Response to the Equal Opportunities Committee’s recommendations on the Draft Budget 2008-09, from the Director General Health and Chief Executive NHS Scotland

Response to Conclusions and Recommendations

Equalities

Mainstreaming - and considering the needs of diverse groups of people - is an approach that the Committee recommends should be applied at the beginning of the policy formulation process and throughout, in order to inform both policy and any requisite funding allocations. If the Scottish Government is now simply taking measures to adapt or support existing policy structures in accordance with equality goals, then this gives the impression that mainstreaming is simply an ‘add-on’ to the policy process.

The Scottish Government’s equality impact assessment process expects a mainstreaming approach from the beginning of policy formulation. The Equality Impact Assessment tool is designed to inform policy development and should be applied from the outset to new policies. However we are also required to assess relevant existing policies and in those instances assessment will not be at the beginning of the process but will influence further policy refinement and development.

The Committee recommends that for future scrutiny purposes each portfolio chapter in the draft budget:

a) draws upon existing data and evidence to highlight the priority areas (the Committee would expect at least two or three significant examples) with reference to promoting equality;

b) outlines key measures and subsequent budgetary allocations intended to promote equality within the identified priority area and how Equality Impact Assessments had been conducted with reference to these key measures and budget allocations; and

c) outlines specific policies and subsequent budgetary allocation under a heading of ‘tackling significant inequalities’ (i.e. the Scottish Government’s own stated national outcome).

a) The Scottish Government recognises the concerns of the committee that equality be better reflected within the budget document. We are supportive of the recommendation to highlight priority areas significant for promoting equality but are not in a position to commit to a specific number. Furthermore, because the shape, content and format of the draft budget has not yet been
determined we cannot say at this stage how this might be reflected in the document.

b) The draft budget is a high level document and will not provide the level of detail which is being suggested by this recommendation. However we will be looking at ways to best convey how our spending will promote equality and are also considering how to improve our equality impact assessment process to support this. We will explore these issues further with the Equality Budget Proofing and Policy Advisory Group.

c) We will consider the Committee’s recommendation but no decisions have yet been made in relation to the format of the budget document nor with regard to the referencing of the government’s national outcomes.