WENS and WEETU and guidance from Jackie Longworth and Ruth Pearson, and support from Amy Watson, WBG Coordinator.

The funding has been provided by ROSA, the UK Fund for Women and Girls. ROSA works to champion funding for women and girls, raise funds and invest in change, and act as a connector and advocate. See www.rosauk.org

WBG is an independent, voluntary organisation made up of individuals from academia, non-governmental organisations and trade unions. We have been scrutinising the gender implications of the budgets and spending plans of UK governments since the early 1990s. See www.wbg.org.uk

WEETU - the Women's Employment and Enterprise Unit - delivered employment support and enterprise training and finance for low income women in Norwich and Norfolk since 1987. However, as the result of current government policies and lack of funding it was forced to shut down its services in summer 2013.

WENS - the Women's Equality Network Somerset - is a group of volunteers supported through Equality South West. They lobby and campaign on gender equality issues throughout Somerset with a particular focus on services provided by local government.

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Introduction

This is a toolkit for women’s organisations, community groups and others who want to evaluate whether and how English local governments are taking gender equality into account in responding to cuts to the grants they get from central government. It concludes with ideas about organizing to challenge decisions that undermine gender equality.

It complements existing toolkits produced to assist women’s organizations, trades unions, community activists and others to assess the impact of local and national expenditure cuts. (See Appendix II on page 24). The focus of this toolkit is specifically on local government.

It focuses on England because the legal frameworks and financial arrangements are somewhat different in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; and because it is based on work with two women’s organizations in England. It draws on analysis of two English county councils: Somerset and Norfolk, and also gives examples from three city councils.

This toolkit:

- describes the key features of English local government budgets;
- explains the legal obligations of English local government with respect to taking gender equality into account in their budget decisions ;
- shows how to locate and analyse the gender impact assessments of budget proposals produced by local governments;
- explains how gender responsive budgeting could help to provide a better basis for compliance with the legal obligations;
- gives examples of how to campaign to hold local governments to account and challenge decisions that undermine gender equality, including pressing central government to restore funding for local government.

*organize
to challenge
decisions that
undermine gender
equality*



Photo (CC) by Cleaner Croydon 2011

This toolkit does not aim to give advice on how to bring legal challenges in the courts, since that requires specialized legal advice. For websites that provide information on legal challenges, see Appendix II on page 24.

We plan to maintain a section of the WBG website (www.wbg.org.uk) on local government budgets, to which local groups can send examples of how they are using the toolkit. Since most of the examples in this toolkit are mainly from two county councils, we particularly welcome further examples from district and city councils.



Fair-wages protest. Photo (CC) by CAFOD

Section 1

Understanding the basics of local government budgets

What does local government do?

Local government in England is organised in two different ways. Some parts of England have two tiers of local government: county councils and district, borough or city councils. Other parts of England have just one tier of local government called a unitary authority. These comprise unitary authorities in shire areas, London boroughs and metropolitan boroughs.

You can find the structure of local government where you live by putting your postcode into this website: <https://www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council>.

You can find which political party is in power in your council through the website of the Local Government Association. <http://www.local.gov.uk/local-government-elections>

County councils are responsible for services across the whole county. For example: education, transport, planning, fire and public safety, social care, libraries, waste management and trading standards.

District, borough and city councils cover a smaller area than county councils. They're usually responsible for services like rubbish collection, recycling, council tax collections, housing and planning applications

Unitary authorities and London and metropolitan boroughs. Where there is just one tier of local government, they provide all the local services listed above. In London and metropolitan areas some services like fire, police and public transport, are provided through 'joint authorities' (for example in London by the Greater London Authority)

Women and local government

Women use local government services to a greater degree than men, especially because of their need for care services, both for themselves and for other people that they care for. Comprehensive data is lacking but local level studies provide indications. For example

Coventry,
www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/chrp/projects/humanrightsimpactassessments/women/layers_of_inequality.pdf

Bristol
www.bristolofawcett.org.uk/Documents/Economy/BristolCuttingWomenOut.pdf

North East
http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/newomens_women_and_the_cuts_interim_study_final_5_9_12_doc.pdf

Women provide local government services to a greater degree than men: women comprise 76 percent of local government employees, concentrated in county councils (81 per cent female employees), London boroughs (74 per cent female) and metropolitan authorities (75 per cent female).

All these types of councils are responsible for education and social services, where occupations are traditionally female and where part-time work is common. District, borough and city councils do not have these responsibilities, and provide services where men traditionally work, such as refuse collection and street cleaning, parks and gardens, and housing: women are 53 per cent of their workforce. See http://www.local.gov.uk/local-government-intelligence/-/journal_content/56/10180/2991184/ARTICLE

Women serve as elected representatives to a lesser degree than men. 32 percent of councilors are women, but only 12.3 percent of council leaders and 13.3 percent of elected mayors. Women are much less likely than men to hold the key corporate (18 percent women), financial (7 percent) and economic development (12 percent) portfolios which form the pathway to leadership. Women are also in a minority (23 percent) of local authority chief executives. See Sex and Power 2013, www.countingwomenin.org

Where do councils get their money from?

Local councils in 2010/11 were funded primarily by a combination of grants from central government (57 percent) and revenue from Council Tax (42 percent). (Local Government Association, Future Funding Outlook for Councils from 2010/11 to 2019/20, July 2013) They also received some income from investments, council rents, sales and charges for services. Another source of revenue is being introduced, as councils will be able to retain some of the Business Rates that they collect on behalf of central government.

Grants

Announcements about central government funding for councils have traditionally been made in December and finalised early the following year. The annual local government finance settlement from the Department of Communities and Local Government announces 'formula grant' allocations on an individual council basis, with the total grant divided among councils on the basis of a complex formula that seeks to take into account the relative needs and available resources of different councils. Other departments will typically make announcements about the distribution of specific grants to local councils at a similar time to the finance settlement. Some grants are 'ring-fenced' and must be spent on specific services.

Council Tax

This is a property-based tax that was introduced in 1993 to replace the 'community charge' (or 'poll tax') that was levied on individuals. Domestic residences are banded according to an assessment of their market value; individual local authorities then determine the overall level of Council Tax. There are 8 value bands which in England are still based on assessed market values in April 1991. (In Wales there has been a re-valuation, which took effect in April 2005, based on property values in April 2003.) Council Tax rates are usually expressed as rates for a Band B and a Band D property. The average B and D rate for 2012-13 was £1,444 but most households pay less than this, so the average rate for all households is only £1,201.

There is a range of exemptions and reliefs from Council Tax, including a 25 percent reduction for properties with only one resident adult and a reduction of up to 50 percent if the property is empty or a second home. Until 2013, Low-income families could have their Council Tax bill reduced or eliminated by claiming Council Tax Benefit, paid by central government. (see J. Browne and B. Roantree (2012), A Survey of the UK Tax System, www.ifs.org/publications/1711)

From 2010-2013, local authorities that opted to freeze (or reduce) their Council Tax were eligible for central government support funding equivalent to the revenue they would have generated from a Council Tax rise of 1 percent. This option has been extended to 2014/15 and 2015/16. If a council wishes to raise Council Tax, they must hold a referendum if the increase is beyond the guidelines set by the Minister for Communities and Local Government, typically thought to imply an increase of more than 2 percent.

