

EQUALITY SCREENING

Equality Impact Assessment guidance should be considered when completing this form.

POLICY/FUNCTION/ACTIVITY	LEAD OFFICER
Customer First Strategy	Linda Norman

A. What is the aim of this policy, function or activity? Why is it needed? What is it hoped to achieve and how will it be ensured it works as intended? Does it affect service users, employees or the wider community?

To deliver a cost-effective modern service which meets customer and corporate needs through the development and use of appropriate technologies whilst maintaining customer care and statutory responsibilities.
The strategy will affect service users, employees and the wider community

B. Is this policy, function or activity relevant to equality? Does the policy relate to an area in which there are known inequalities, or where diverse groups have unique needs or experience? Remember, it may be relevant because there are opportunities to promote equality and greater access, not just potential for adverse impacts or unlawful discrimination.

By reviewing the strategy to improve resilience within the Customer Services area and automating processes and encouraging channel shift, efficiencies will be generated and thus ensure more customers can be dealt with at first point of contact.
Promoting digital services allows us to use our limited resources to support our most vulnerable or digitally excluded customers through other channels such as telephony and face-to-face. We recognise that we have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments for those who cannot. In return, we need to make sure that our digital services are good enough and provide enough information so that our customers do not have to contact us another way to follow up.
No reduction of direct services is planned but by improving call handling and eliminating duplication more calls can be dealt with at first point of contact to enhance the customer experience to ensure there is no negative impact to the public.
To address the work/life balance of residents to enable 24/7 service delivery and channel shift and offer a choice in service delivery to meet the needs of all residents.
The Council is committed to delivering existing channels but must respond to those customers who want to engage with the Council in a digital way.
In reviewing the strategy, there appears to be:

- No negative impact on an individual's age
- No negative impact on a person's disability
- No negative impact on gender
- No negative impact on households where a family member may be pregnant
- No negative impact on an individual's transgender
- No negative impact as all couples are treated the same
- No negative specific impact on race or ethnicity
- No negative impact on an individual's religion or belief
- No negative impact on an individual's sexual orientation

All staff undergo Equality and Diversity training as part of their 6-month probation period and existing Customer Services staff have already completed Unconscious Bias training previously.
The Council's website is fully accessible and the Web team monitor all pages to ensure they meet the

accessibility standard.

If the policy, function or activity is considered to be relevant to equality then a full Equality Impact Assessment must be conducted.

C. If the policy, function or activity is not considered to be relevant to equality, what are the reasons for this conclusion? What evidence has been used to make this decision? A simple statement of 'no relevance' or 'no data' is not sufficient.

This policy does need a full Equality Impact Assessment as it may affect all residents, businesses and staff and whilst it is about making the Council more accessible to those who want to engage in a digital way the Council will not be removing any of the more traditional methods of communication.

Whilst there is no identified negative impact on any of the nine protected characteristics, the implementation of the policy will be reviewed throughout the lifetime of the strategy and any identified impact will be addressed at that point.

This screening assessment will need to be referred to the Equality Group for challenge before sign-off.

Date completed: 06.03.24

Sign-off by senior manager: Linda Norman

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

SCOPING

1. What aspects of the policy function or activity are particularly relevant to equality? Other aspects should not necessarily be excluded from the assessment, but attention should be focused on the most key areas and include which of the equality strands the policy function or activity is relevant to. Diversity within the strands should also be considered. Please consider whether any comments made in Part B of the Screening form are relevant here.

A well-designed Customer First strategy can be a powerful tool to promote equality and inclusion for all areas of the community:

Access and Inclusion:

- Ensuring services are compatible with assistive technologies, using plain language and navigation, and offering alternative formats for information (e.g., transcripts for videos, captions for audio).
- Publication of Customer Charter will clearly communicate how the Council will treat individuals and how residents should treat Council staff in return.
- Using inclusive language in plain English and other methods of communication including video and audio tools will ensure transparency and a more equitable customer experience

Workforce Considerations:

- **Customer Centricity:** Cultivate a culture where prioritizing customer needs is ingrained in all levels of the organisation.
- **Empowerment:** Empower employees to make decisions and solve customer problems independently. This fosters ownership and accountability, allowing them to go the extra mile for customers without bureaucratic hurdles.
- **Collaboration:** Encourage collaboration across departments. A customer's journey might touch multiple teams, so fostering a collaborative environment ensures a seamless and consistent customer experience.

