

Bristol Fawcett group response to 2014-17 budget proposals December 2013

Bristol Fawcett members campaign to improve policy and services for women and girls. We bring an informed gender equality perspective to local decision making bodies.

Summary

A more detailed response can be found in the appendix to this document. We welcome the move to a 3-year budget. We recognise that the cuts have been imposed on Bristol by national government. We believe in and share the principles outlined in the consultation document, specifically

- **Protect vital services for those who need them most**

This means that **women and children who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse and sexual violence must be a priority for the Council**. We call on the Mayor and on all members of Council to protect and enhance the funding for violence against women services – these services do not currently meet the level of need and are needed more than ever in the current economic climate.

- **Help close the city's inequality gap and stimulate investment, growth and jobs in the Bristol economy**

There must be recognition, as is universally accepted, that the national and local cuts to public sector spending and welfare have had a massive and cumulative disproportionate impact on women – progress towards women's equality has now gone into reverse, with the gender pay gap nationally and in Bristol actually increasing for the first time in years. Disabled women, BME women and single parents (92% women in Bristol) are hit hardest of all. Women's employment and the provision of childcare that enables women to take part in training and the workforce must be at the heart of Bristol's economic vision – this means that cuts to 'wraparound' childcare provision in Children's Centres should not be implemented – and there must be a rigorous gender equality impact assessment of the £49M internal change programme for its discriminatory impact on women as employees and low earners.

Our recommendations are:

- do not cut funding that addresses violence against women and girls in the city
 - do not cut wraparound childcare provision in children's centres
- do use any of the many toolkits available to produce a *cumulative impact assessment* of the proposed cuts – including the change programme – and including the historic cuts to date locally & nationally - upon the women of Bristol and apply the data. If the Council's Equalities Team is not well resourced enough to undertake this exercise then we respectfully suggest that it is not well resourced enough to be cut as proposed in the consultation.
- Make further savings from the Neighbourhood Partnerships budget (excepting the 10% most deprived area NPs) and the Arts budget in order to maintain funding for violence against women services, childcare, the Equalities Team and the VCS.

Bristol Fawcett commentary on a number of the Mayor's budget proposals 2014/15 – 2016/17

Towards a cumulative impact assessment

Our response concentrates on the impact of the proposals upon women and their children in particular. We take items in the order in which they are published in the consultation.

Acronyms

CDSA	Crime and Disorder Strategic Assessment
D&SVA	Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse
NP	Neighbourhood Partnership
VAWG	Violence and Abuse Against Women and Girls
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector

• **Improving business efficiency**

- **Relocating Youth Offending team:** reducing operating costs implies reduction in 'back office' staff, majority held by women. Also women's responsibilities for family wellbeing means that reduced service will adversely impact on women.
- **Reduce the running cost of council buildings:** obviously should be done, but Council should check that limiting Council business to a smaller number of buildings, which may increase commute time and cost for some Council employees, does not adversely impact on the large number of Council employees who are women and in the lower paid echelons.
- **Ensuring cost duplication is minimised:** obviously services and costs should not be duplicated. However services previously funded under different budgets may have had significant differences. E.g. Public Health funded provision of services to prevent VAWG is substantively different from Safer Bristol strategic support and funding of provision of services and protection from VAWG. Care should be taken in the detail so that crucial sections of a holistic service are not omitted.
- **Challenge council spending:** this presents potential enormous savings without any detail, therefore must be challenged for more information. Which Council budgets are "consistently underspent"? Could this be, e.g. Council Tax rebate, in which case the underspend would be more beneficially spent in increasing take-up support.
- **Proposed reductions in Procurement and ICT** – could pose serious problems for women; e.g. procurement support in contracts for services affecting women needs to be first-rate to ensure contracts give both good quality and value for money. Council is proposing to avoid duplication by increasing reliance on technology, so ICT needs to be in best condition to ensure that services delivered through technology are accessible and achieve what they intend to achieve.
- **Reduce Equalities and Community Cohesion team:** the current team has already been reduced, including scrapping specialisation by equality area, which means that expertise on e.g. women's equality is no longer structured in. Staff training in equalities across the board is essential, but you can't train out lack of commitment. Council performance requires back-up and monitoring by specialist staff.
- **Prevention budget reduction:** it is misleading for the Council to say they can't assess impact – they know how this money has been used in the past, supporting emerging and innovative projects often started by people in the community who are

not (yet) “professionals”, of whom many will be women looking to solve problems they experience, such as domestic violence and abuse, in addition to the other named groups such as men and women with disabilities, mental ill health, etc.