How many councils have increased Council Tax ?

In 2011/12, no local council increased Council Tax

In 2012/13, 85 percent received Council Tax freeze grant, 15 percent increased Council Tax

In 2013/14, 61 percent received Council Tax freeze grant, 39 percent increased Council Tax

No council has triggered a referendum.

Source: Department of Communities and Local Government , Statistical Release, Council Tax Levels Set by Local Authorities in England 2013/14
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/series/council-tax-statistics

Council Tax Support

From 2013/14 Council Tax Benefit has been abolished and local councils are responsible for putting in place localised support schemes. Pensioners must be provided with the same (means-tested) level of support in paying their Council Tax bills as before, but there is no such requirement for low income people of working age. Councils must provide support with fewer resources than has been spent in the past: the amount that will be provided by central government for Council Tax support will be 10 percent less than previous spending on Council Tax Benefit.

(Department of Communities and Local Government, Statistical Release, Council Tax Levels Set by Local Authorities in England 2013/14
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/series/council-tax-statistics)

Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests that the grant left over after providing rebates for pensioners will cover only 81 percent of the cost of Council Tax support for working-age claimants nationally if the rates are maintained at those provided by Council Tax Benefit. As many one in ten local authorities will have less than 75 percent of the costs covered. (S. Adam and J. Brown, Reforming Council Tax Benefit, <http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/6183>).

What will local councils do in response to localization of Council Tax support?

'Moving to fixed grants will change local authorities' incentives in a variety of ways, some more desirable than others. One effect, emphasised by the government, will to strengthen local authorities' incentives to promote employment and growth in the local economy. But it will also reduce their incentive to increase council tax rates, reduce their incentive to facilitate low-value housing development, give them an incentive to discourage low-income families from living in the area, give them a disincentive to encourage take-up of support, and strengthen their incentive to reduce error and fraud. It remains to be seen how far councils will respond to all these different incentives.'

S. Adam and J. Brown, Reforming Council Tax Benefit, <http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/6183>

Business Rates

Business Rates are a tax on the market value of a commercial property, including shops, offices, warehouses and factories. For England, they are set by central government. In 2012–13, the tax was set at 45.8 percent, with various reductions and exemptions. There have been revaluations of commercial property at about 5 year intervals. The latest revaluation took effect in April 2010, based on April 2008 rental values. Up until 2013, Business Rate revenue would go straight to central government, but a business rates retention scheme was introduced in April 2013: local authorities will keep around half of rates revenue raised from new developments, for a period of up to 10 years. (see J. Browne and B. Roantree (2012), A Survey of the UK Tax System, www.ifs.org.uk/publications/1711).

How are grants to councils being cut?

Local government accounts for about a quarter of public expenditure in UK but this is set to fall. In 2010/11 the government cut grants to local councils by £1.165bn and in 2013/14 by a further £2.1bn - a 33 percent cut in real terms since 2011. This is considerably higher than the cuts to central government departments. A further real-terms cut of 10 per cent was confirmed for most local government services for 2015/16 in the July 2013 Spending Round.

All councils are experiencing reductions in funding from central government over the 2010 Spending Review period. However, some councils are experiencing bigger reductions in funding than others.

The Local Government Association found that:

Those councils that were more dependent upon grant in 2010/11 are experiencing bigger reductions in funding from central government over the period. There is a strong relationship between grant dependency and deprivation with more deprived authorities tending to be more reliant on central government grant. (LGA, Finance spending round submission, April 2013, www.local.gov.uk)

More detailed information has been put together by Newcastle City Council and made available by The Guardian in a data base that you can access to find out how your council is being hit.

www.theguardian.com/society/patrick-butler-cuts-blog/2013/jan/11/council-cuts-north-loses-out-to-the-south-newcastle

and

www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/interactive/2012/nov/14/local-authority-cuts-map

How are local councils responding to the cuts?

Councils are having to cut services and employment, but they are adopting a variety of strategies, with different patterns of cuts and policies on Council Tax. Some useful sources of information are:

The False Economy website which provides an interactive map where users can add cuts in their local area and testimonies about how these cuts affect them.

<http://falseeconomy.org.uk/cuts/uk/all/t1>

The Guardian has provided an interactive map which shows the percentage change in spending by councils on planning, leisure and culture, adult social care and children's services.

www.theguardian.com/society/interactive/2013/mar/26/council-spending-cuts-across-uk-interactive-map

You can find out whether your council has frozen Council Tax on

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/series/council-tax-statistics

***on average
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More deprived areas are facing higher cuts

Figures produced by Newcastle city council show that on average local authorities faced a cut of £61 a year per head of population in the total funding they receive from central government throughout the period covered by the coalition government's comprehensive spending review, ending March 2014. Newcastle considered money distributed to 330 local authorities directly and also through schemes such as the new homes bonus and the grant for councils which freeze Council Tax.

An analysis of the data by the Guardian reveals that in the fifty councils worst affected by the government's decision to slash local authority budgets from 2010, the average cut was £160 per head. This group included some of the poorest populations in Britain - such as the most deprived council in Britain, Hackney, and struggling urban parts of the north such as Liverpool, Rochdale and South Tyneside.



Photo (CC) by Quixotic54 2009

In this group, on average a third of children were living in poverty. By contrast the fifty councils least affected by the government's cuts were shire councils, largely in well-heeled fringes of the south - such as Wokingham, Richmond and Elmbridge - which suffered cuts

on average of just £16 over the three year period and had child poverty rates of just 10 percent.

www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/nov/14/council-cuts-england-detailed

It seems that the reason for the difference in cuts per head is that in the past the most deprived areas received extra central government grants targeted at tackling poverty and deprivation and these grants have suffered the biggest cuts.

Where can you find more details about the budget of your local council?

The council's budget brings together revenue and expenditure. Councils are legally required to set balanced budgets at the start of every financial year and cannot carry forward a deficit at the end of the financial year.

Councils cannot plan to spend more than the revenue that they get from grants, taxes and charges. Budgets are prepared for each financial year and, many cases, also for a rolling three year period.

You can find out about your council's budget on their website. Some councils make this easy, others do not. For instance entering 'budget' into search function on the Brighton and Hove website leads to a link to the current budget book with detailed information.

<http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/council-and-democracy/council-finance/current-council-budget-201314>. This has a lot of information but is a rather technical document that takes time to understand, and does not highlight what cuts have been made and the arguments for them in a user-friendly way. But Brighton also produces live webcasts about their budget, including the opportunity to ask questions. See: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/council-and-democracy/live-chat-open-door-webcast

Other councils do not make it so easy to find out about their budget. For instance, Somerset County Council.