Skills and Training:

- **Customer Service Skills:** Provide training programs to equip all employees, regardless of their role, with strong customer service skills. This includes active listening, communication techniques, problem-solving abilities, and conflict resolution strategies.
- **Product Knowledge:** Ensure employees have a thorough understanding of the products or services offered. This allows them to answer customer questions accurately and provide informed recommendations.
- **Upskilling Staff:** The digital transformation may require new skills from staff. The policy should address staff training and development to ensure everyone can adapt and thrive in the new digital environment.

Community Engagement:

- **Alternative Channels:** While digital tools are valuable, the policy should acknowledge that not everyone has internet access or digital devices. Maintain alternative channels like phone lines and physical offices for those who cannot access services digitally.
- **Building Trust and Transparency:** By prioritising customer needs, the Council demonstrates a genuine interest in residents fostering trust and transparency. Community members are more likely to feel comfortable engaging with a council they

perceive as responsive and accountable.

- **Understanding Community Needs:** By actively collecting customer feedback through surveys, focus groups, or social media listening, the council can gain valuable insights into residents' needs, concerns, and preferences of their community. This information can then be used to inform service offerings, and community engagement initiatives.
- **Improved Communication and Collaboration:** A customer-centric approach encourages open communication between the council and its customers. This can be facilitated through social media platforms, online forums, or community events. These channels allow for two-way communication, where companies can share information and updates, while also gathering valuable feedback from the community.
- **Empowering Customers:** A customer-first strategy empowers customers to become partners in shaping the council's objectives
- **Increased Customer Satisfaction:** By focusing on resolving customer issues and exceeding expectations, the council can create a more positive customer experience.

Overall, a Customer First Strategy goes beyond just transactional interactions. By prioritizing customer needs, building trust, and fostering open communication, the council can create a foundation for a strong and mutually beneficial relationship creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for both staff and the community they serve.

2. Set out the available evidence that will help you assess the impact of this policy function or activity on equality.

This could include service-level monitoring data, analysis of complaints/enquiry records, existing user feedback, data obtained from external sources and information about the local community. You may find it useful to compare your service-user statistics against the [Runnymede population profile](#).

Data Analysis:

- **Website Usage Statistics:** Analyse website data to see if there are disparities in usage by different demographics (age, location, disability). This can indicate potential barriers for certain groups.
- **Service Access Data:** Track how residents access council services (online, phone, in-person).
- **Surveys and Focus Groups:** Implement surveys, feedback questionnaires and focus groups with residents from diverse backgrounds to understand their experiences with the council's digital services.

User Feedback Mechanisms:

- Implement mechanisms for residents to provide feedback on the council's digital services. This is through online surveys, comment boxes, or dedicated helplines.

Changes in Service Usage:

- Monitor how diverse groups use council services
- By analysing this data, we will identify areas where the Customer First strategy might unintentionally create barriers for certain groups. This evidence can then be used to refine the strategy, improve accessibility, and ensure a more equitable experience for all.

3. What consultation and involvement has been undertaken in relation to this (or a similar) policy, function or activity and what are the results? If none have been conducted, what consultation will be needed? Data may be available from recent consultation activities on a related policy or Equality impact assessment.

Following on from the previous Customer Services Strategy, data has been analysed on take up of on-line services, review of complaints and compliments and service requests. There will be consultation with Corporate Leadership Team, Senior Leadership and councillors before the Strategy is adopted and then a communication and staff training plan will be devised to ensure a smooth transition to modern technologies outlined in the strategy.

4. Are there any gaps in the information established from the consultation and involvement undertaken and referred to in Part 3? If so, set out how these gaps will be filled?

Whilst there are no identified gaps in the Strategy, the implementation of the policy will be reviewed throughout the lifetime of the strategy and any identified impact will be addressed at that point.

There it is not possible to fill information/data gaps in time to inform this assessment, specific action points will need to be included in the action plan section Part 10 below, with a focus on monitoring the actual impact of the policy function or activity.

ASSESSING IMPACT

It is essential to consider not just the intended consequences of the policy but also any unintended consequences and barriers that might prevent it being effective for people within any of the Protected Characteristic groups.