- **Increasing the use of Direct Payments:** this needs to be offered only as a genuine option and alongside budget and debt advice. Council needs to maintain a role to monitor services bought by recipients, as direct payments – e.g. to a carer – could increase the opportunities for neglect and even abuse.
- **Housing Related Support:** Council should refer to research by the University of Bristol into homelessness and women.¹ Cutting support costs could place women at greater risk of abuse, from cuts in training and qualifications, and will also impact on support jobs, which are largely held by women.
- **Reduce policy development in Safer Bristol:** It’s crucial to maintain effective policy and licence enforcement, for the safety of women (affected by pubs and clubs and by taxi services).

• **Changing how we fund and provide services**

- **Review of Children’s Centres and Early Years support:** these are potentially disastrous proposals. Children’s Centres enable children to have good quality support and they celebrate diversity and social cohesion. Limiting use of Children’s Centres to the most disadvantaged is likely to reduce social cohesion and diversity and lead to stigma. Additional childcare is provided in many CCs for women attending the Freedom Programme domestic violence and abuse prevention; and support. Family financial disadvantage is not the sole indicator of other and broader forms of disadvantage – e.g. isolation, family abuse. These proposals will not only disadvantage children but will also disadvantage women/mothers. The size of the projected cuts seems totally disproportionate. Cutting additional paid childcare in CCs entrenches disadvantage for low-paid parents who need accessible affordable childcare in order to work.
- **Review the use of School Road:** we are dismayed at the prospect of the loss of respite care, which will largely affect women as carers of their disabled children and other relatives, and at the prospect of the loss of 19 women’s jobs (as opposed to 3 male).
- **Review of strategic housing services:** this will impact on women tenants experiencing domestic violence and abuse. Also on support for tenants receiving direct payments, of which effectiveness is dependent on adequate benefits support.
- **Review of Library Service & Cease library non-statutory services - Prisons Service and Schools Library Service. Redesign At Home Delivery Service:** we don’t think this will necessarily adversely affect women more than men, but are very concerned by what the proposals may mean for current users of the services.
- **Review of housing related support provided to independent sector sheltered housing schemes for older people:** the majority of older people using these services are women – who may be more likely to ‘not want to bother’ a floating support worker and therefore their support needs, even in quite drastic situations, risk not being met.
- **Safer Bristol – reduce spending on crime reduction projects:** Bristol cannot afford – morally or in terms of the human and ongoing financial cost to the city – to reduce spending on D&SVA. Levels of reporting are already far below the known incidence levels, as set out in the recently published Crime and Disorder Strategic

¹ <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/research/projects/current/RK7228/index.html>

Assessment (CDSA)². D&SV is extremely complex – indirect cuts (e.g. reducing the projects team) would mean loss of specialist understanding and ability to procure appropriate services, monitor and correct any shortcomings in service. The CDSA shows a 24% increase in demand for Next Link’s domestic violence and abuse service³ and this is unsurprising given what we know about links between economic stressors and increased violence against women.⁴

- **Review Home to School Transport service:** acceptability of this proposal will entirely depend on effectiveness of the proposed assessment (of placement and transport) system, e.g. the disasters that have happened with ASOS assessment of entitlement to disability support should not be mirrored.
- **Reduce Local Bus Service (Subsidy):** loss of late-night services will expose women service users to greater risk of assault. Gender data should be provided on users of the services at risk.
- **Reduction in the Voluntary and Community Sector Budget within Health and Social Care budgets:** no mention in the EqIA of women being adversely impacted which is surprising given what we know about the numbers of women accessing services and the number of women who are carers. Cuts to the VCS in Health and Social Care mean that women, as carers, will pick up the extra burdens created.