Entering 'budget' into the search function of their website (www.somerset.gov.uk/irj/public/home) does not come up with any helpful links to the budget. But entering 'financial plan' was more fruitful, leading to the rolling three year financial plans through which the budgets are set:

www.somerset.gov.uk/irj/public/services/directory/service?rid=/guid/706ad3aa-043f-2c10-9680-998f505c94d4.

This has a lot of information, but it is a rather technical document that takes time to understand. It does not highlight what cuts have been made and the arguments for them in a user-friendly way.

Some councils produce a wealth of easily located information with a detailed explanation of cuts they are making and the arguments for these cuts. An example is Newcastle: putting 'budget' in the search function of the website lead to a page with many helpful budget documents:

www.newcastle.gov.uk/your-council/budget-and-annual-report/budget-proposals-2016. The budget proposals are set out in a reader-friendly way. There are links to documents about the consultations that were held about the budget, and to a report on what has changed as a result of consultations. There is a clear account of what cuts have been proposed and the arguments for them.

If you cannot find the document that you are looking for on the council website, contact the council and ask them to email the relevant documents. If you need help in understanding them, ask your local councillor, whose contact details you can find on the council website.

Section 2

Understanding the law on local government budgets & gender equality

What are the legal obligations of local government with respect to taking gender equality into account?

The legal framework is provided by the Equality Act 2010, which came into force from 1 October 2010. It protects people from discrimination on grounds of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation



Equal Pay Day

Photo (CC) by SPO Presse and Kommunikation 2009

The Equality Act obliges all public bodies, including all local government authorities, to take account of the need to prevent discrimination and advance equality, through the Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force from 6 April 2011.

The Public Sector Equality Duty also applies to other organisations (e.g. voluntary, social enterprise or private sector organisations) when they are delivering services or performing functions on behalf of public bodies.

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010. (E.g. discrimination against women)
2. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. (E.g. between women and men)
3. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those that do not. (E.g. between women and men)

Advancing equality of opportunity means having due regard to need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
- take steps to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people;
- encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Source: Equalities and Human Rights Commission (2012), The essential guide to the public sector equality duty. England (and non-devolved public authorities in Scotland and Wales).

What must local government do?

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission provides a variety of guidance, including on making fair financial decisions. It tells local government personnel that:

The new public sector equality duty (the equality duty) does not prevent you from making difficult decisions such as reorganisations and relocations, redundancies, and service reductions, nor does it stop you from making decisions which may affect one group more than another group. The equality duty enables you to demonstrate that you are making financial decisions in a fair, transparent and accountable way, considering the needs and the rights of different members of your community. This is achieved through assessing the impact that changes to policies, procedures and practices could have on different protected groups (or protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010).

The law requires that public authorities demonstrate that they have had 'due regard' to the aims of the equality duty in their decision-making. Assessing the potential impact on equality of proposed changes to policies, procedures and practices is one of the key ways in which public authorities can demonstrate that they have had 'due regard'.

www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty/using-the-equality-duty-to-make-fair-financial-decisions/

However, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission guidance is organised by activity and sector, not by protected characteristics. Thus it does not offer specific guidance on gender equality impacts of local government. Such guidance was provided by the Equal Opportunities Commission, which was dissolved when the EHRC was set up: see for instance, Equal Opportunities Commission (2007) *The gender equality duty and local government: Guidance for public authorities in England*, which has a useful section on gender issues in service delivery. This EOC document does not seem to be available via the EHRC website, so we have placed a copy on the WBG website alongside this toolkit. It is out of date with respect to legal obligations but not with respect to understanding the ways that gender interacts with local government services.

Assessing the potential impact on equality of proposed changes to policies, procedures and practices is one of the key ways in which public authorities can demonstrate that they have had 'due regard'.



Photo (CC) by Christina Drane 2006

Must a local government conduct and publish a formal Equality Impact Assessment?

A key purpose of the Equality Duty is to require public bodies to give advance consideration to any likely impact on equality before deciding what their policy should be or making decisions that may have equality implications.

Under the previous equality duties in respect of gender, race and disability legislation, a formal equality impact assessment (EIA) was required.

Under the new single Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in the Equality Act 2010, there is no formal requirement to conduct EIAs. However, public authorities will need to demonstrate 'due regard' to the general duty.

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission recommends that local governments should carry out an EIA as the best way of ensuring that 'due regard' has been demonstrated:

We recommend that you document your assessment of the impact on equality when developing financial proposals. This will help you to:

- Ensure you have a written record of the equality considerations you have taken into account.
- Ensure that your decision includes a consideration of the actions that would help to avoid or mitigate any impacts on particular protected groups. Individual decisions should also be informed by the wider context of decisions in your own and other relevant public authorities, so that particular groups are not unduly affected by the cumulative effects of different decisions.

- Make your decisions based on evidence: a decision which is informed by relevant local and national information about equality is a better quality decision. Assessments of impact on equality provide a clear and systematic way to collect, assess and put forward relevant evidence.
- Make the decision-making process more transparent: a process which involves those likely to be affected by the policy, and which is based on evidence, is much more open and transparent. This should also help you secure better public understanding of the difficult decisions you will be making in the coming months.
- Comply with the law: a written record can be used to demonstrate that due regard has been had. Failure to meet the equality duty may result in authorities being exposed to costly, time-consuming and reputation-damaging legal challenges.

www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty/using-the-equality-duty-to-make-fair-financial-decisions/

Authorities must show that they have complied with the requirements of the duty with respect to their budget decisions.

This tool kit helps you evaluate whether this is the case, with a particular focus on gender equality; and offers guidance on what you can do about holding councils to account for inadequate assessments and failure to consider how to mitigate adverse impacts on women. It does not provide advice on how to bring a legal challenge, which is in any case becoming more difficult as the Coalition government has tightened the criteria for applications for judicial review of government decisions and has cut legal aid.

Two successful legal challenges

“the courts have not said that a formal EIA is necessary; what they have said is that the duty requires a public body to consider whether it would be appropriate to undertake a formal EIA or use other means of gathering information, when a decision or an actual or proposed policy might have an impact on equality.

It is important to note that doing an EIA on its own will not be enough to comply with the duty, particularly if it is just approached as a ‘tick-box’ exercise and the public authority has failed to gather sufficient information and/or has failed to take a well-informed view of the likely impact on equality.

In a successful challenge to Birmingham City Council’s decision to withdraw funding from various specialist advice services, the Council claimed that it had carried out an EIA but the court said it was inadequate because it had not consulted the specialist advice providers and their service users about the specific impact the termination of funding would have on them.

Similarly, in the successful challenge to Ealing Borough Council’s decision to stop funding domestic violence services provided by Southall Black Sisters, there was criticism of how the Council had used and interpreted the data available to it on the incidence of domestic violence by ethnic group.”

Source: TUC Equality Duty Toolkit
(www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-20159-f0.pdf)



Photo (CC) by UM Women 2009

Section 3

Finding and evaluating gender impact assessments produced by your local council

Has your local council conducted a gender impact assessment?