Please use the Grid included below to assess the impact of the Policy/function/action on each of the Protected Characteristics. When completing the assessment, please bear in mind the following questions;

- 1. What are the main findings of your consultation and involvement activities, and do they demonstrate problems that need to be addressed? For example, could the policy, function or activity outcomes differ according to people's ethnic group, disability, gender, religion/belief, sexual orientation, or age?** For instance, there might be evidence of higher or lower participation/uptake by diverse groups.
- 2. If there is a disproportionate impact on one group, is it appropriate and consistent with the objective?** For instance, the policy may include lawful positive action or other methods to address particular needs or may be considered to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim

Protected Characteristic	Positive		Neutral	Negative		Comments
	High	Low		High	Low	
Age	X					Improvements to online services including meeting accessibility standards and 24/7 accessibility will have a positive impact on all age groups. By maintaining and improving more traditional communication methods will ensure those who are not digital agile can still contact the Council in their preferred choice of contact
Disability	x					This customer first strategy will significantly improve the lives of people with disabilities promoting accessibility, independence and participation. For example, Improvements in car parks with the introduction of blue badge scanners will improve the visitor experience of disabled visitors to Council car parks. The planned improvements to the Council's website including accessibility standards and assisted technologies like screen readers, translation tools and magnification tools all support disabled users
Gender Reassignment	x					The use of gender-neutral language in online forms, invoices, applications, and communication channels to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment. Robust data security measures to protect the privacy of sensitive information related to gender identity.
Marriage / Civil Partnership			X			The Customer First Strategy focuses on service delivery and communication so is unlikely to have any major impact specifically for married or civil partnerships.
Pregnancy / Maternity		X				The Customer First Strategy focuses on service delivery and communication so is unlikely to have any major impact specifically for married or civil partnerships.
Race	X					The Strategy may have a positive impact on race in several ways, promoting inclusivity and reducing racial disparities in access to information and services including translation tools, multi-cultural staff training including unconscious bias and cultural sensitivity
Religion / Belief			x			The strategy focuses on service delivery and communication so is unlikely to have any major impact specifically for religion or beliefs.
Sex			X			The strategy focuses on service delivery and communication so is unlikely to have any major impact specifically for sex
Sexual Orientation	X					The Council websites and online platforms will use inclusive language and imagery that reflects the diversity of sexual orientations within the community

5. Does the policy, function or activity miss potential opportunities to promote equality or positive attitudes to (and between) different Protected Characteristics or communities?

Digital divide: As the strategy does not focus solely on online service delivery but continues to provide alternative access points (phone lines, physical offices), it should not exclude residents without internet access or digital literacy skills. Having a choice of access channels will not disproportionately affect older adults, low-income residents, or people with disabilities.

Language barriers: The strategy includes the support and expansion of multilingual tools so should not exclude residents with limited English proficiency from accessing council services and information online.

Lack of prior consultation: Developing a customer first strategy without consulting with diverse community groups can lead to overlooking their specific needs and perspectives. This can result in a strategy that fails to address existing inequalities or promote positive interactions between different communities. However by continually reviewing the strategy over the next three years should mitigate this risk.

ADDRESSING THE IMPACT: ACTION PLANNING, MONITORING AND REVIEW

6. Does the policy, function or activity require reconsideration or amendment? If not, explain the reasons for this conclusion. If an adverse impact has been identified, you will need to set out the justification for continuing the policy, function or activity or outline measures to mitigate the impact.

The Strategy outlines the introduction of a Customer First Steering group comprising of key stakeholders across all departments that will oversee the programme delivery, track progress against goals and make necessary adjustments as needed. This group will meet quarterly and will feed into the annual report on progress delivery.

7. What actions have you identified as a result of this equality impact assessment? These might include improving data collection in order to give a clearer picture of your service-users, physical adjustments to a building, arranging for information to be sent out to individuals in alternative formats or languages, or consulting with a wider group of people to understand the impact of the policy.

Use third party monitoring software (Silktide) to conduct accessibility audits of the Council's website including compliance with WCAG standards

Provide training and support to all staff on how best to support residents with protected characteristics

Continue to provide a wide range of choice for contacting the council

Continue to provide translation tools on websites, on-line forms and key documents

Deliver content through different methods such as video and voice recordings

Implement a customer care training programme for staff

8. Action Plan (where applicable): Who will be responsible for completing these actions and in what timescale? How will you review the actual impact of this policy function or activity?

Provide details of timescale and actions for review, and details of how the actions will be evaluated to measure if expected outcomes are achieved in practice. You may have identified 'triggers' that would indicate a problem with the policy, function or activity and suggest a revision is be needed.

The Customer First Strategy has a clear three-year action plan as to how the improvements will be delivered and will feed into Service Action Plans and individual performance development plans to ensure the golden thread is maintained.

This assessment will need to be referred to the Equality Group for challenge.

Date completed: 15.03.24

Sign-off by an authorised Officer/Manager: Linda Norman