- **Better buying**

- **Commissioning home care against reablement outcomes:** According to the council’s own figures, 66% of those who currently receive home care service are female, so the changes here could potentially affect twice as many women as men. The stated objectives of individualising care and helping individuals to maintain or increase their independence are in principle desirable, but achieving the hoped for budgetary savings at the same time might prove impossible. It is therefore important that these changes are closely monitored to ensure that home care users are happy with the services provided, and that particular needs and preferences are fully met; (e.g. for care staff to be of the same gender and ethnicity as the service user, and/or to be sensitive to cultural and lifestyle differences).
- **Reduce costs of residential and nursing placements for older people:** This could mean reduced choice of providers, and consequently in some cases people may need to move away from their immediate local area to access residential care. It may also result in providers cutting wages for residential care staff (who are predominantly female) and/or redundancies, in order to maintain low costs.
- **Better value for money from residential and nursing placement contracts:** As above, this sounds good in principle, but in practice may create problems, and needs to be closely monitored.
- **Remove subsidy for leisure and sports contracts:** currently there is a greater need for take-up of these services by women, who earn less than men and for

² (p37)

http://www.bristol.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/community_and_safety/safer_bristol/Crime%20and%20Disorder%20Strategic%20Assessment%20Accessible%20Version%2012.11.13.pdf

³ *ibid.*, p.41

⁴ e.g. Van den Berg & Tertilt (2012) <http://tertilt.vwl.uni-mannheim.de/slides/MannheimNov2012.pdf> and in the UK, cuts impact research by the Young Foundation in Camden: http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/uts_on_some_of_the_most_vulnerable_in_Camden_2.pdf and EHRC Research report No. 47:

[http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/47_the_equality_impacts_of_the_current_recursion.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/47_the_equality_impacts_of_the_current_recession.pdf)

whom there are more cultural barriers to participation in sport and fitness. This will have a discriminatory impact on women. Women-only swim sessions and sessions for pregnant women are at risk unless protected by detail of the new contracts.

- **Reducing or stopping services**

- **Reduction in funding for Home Improvement agency:** These services are used predominantly by older and disabled people, at least 66% of whom are women. Removing support may lead to an increased need for statutory services – hence counteracting any potential savings.
- **Cease funding for specialist floating support service for older people:** The council acknowledges that this proposal could mean that some older people do not get the support they need, and some will need to access residential care. Some will be able to access generic support services – but the absence of specialist support could mean that many fail to receive adequate support (e.g. they may be unable or unwilling to make their needs known; and staff – who may lack sufficient specialist training - not picking up on unvoiced concerns, e.g. abuse from partners, relatives or other carers.) This is likely to affect women more than men, particularly in the older age groups. It will also increase the burden on family and other carers, most of whom are women. This has not been acknowledged in the EqIA.
- **Reduce Older People extra care housing wardens:** as above, this could mean that some older people do not get the support they need.
- **Stop supervision of Hengrove Play area:** why is Hengrove supervised at all? Is this because of evidence of greater need amongst children and young people in this area? So we have to presume that cessation of supervision will impact more on disadvantaged young people, many of whom are solely parented/cared for by women.
- **Reduce nuisance response team:** Noise and other nuisance complaints often affect vulnerable people, and women may feel threatened and be at risk of abuse, without being able to call on council enforcement services.
- **Review public toilet provision:** This in effect means closing 22 of the 23 street public toilets in Bristol. This is bound to have a major impact on the quality of life of many women in Bristol. As is acknowledged by those making the proposal, the impact will be greatest on those whose need of the provision is greatest – i.e. older women, those with particular health or disability needs, carers (usually women) with children, and pregnant women – none of whom will be served by the on-street urinals for men's use of the leisure economy but which remain funded. These closures may greatly limit the activities of many women, and may cause some to become housebound due to lack of easy availability of suitable toilet provision, when and where it is needed. Increasing community provision – e.g. in cafes, shops, community buildings and so on – is not a substitute: many women will be reluctant to use toilets in cafes and pubs, if they are not also a customer; and accessibility, for disabled users, is also likely to be an issue.