Finding out whether your local council has produced gender equality impact assessments may not always be easy.

First try the council website. This worked in the case of Somerset County Council, using the keyword 'equality impact assessment' on the website www.somerset.gov.uk/irj/public/council, which led to an easy to use page on equality impact assessments:

www.somerset.gov.uk/irj/public/council/goalsandvalues/goalandvalue?rid=/wpccontent/Sites/SCC/Web%20Pages/Council/Goals%20and%20values/Budget%20Impact%20Assessment

However, at the time of the workshop, we found Norfolk County Council website was less user friendly, and completed EIA documents were difficult to find.

If you can't find the information readily on the website of your council, our experience was that a telephone call to the relevant equality officer may save time and effort. Without the local equality officer's assistance we would never have found them for Norfolk County Council as they were appendices to council reports and committee documentation, filed by council cabinet paper dates and by council department.

The lesson from this is that you may need to look at Committee and Council Meeting papers. These can be a really useful source in working out why decisions have been made. They often contain a lot of equality information, but won't necessarily come up when you try to search for equality.

Norfolk County Council has since improved the accessibility of EIA documents, and they can be located at:

www.norfolk.gov.uk/Council_and_democracy/Interact_with_us/Norfolks_Big_Conversation/Read_our_proposals/NCC086573

Has your local council made adequate gender impact assessments?

Some key questions to ask:

1. Have all budget proposals been accompanied by an equality impact assessment?
2. How many assessments have not included gender?
3. Are gender-disaggregated statistics on service users or providers included in the equality impact assessments?
4. In assessments that did include gender, was the gender assessment adequate?
5. If the assessment found that there would be an adverse impact on women as compared to men, was any mitigating action proposed?
6. Is there an overall, or 'high level' equality impact assessment that considers the cumulative impact of cuts, and the balance between spending cuts and tax increases?

Here (on the next 4 pages) we provide some further guidance based on experience in the workshops in Taunton, Somerset, and in Norwich, Norfolk.

1. Have all budget proposals been accompanied by an equality impact assessment?

Norfolk County Council budget for 2011/14 contains 142 budget proposals; 96 are identified as needing an EIA, but no evidence is given as to why 48 apparently do not. A high-level impact assessment was produced in October 2010 to guide the detailed assessments. It failed to mention women.

Seventy areas of activity were reviewed by the Somerset County Council, of which 12 were identified as not requiring an equality impact assessment, again without evidence. Among excluded activities are road safety, transport development, waste disposal and strategic planning.

2. How many equality impact assessments have not included gender?

Of the 58 equality assessments made by the Somerset Country Council, 10 did not include gender.

An example is the EIA of a proposal to reduce subsidies to bus services, which noted that the users at risk included people living in rural areas and those aged over 60, some of whom may have a disability or low income. Against 'gender', it recorded 'not applicable', ignoring studies that show that women make more use of bus services than men.

Norfolk County Council reports that nine targeted consultation events were held to gather evidence from 'protected groups' in Norfolk. *"The Big Conversation was designed to be accessible to ensure that every resident of Norfolk had an opportunity to participate."*

There were eight events for disabled people

One for parents of disabled children.

Seven for older people's organisations

One for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people

One for carers

But no event was held to target women and women's organisations. The main focus of the equality impact assessments for each budget proposal was disabled and older people.

3. Are gender-disaggregated statistics on service users or providers included in the equality impact assessments?

Very few of the EIAs conducted by Norfolk County Council were supported with data on service use disaggregated according to protected characteristic. Exceptions were the EIA on re-design of the service for assessing social care needs, and the EIA on reducing the scale of the equipment service for disabled and older people. Both showed that women are the majority of those affected –but women were not identified as an adversely affected group.

The only measure identified as having potential impacts on women was the reduction in spending on preventative services, which included services for survivors of sexual violence, which the EIA noted are disproportionately women.

Several proposals to limit provision of adult social care noted that this would mean that more unpaid care would have to be provided. This was noted as a problem for disabled and older people who need care, but not as a problem for providers of care, and there was no mention that carers are predominantly women.

Sex-disaggregated data was referred to in relation to possible redundancies and workforce redeployment.

Of the EIAs conducted by Somerset County Council, only one referred to data on the sex of users (proposal to reduce library services) and four to data on the sex of providers (all in connection with likely staffing cuts).

4. In assessments that did include gender, was the gender impact assessment adequate?

If assessments do not consider the proportion of the users of a service who are women, and the proportion who are men, it is unlikely that an adequate gender impact assessment will be made.

Example: Cutting Economic Development Grants, Norfolk County Council

The EIA for this proposal identified the protected characteristic of sex as being potentially affected by the proposals, but under the 'potential impact' section the EIA states that:

No adverse impact on protected groups is anticipated...Cessation of grant assistance to these organisations impacts on their ability to carry out activity that benefits the economy of the local community, for example, to ensure that village halls remain available for use by local communities. The impact of this will be on the local community as a whole.

Women in the workshop in Norwich commented that without data on the use of services by protected groups it is not clear that all members of the local community will be affected to the same extent. If women, for example, use village hall facilities more than men, then restricted access to village halls will impact more on women than men. They found the EIA inadequate.

Example: Reconfiguring Respite Short Breaks Service for Carers of Adults with Learning Disabilities, Somerset County Council

The EIA for this proposal identified a gender dimension to the implications for paid staff providing this service, noting that 66 per cent of them are women. However, with respect to unpaid carers, the people they are caring for, the EIA noted that ‘The same service will be available to all, regardless of gender, age, race or sexuality of the carer or dependent relative.’

This ignores the fact that the unpaid carers are also predominantly women, and reductions to the quality and quantity of respite care will have a disproportionate impact on them.

If assessments use inappropriate benchmarks, then it is unlikely that an adequate gender impact assessment will be made.

Example: Assessment of Possible Redundancies, Norfolk County Council.

The council made an EIA of the workforce implications of all the budget proposals. The protected characteristic of sex is identified as being potentially affected by the proposals. However, in the Summary EIA it states that:

There is no evidence to suggest that women will be disproportionately represented in any redundancies the council will be required to make over the next three years. Current monitoring data confirms that the gender profile of redundancies occurring in 2010 remains in line with the overall workforce gender profile of the organisation.

Women in the Norwich workshop noted that just because prospective redundancies are in line with the overall workforce profile, this does not mean that women as a group in society will not be disproportionately affected. If more women than men are being made redundant or being redeployed, then the workforce proposal is disproportionately impacting on women (as a protected social group).

Example: Assessment of Possible Redundancies, Somerset County Council

A similar misunderstanding is evident in the case of Somerset County Council. The EIA is rightly concerned to ensure that there is no discrimination in selection of staff for redundancy. It notes that 74 per cent of the staff who might face redundancy are women, and implies that the appropriate benchmark is that women should not constitute more than 74 per cent of those made redundant. However, meeting this benchmark does not mean that women as a social group are not disproportionately adversely affected.

5. If the local government assessment found that there would be an adverse impact on women as compared to men, was any mitigating action proposed?

Example: Norfolk County Council identified a potential adverse impact on women in only one case, reduction in spending on preventative services, which included services for survivors of sexual violence. No specific mitigating action was proposed.

Example: Somerset County Council EIA of local integrated services for children and families.

The EIA identified likely adverse implications for women and girls as users of services related to reduction of teenage pregnancy and to provision of women’s refuges. Some mitigating action was identified. Funding for some of the services for reduction of teenage pregnancy would be provided by the NHS. Funding for women’s refuges would not be cut, though there would be changes in the mode of funding and likely a redistribution of funding. Refuge providers would be invited to join a thematic group to negotiate any changes.

The workshop in Somerset considered this to be an example of good practice: specific measures are identified on funding and, in the case of refuges, there will be consultation with providers.

6. Is there an overall, or ‘high level’ equality impact assessment that considered the cumulative impact of the cuts?

Example: Norfolk County Council Budget Proposals 2011/2014, Equality impact assessment report (January 2011)

This report summarises equalities impacts of proposed budget cuts on disabled people and older people; on Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents; on men and women; on lesbian, gay and bisexual residents; on religion and belief; and on younger people.

With respect to gender impact, the report does recognise:

- that there may be a greater need to provide unpaid care, and this will fall more on women, as women are more likely than men to provide unpaid care
- that review of services provided by the Sexual Violence Alliance will disproportionately affect women, as women are more likely to be affected by sexual violence

However, it does not apply the same logic to redundancies, suggesting that women will not be disproportionately affected by redundancies, as the gender profile of redundancies is in line with gender profile of the workforce.

What is missing: The report does not recognise that women are disproportionately represented among older people, and have greater care needs than men. It lacks sex-disaggregated data. It does not consider whether a different overall strategy for coping with cuts to the grants the council receives from central government would mitigate the adverse impacts.

Example: Somerset County Council Medium Term Financial Plan 2012/13 to 2014/15

The plan as published contains one page on risk and impact assessments, which gives no details and says that the assessments can be found on the council website, with the budget papers for February 2011. After quite some time searching, it was possible to locate 'Appendix P', which briefly summarises equality impact assessments.

It finds that the groups most likely to be adversely affected are "the financially vulnerable, disabled and young people". It also recognises that older people with disability or on low income may be left vulnerable to social isolation by cuts. However, it makes no mention of women or gender. It claims that reductions to services for young people will be minimised by "a move to voluntary and community sector delivering them"

What is missing: The report does not recognise that reliance on unpaid work to compensate for reductions of services for older and disabled people and young people disproportionately affects women. It does not include employment implications of the cuts. It lacks sex-disaggregated data. It does not consider whether a different overall strategy for coping with cuts to the grants the council receives from central government would mitigate the adverse impacts.

A better cumulative impact assessment has been produced by Newcastle City Council www.newcastle.gov.uk/your-council/budget-and-annual-report/budget-proposals-2016. This is a substantial 35 page document that considers impacts on people protected by the public sector equality duty, socio-economic impacts, and impacts on communities, situated in context of the unequal distribution of spending cuts from central government (which hit Newcastle harder than more prosperous towns and cities) and the social and economic characteristics of Newcastle. In the section on gender impact, the assessment recognises that public sector job losses will impact heavily on women. It states that:

We know that many public services are vital in mitigating gender inequalities that exist in families, communities, employment and the wider economy. Reducing funding for these services therefore increases the risk of a widening inequality between men and women.

A detailed discussion of the impact of cuts in care services is provided. There is evidence about the way that central funding government for Sure Start Children's Centres has been cut, leading to reduction in services provided by the Centres, which in turn

adversely impacts on the ability of low income mothers to combine paid work with care responsibilities. The impact assessment also recognises the intersection of age and gender and states that:

The overall effect of the combination of age, disability and deprivation means that changes to support services, particularly social care, could increasingly impact disproportionately on women by 2016.

However, we will still increase the proportion of our net budget devoted to social care and will consider how innovative changes in local arrangements can contribute to securing a more sustainable future.

The report concludes with a commitment to update the impact assessment to reflect actual impacts based on feedback from on-going engagement with individuals, organisations and communities:

This will also enable us to assess what effect our mitigations have had in helping to reduce impacts. We will continue to look at ways to avoid making the most damaging cuts to those services that we have tried to protect and invest where we can for the future.

You could press your council to produce a cumulative impact assessment along the lines of that produced by Newcastle City Council.

many public services are vital in mitigating gender inequalities that exist in families, communities, employment and the wider economy. Reducing funding for these services therefore increases the risk of a widening inequality between men and women.

Section 4

How could gender responsive budgeting help to produce better analysis and outcomes?

Gender responsive budgeting is budgeting that supports gender equality. It means examining expenditure and revenue from a gender equality perspective, asking whether the budget is likely to:

- Improve gender equality
- Reduce gender equality
- Leave gender equality unchanged

It can take into account gender equality in:

- use and provision of services
- use and provision of infrastructure (such as buildings and street lighting),
- access to welfare benefits,
- financing of services and benefits.

It can take into account several dimensions of equality, including:

- earnings and income,
- health and well-being,
- and time use (including in paid work, unpaid work, rest and leisure).

There are several tools that can be used to analyse budgets and identify ways to make budgets more gender responsive. See for instance, UNIFEM (2005) Tools for Gender-Sensitive Analysis of Budgets and Sheila Quinn (2009) Gender Budgeting: Practical Implementation Handbook, Council of Europe. Both are available on the WBG website.

Tools need to be selected and adapted to suit specific circumstances. Here we select tools most relevant to English local government in the context of cuts to their grants from the UK government.



Photo (CC) by Deja H. Thoris

Gender Analysis of the Medium Term Financial Plan: the Balance between Expenditure Cuts and Tax Rises

Local councils produce a three year medium term financial plan as a framework for the annual budget. In these plans they set out the key factors that provide the context for all EIAs: the amount of grant revenue they expect to get from central government, and the amount they plan to raise through Council Tax and other charges (to fund current services) and borrowing (to fund new investment in buildings, road improvements, waste disposal facilities etc.). If grants are cut, the local council has the option of cutting services and employment, while maintaining Council Tax rates as they are; or offsetting, in whole or part, the reduction in grant revenue by raising Council Tax. The Coalition government has tried to dissuade councils from increasing Council Tax through the provision of a grant to councils that freeze Council Tax and a requirement for a referendum if Councils want to raise Council Tax beyond the limits set by guidelines from the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Not all councils are dissuaded. For instance in February 2013, the Mayor of Bristol proposed a rise of about 2 percent in Council Tax, amounting to 50p a week on average, which would avoid further cuts of £1.5 million, on top of £35 million cuts already required to balance the budget.

www.bristol.gov.uk/page/council-and-democracy/key-themes-budget-proposals

Some local councils organise public consultations before finalising the medium term financial plan, but these may only ask about what should be cut, not about how cuts could be reduced by raising Council Tax. We could find no evidence that decisions on Council Tax were subject to Equality Impact Assessment by Norfolk and Somerset County Councils.

Gender responsive budgeting ...means examining expenditure and revenue from a gender equality perspective...

Some Key Questions to Ask About Your Council's Medium Term Financial Plan

1. Has the council decided to adjust by freezing Council Tax and cutting services and employment?
2. Has it analysed the gender (and other equalities) impacts of this decision?
3. Has it analysed the gender (and other equalities) impacts of raising Council Tax to offset, in whole or in part, the reduction in grants?
4. Has it shown the public the costs, in loss of public services, of freezing Council Taxes?

Example: Norfolk County Council Financial Plan 2012-14

The council decided to freeze Council Tax for three years to 2014; and to make cuts of £135 m over the three year period to 2014. It obtained a one-off Council Tax Freeze Grant from central government in 2012/13 of £8.624m (equivalent to a 2.5 percent rise in Council Tax).

There was no analysis of the gender (and other equalities impacts) of this decision. Nor of an alternative plan that would involve rises in Council Tax and fewer cuts. The only analysis of the distribution of Council Tax payments was geographical, showing how much would be collected in 2012/13 from different districts in the county.

Norfolk County Council did organise a public consultation on the overall strategy for adjusting to cuts in grants from central government prior to finalising the plan, which is welcome. However, there was no consultation on the decision to freeze Council Tax, which was presented in the consultation document as a decision that had already been taken, and explained as follows:

If we are able to keep Council Tax levels down, families and individuals will be better placed to decide where and how to spend more of their own money on things that matter to them.

People were not given the option of supporting a rise in Council Tax in order to protect services and jobs, and to defend equality.

Norfolk County Council website provides information on how to pay Council Tax and how to report fraud in Council Tax, but not on how Council Tax payments are distributed between different groups of people, according to their equality characteristics.

Example: Somerset County Council Financial Plan 2012/13-2014/15

The council decided to freeze Council Tax for the three years of the plan; and to make cuts of just over £35 million for the two years 2012/13 and 2013/14. (Cuts for 2014/15 not yet identified). The Plan noted receipt of Council Tax Freeze Grant of £0.652 m in 2012/13.

There was no analysis of the gender (and other equalities impacts) of this decision. Nor of an alternative plan that would involve rises in Council Tax and fewer cuts. The Plan noted that Council Tax had been frozen since 2010/11 and that each 1 percent increase in Council Tax would raise about 2 million. The Plan also explained that the Somerset Council Tax is the lowest of any Shire County in England. An Appendix gave more details on the tax base for Council Tax, in terms of the numbers of properties in the different valuation bands, but there was no analysis of the distribution of payments across different social groups.

Somerset County Council did not hold a public consultation on the overall strategy for adjusting to the cuts in grants from central government. Instead it held a number of ad-hoc consultations on some specific measures, including a proposal to cut directly provided youth services and rely on provision by the voluntary and community sector. More than 400 young people gave their views which were against these proposals. The council also conducted telephone and on-street interviews with about 900 people towards end of 2011, asking if they were satisfied with council decisions and services: 50 percent of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied, and 52 percent agreed that the County Council is making the right decisions. The value of such surveys is questionable since no contextual information is provided about specific proposals for cuts. There was no consultation on the decision to freeze Council Tax.



Photo (CC) Christina Drane 2009



Photo (CC) by Leonard John Matthews

Applying a gender-responsive approach

If women predominate among users of services and providers of services but pay less Council Tax than men, they will tend to be more adversely affected than men by plans that adjust to cuts in grant revenue by cutting services and leaving Council Tax unchanged.

The plan should provide sex-disaggregated data on users and providers of services, and a gender analysis of Council Tax, with information on the distribution of Council Tax payments between single women, single men, and couple households, in different household income groups. It should also show how Council Tax levied by the council compares with that of other councils. Especially if it is low, then there may be scope for raising the tax.

This needs to be complemented by an analysis of Council Tax Support. With the ending of Council Tax Benefit, it is local councils who have to provide Council Tax Support. As noted in Section 1, they must make sure that pensioners are not worse off, but the same does not apply to low income working age people. Information gathered by the New Policy Institute suggests that two and half million people will be adversely affected. You can find out how this affects your area on <http://counciltaxsupport.org/analysis-2/reform-impact/>. However, it does not seem that sex-disaggregated data is available.

It is vital to consider whether a decision to freeze Council Tax is in fact a decision to reduce gender equality, via the impact on services and employment.

Press your council to gather this information make it available during public consultations.

Gender analysis of the impact of expenditure cuts on time use and unpaid work

Cutting spending may save money, but does it save time? Cuts to services may increase the time spent on unpaid work, such as the work done by volunteers and by people caring for family members who are young, ill, disabled, or old and frail. This is particularly likely to happen with cuts to care services, but can happen with cuts to many other services, such as library services and youth services, if the council makes plans to transfer provision to voluntary and community organisations that use unpaid volunteers. So-called 'efficiency savings' may have the same effect of increasing unpaid work.

Unpaid work is disproportionately done by women. Women are put at a disadvantage when they do a lot of unpaid care work. It results in lower pay, worse promotion prospects, and lower pensions.

Some key questions to ask about the impact of your council's spending cuts on time use and unpaid work:

1. Are there 'efficiency savings' and cuts that are likely to lead to more unpaid volunteer and domestic care work?
2. Does the council recognise this (perhaps in the EIAs)?
3. Has the council looked at the implications of more unpaid work for those who provide it?
4. Has the council made any estimate of how much unpaid work its 'efficiency measures' spending cuts imply? Has it created a time use account to set alongside the financial accounts?

The equality impact assessments carried out by Norfolk and Somerset Councils revealed that they did expect the cuts they were making to services for young people and disabled and elderly people to increase the amount of volunteer and family unpaid work that would have to be done. However, this was only seen as a problem for disabled and elderly people who might be unable to access other people to provide unpaid services. It was not seen as a problem for those required to provide more unpaid work. This assumes that:

- people have a lot of spare time;
- they can choose whether or not to do unpaid work;
- they do not suffer any disadvantages as a result of doing extra unpaid work.

Neither council tried to estimate how much more unpaid work was implied by its spending cuts; and what the impact on providers would be.

Example: Somerset County Council consultation into proposals to raise the access to care services eligibility threshold

This asked if the proposals were ‘reasonable and fair’ but did not provide any estimate of the extra hours of unpaid work these proposals implied.

Example: Norfolk County Council consultation on the cuts

This stated ‘We propose to hand back to the people of Norfolk responsibilities for things we believe should no longer form part of the core services provided by the County Council...’ but made no estimate of the extra hours of unpaid work the proposals implied.



Photo (CC) by Sophia Liang

It would be possible to make an estimate of how much more unpaid work would be required in the following way:

- identify those cuts to services that imply more unpaid work;
- estimate the hours of female and male paid time lost in services provided directly by council employees;
- estimate the hours of female and male paid time lost in services provided by employees of organisations contracted to provide services.

It is reasonable to assume that, in general, loss of women’s hours of paid work implies an equivalent need for more unpaid hours of work by women, as there are strong gender norms about who does what kind of work.

Reorganisation of services can sometimes enable the same quantity and quality of service to be provided with fewer hours of work. But this is far less likely in interpersonal services, where the quality of the service depends on being able to provide it in an unhurried way in face-to-face interaction.



care services, services related to domestic violence and services related to public transport seem likely to be more important than road improvements and tourism information and development.

Gender analysis of the prioritisation of cuts

Some services provided by councils are more important for gender equality than others. For instance care services, services related to domestic violence and services related to public transport seem likely to be more important than road improvements and tourism information and development. You may want to look at all the programmes in the council’s budget and discuss how you would prioritise them. EIAs consider each programme in isolation and do not raise the question of priorities

Some key questions to ask about the pattern of the cuts:

1. Do all programmes suffer equal cuts, as a percentage of previous expenditure?
2. Are the programmes that are most important for gender equality those that suffer the deepest cuts?
3. Are the programmes that are most important for gender equality cut less than others?

Example: Somerset County Council Cuts for 2012/13

The Medium Term Financial Plan 2012/13-2014/15 has an appendix comparing the budget for 2012/13 with the budget for 2011/12, under broad headings. Analysis of these numbers shows big variations in the scale of cuts.

Some programmes benefited from increased spending:

Safeguarding and Care for Children and Young People +6 percent
Business Development and Transformation +3 percent
Environmental Management and Resources +21 percent
Waste Services +7 percent
Directorate Management +257 percent
Finance and Property +15 percent
Human Resources and Traded Areas +1 percent
Registrars and Coroners +3 percent
Client Function and Unitary Charge +3 percent

A few had the same spend as the previous year:

Learning Disabilities Provider
Strategy and Performance

The rest were cut:

Learning and Achievement (Children and Young People) -13 percent
Strategy, Resources and Commissioning (Children and Young People) -1 percent
Adult Social Care -4 percent
Heritage, Libraries and Business Efficiency -1 percent
Commissioning Care and Adult Services -8 percent
Highways and Traffic Management -11 percent
Transporting Somerset and Fleet -7 percent
Physical Regeneration -13 percent

This pattern of cuts raises several questions from a gender equality perspective. For instance, why were care services for adults cut so much, when several services of less importance for gender equality had increased funding?

Example: Norfolk County Council Consultation on Budget Savings 2011-2014

A consultation document was published showing proposals for cuts (labelled 'savings'). It provided quite detailed information by programme.

Cuts for programmes in Adult Social Care ranged from 100 percent (meaning the programme was ended) to 9 percent, with 7 of the 23 programmes receiving cuts of more than 50 percent.

Cuts for programmes in Environment and Development ranged from 0.2 percent to 100 percent, with 3 out of 22 programmes receiving cuts of more than 50 percent.



Photo (C) Elvert Barnes

It would be possible to categorise programmes in terms of their importance for gender equality using a system developed in Andalusia in Spain, where the regional government puts all programmes into three categories in relation to contribution to achieving gender equality: low, medium and high. The pattern of cuts could then be related to these categories, with efforts to minimise cuts for those programmes of high importance to gender equality. Councils could consult with women's groups on the relative importance of programmes.

Section 5

How can you campaign for budgets that support gender equality?

You can use the analysis you have done as a basis for campaigning in a number of ways. You need to bear in mind that many local councils are having to make very difficult decisions because of the cuts they themselves are facing in grants from central government, and the way that central government constrains their freedom to raise more money through Council Tax.

Freedom of Information

If you need more information, consider making Freedom of Information requests to pressure the council to release more information. Although this can seem laborious and bureaucratic, requesting equality information under FOI rules can be really helpful.

Example: WENS vs Somerset County Council

WENS made an FOI request to Somerset County Council which led to the release of more information on gender equality implications of budget decisions.

If you want to make an FOI request, Appendix I on page 23 shows the kind of letter that you should send.



Photo (CC) by Ryan Ozawa



Photo (CC) by Melissa Wall

Improve access to information

Ensure that councils make information on equality impacts more easily available to members of the public who do not have access to computers, or time to make lengthy searches of council documents. Press them to do a cumulative impact assessment of the kind made by Newcastle City Council.

Example: WENS vs Somerset County Council

The Chair of WENS asked the Leader of Somerset County Council to place a file containing hard copies of all the EIAs in an accessible place so that members of the public could view them before the key meeting at which budget decisions were taken.

Question councillors

Attend local council sessions and ask specific questions of elected councillors during the Public Question Time. Dates of key meetings can be found on the council website.

Example: WENS vs Somerset County Council

The Chair of WENS asked the following questions at the session of Somerset County Council on Wednesday 15 February 2012 that considered the Financial Plan 2012/13-2014/15

My statement and questions relate to Item 7 and specifically to Paper B and the impact assessments associated with the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

As well as Paper B, I have looked at more than two thirds of the circa 1200 pages of impact assessments that constitute appendices to Item 7, paying particular attention to impacts of changes and reduced budgets on women and older people. Taken together, they point to an extremely bleak future for the people of Somerset, especially women, young people, older people, those with caring needs, those with disabilities, and people from ethnic minorities, as well as the isolated and the poor. Many in Somerset fall into several of these groups.

- 1) You have argued that you have no option but to make these cuts because of the policies and cuts to local authority budgets of central government. You have this year undertaken much more detailed assessments than previously and know what the impact of proposals will be for the people of Somerset. Can you therefore now tell your government these things on our behalf and ask it to reconsider the implications of what it is doing?*
- 2) Some of the work is thorough but very many assessments suggest that the council's decision-making processes remain wide-open to challenge in respect of equality legislation. If everyone who completes assessments is not trained, you will not have from the exercise what you require by law to inform your decisions. Are officers trained to carry out equality impact assessments? Can resource be set aside for doing this?*
- 3) Can the council please look again at the impact of changes/savings on women, both for individual proposals and in terms of cumulative effect, using key pieces of quantitative and qualitative evidence, and propose actions that will genuinely mitigate?*

From the impact assessments, women look to bear the brunt of the cuts in Somerset. Most cuts hugely affect them but there is no acknowledgement of this whatsoever in many assessments and only scant reference in others. Even in the cases where an impact on women is clearly set out, there is often no serious attempt at mitigation.

I was concerned to see (Paper B, 4.14) that whereas young people, older people and people with disabilities were rightly identified as groups on which service reduction would have a greater impact, women were not even mentioned. The cumulative effect of the changes will be life-changing for women in the county.

Press for the use of Gender responsive budgeting tools

You can press the council to use gender responsive budgeting tools to highlight issues that EIAs do not adequately address:

- Gender analysis of the Medium Term Financial Plan: the balance between expenditure cuts and tax rises;
- Gender analysis of the impact of expenditure cuts on time use and unpaid work;
- Gender analysis of the prioritisation of cuts;

You can begin to do some analysis using these tools yourself and whatever published data is available, and then seek meetings with the council Equality Officer and your local councillor to discuss your findings.

Work with other groups

You can work together with other groups to analyse budgets and challenge decisions. You can identify other groups in your locality who are concerned about the impact of the cuts. These might include:

- local branches of feminist organisations such as the Fawcett Society (see www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/get-involved/local/) and UK Feminista (see www.ukfeminista.org.uk/take-action/local-groups/);
- women's voluntary sector organisations, which are themselves being hard hit by funding cuts, see report by the Women's Resource Centre <http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/our-work/impact-of-austerity/cuts-and-the-womens-sector/>
- trade unions, especially UNISON, the public services trade union (see www.unison.org.uk).



There may be campaigns against the cuts already underway in your locality. See <http://falseeconomy.org.uk/campaigns/uk/all/t1>

You might set up an online network, so that you can work together with others.

Example: WEETU discussed setting up a LinkedIn group for the people who attended the workshop in Norwich

You might use electronic surveys such as Survey Monkey (see www.surveymonkey.com) to collect information, inform local women and mobilise them around the issues identified.

Example: WEETU discussed conducting a survey using Survey Monkey

Write letters to Councillors and Ministers

The website of your local council will have information on local Councillors and how to contact them. For instance, for Norfolk County Council this information can be found at www.norfolk.gov.uk/Council_and_democracy/index.htm

In letters to Councillors, you might want to begin by acknowledging the difficulties that the council faces because of cutbacks from central government. But you can then make the point that this does not excuse failure to conduct adequate gender equality impacts assessments (give specific examples) and failure to seriously address mitigating measures to reduce or avoid adverse impacts on women (give specific examples), which might include raising more revenue through Council Tax and other measures. For Councillors who are members of the Conservative and Liberal Democratic Parties, you might add a paragraph asking what they are doing to raise the issue of cuts to local government grants with Ministers. You might end by asking for a meeting with the Councillor.

The most relevant Ministers are those at the Department for Communities and Local Government, who are listed on the Department's website <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government> (make sure you scroll to bottom of the page)

Also relevant are the Ministers for Women and Equalities at the Government Equalities Office, who are listed on the website of the Office www.gov.uk/government/organisations/government-equalities-office (make sure you scroll to the bottom of the page)



Photo (CC) by UN Women 2012

You might focus on asking why local councils are being singled out for such high cuts, when women are so adversely affected, since they are disproportionately both users and providers of local services. You might note that so-called efficiency measures are very often reducing costs by shifting the burden to women providing unpaid care.

Use the media to publicise your findings and demands

Engage with print and TV local media. Draft and send press releases. Identify spokespeople and brief them on the issues, data and evidence, so that they are equipped to speak to the media.

Use social media, such as Twitter, to highlight the issues – these are becoming the most common source for journalist rather than the traditional press releases.



Photo (CC) by Jo Jakeman 2008

Appendix I

Making a Freedom of Information Request on paying 'Due Regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty

A suggested template for the Request:

[Your address] [Date]

[Public authority / organisation address]

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: [insert here name of policy, practice, or initiative or funding decision where you feel due regard hasn't been given]

I am concerned that [insert name of authority or organisation] has not given due regard to its Public Sector Equality Duty in relation to [insert details of policy, practice, or decision where you feel due regard hasn't been given].

As you know, current equality legislation places upon public authorities an obligation to a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, b) advance equality of opportunity and c) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic. This means that you are required to consider equality in relation to every function of the authority, to ensure that equality considerations influence the decisions made and consider the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
- Meet the needs of people with protected characteristics and;
- Encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or other activities where participation is low.

Please can you tell me how you have had due regard to the need to (insert relevant part(s) of the Public Sector Equality Duty a) b) or c) as given above) in relation to (insert the particular characteristic e.g. older people, disabled people, women etc.) in all the elements of your decision to [insert details of policy provision / decision].

In addition, please can you send me a copy of the equality analysis that you undertook before taking this decision / amending this policy / continuing with this practice [delete as appropriate]. If you have not conducted such an analysis, please say why not, and whether the arrangements are in place for conducting one, and when it will be carried out.

Please forward this information to me within 20 working days. I will contact you again if I have not received more information from you in this time.

Please treat this as a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

Yours sincerely,

[your signature]

[Your name printed]

[Your organisation/group name if writing on behalf of one.]

This letter is adapted from a template developed by Equality Southwest. You can find more about Freedom of Information Requests and the Public Sector Equality Duty on this website:

www.equalitysouthwest.org.uk/information-and-legislation/esw-report/template-letter---challenging-under-the-public-sector-equality-duty



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Appendix II

Other Useful Resources

Other useful toolkits

For a guide to the Equality Duty, see www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-20286-f0.cfm

For a guide to how to do a comprehensive and detailed assessment of how cuts, both national and local, are affecting women at local level, see *Women and the Cuts Toolkit*

www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-20286-f0.cfm

For a guide to campaigning effectively in your local community, www.unison.org.uk/upload/sharepoint/Best%20Practice%20and%20Procedures/How_to_campaign_effectively_in%20your_local_community.pdf

For a guide to engaging with the 'Localism' agenda, see the toolkit produced by Women's Resource Centre

<http://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/our-work/localism-agenda/>

Assessments of impact of national and local expenditure cuts on women

For an example of an assessment of the impact of local and national cuts on women in Bristol, see <http://wbg.org.uk/pdfs/BristolCuttin gWomenOut.pdf>

For an example of an assessment of the impact of local and national cuts on women in Coventry, see [www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/chrp/projects/humanrightsimpactassessments/women/layers_of_inequality.p df](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/chrp/projects/humanrightsimpactassessments/women/layers_of_inequality.pdf)

For information on legal challenges to spending cuts, see

<http://falseeconomy.org.uk/blog/tags/tag/legal-challenge>

www.ncb.org.uk/edcm/Using_the_Law_to_Fight_Cuts.pdf

Women vs Local Cuts

Challenging Gender Equality Impact Assessments & Local Government Budgets

A Toolkit for Women's Groups

This is a toolkit for women's organisations, community groups and others who want to evaluate whether and how English local governments are taking gender equality into account in responding to cuts to the grants they get from central government.

It complements existing toolkits produced to assist those looking to assess the impact of expenditure cuts, with a focus on local governments and their legal obligation to consider gender equality in their budget decisions. It shows how to locate and analyse local governments' gender impact assessments, and concludes with ideas about organizing to challenge decisions that undermine gender equality, advocating a gender responsive approach to government budgeting.

This toolkit was collectively produced by the Women's Budget Group, on the basis of training sessions run by Adele Baumgardt with two local women's organisations - WENS in Taunton and WEETU in Norwich. This project was funded by ROSA, the UK Fund for Women and Girls (www.rosauk.org).

A **PDF version** of this toolkit is available to download for **FREE** from the WBG website: www.wbg.org.uk

To order printed copies, or other information, please contact the Women's Budget Group by email: admin@wbg.org.uk

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