



## Equality Relevance Assessment

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| <b>1. Details of proposal</b>   |  |
| Policy title  | Property Modernisation Programme             |
| Lead officer  | Donald Forrest – Head of Finance and Estates |
| Date relevance considered   | 19/09/2013                                   |
| <b>2. Does the council have control over how this policy will be implemented?</b>   |  |
| <b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/>   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/>                 |
| <b>NO</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>                     |
| <b>3. Do you have evidence or reason to believe that this policy will, or may potentially:</b>  |  |
| <b>General Duties</b>   |  |
| Reduce or increase discrimination, victimisation or harassment against people covered by the equality protected characteristics?  | No   |
| Reduce or increase equality of opportunity between people who share an equality protected characteristic and those who do not?  | Yes  |
| Provide opportunity to improve good relations between those who share an equality protected characteristic and those who do not?  | No   |
| <b>4. Equality impact assessment required?</b><br>(Yes to any of above = full assessment recommended)   |  |
| <b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/>   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/>                 |
| <b>NO</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>                     |
| <b>5. Decision rationale</b>  |  |
| <p>Yes – as a discretionary decision.</p> <p>Key to this strategy is the disposal of assets considered to be surplus, reduction of office space occupied per person through higher staff to desk ratios and more multi-functional and multi-use buildings such as Partnership Centers containing many different aspects of service delivery provided by both the council and its partners. Within the proposal some staff may be relocated to different premises. Possible impacts might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council staff who may be affected by changes in location – in terms of accessibility needs / limited mobility</li> <li>• Where staff are allocated to locations where hot-desking / use of Worksmart is implemented, ensuring that staff with specific needs are considered e.g. disability, limited mobility</li> <li>• Accessibility to relocated council services in terms of service users with disability / limited mobility / ability to travel (low income) within catchment area</li> </ul> <p>Recommendation to move forward to further assessment.</p> |  |

- **Assessment required – continue to next section**

## Equality Impact Assessment

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| <b>1. Details of proposal</b>  |  |
| Details of others involved   | Donald Forrest – Head of Finance and Estates<br>Kenny Selbie – Equality Officer<br>Hannah Gardner – Equalities Analyst |
| Date assessment conducted  | 15/12/14   |
| <b>2. Aims of the proposed change to council policy or resources</b>   |  |
| <p>This measure is an 'ongoing' project in terms of the council's Property Asset Management Strategy to ensure that its property assets are used both effectively and efficiently in the delivery of council services. The current 10 year office rationalisation strategy is already more than half way through its main aim of delivering a reduction in the main operational buildings from 42 to 16 by 2018.</p> <p>The project objectives are to improve efficient and effective use of existing offices; to reduce levels of office property costs and to link effectively with the council's modernisation agenda for efficient and effective delivery of services.</p> <p>Key to this strategy is the disposal of assets considered to be surplus, reduction of office space occupied per person through higher staff to desk ratios and more multi-functional and multi-use buildings such as Partnership Centres containing many different aspects of service delivery provided by both the council and its partners. Within the proposal some staff may be relocated to different premises.</p> |  |
| <b>3. What equality data, research or other evidence has been used to inform this assessment?</b>  |  |
| Evidence was collected from local, national & academic research, including, census data for West Lothian. Research was also drawn from gender pay gap specialists Close the Gap.   |  |
| <b>4. Details of consultation and involvement</b>  |  |
| The assessment has been subject to scrutiny by representatives of the equality community forums through a specific focus on Delivering Better Outcomes projects as agreed by the council's Corporate Working Group on Equality.  |  |
| <b>5. Issues identified and 'protected characteristics' impact</b><br><b>(Covering: age; disability; gender; gender identity; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief and sexual orientation equality)</b>   |  |

A number of components of this project could disproportionately impact individuals with protected characteristics. The reduction in the number of buildings the council utilises, although more efficient, could impact the accessibility of services. Reducing the number of more local services and replacing them with 'centralised' services (e.g. partnership centres etc.) has particular implications on those with disabilities and older adults. Although distances between 'old' services and 'new' services may be negligible, it could significantly impact the way in which these groups access the service. A balance should be struck between more efficient services, and ensuring areas of greatest need are resourced properly. The issue of access may be mitigated by ensuring that sufficient public transport can reach centralised services from areas of need.

With regard to the modernisation of current Council properties (County Buildings / St.David's House), disabled employees and services users could be disproportionately impacted. Although the aesthetics of a refurbished building may create a better and more productive work environment, accessibility often remains an issue. The use of 'inclusive' design could positively impact disabled users of the building; however, often the design of the building overshadows the need for an efficient / practical building that can be used by all. Without 'inclusive' design, there is a potential to isolate disabled service users and staff. Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (2011), public authorities are required to make reasonable adjustments in the way in which they carry out their functions so that disabled people are not disadvantaged by the way in which those functions are carried out. This includes adjustments to policies, practices or procedures, premises, and the provision of auxiliary aids or services.

Decreasing empty space within offices, by increasing the number of individuals per space could be detrimental to those with disabilities. Increasing the amount of work stations per floor consequently decreases the space in which individuals with physical disabilities can manoeuvre easily – specifically those with mobility aids (e.g. wheelchair / walking frames). A report by the *Office of Disability Issues* indicates that inadequate space can cause high levels of stress in those with disabilities, as their mobility is further limited by the environment.

The relocation of staff, and changes to terms and conditions of employment could adversely impact individuals with protected characteristics. This proposal is more likely to affect part-time workers. Due to the makeup of the workforce profile in West Lothian Council, there is a possible risk that female employees could be adversely impacted. 41% of women in employment worked part-time in 2005, compared with 10% of men. This proportion of women is largely unchanged since 1984. The Office for National Statistics data for March 2011 – April 2012 show 48% of women employees in Scotland working part-time, compared to 16% of men (*Scottish Government*, 2013). Those who have caring responsibilities may also be adversely affected by the proposed plans. Primary carers of children are more likely to be female, and as a result there is a direct overlap between these protected groups. This group may be affected if there is a change to the geographical location of their workplace, or a change to their working hours. Females and those with caring responsibilities are more likely to work part-time hours, and therefore a change to work structures may impact on them in a negative way (*Close the Gap*, 2013).

## 6. What measures are in place to monitor the actual impact following implementation?

Many of the proposals under this project are already implemented and a number of the early initiatives were assessed as part of the council's previous Tough Choices programme. The Delivering Better Outcomes projects are being monitored by the Modernisation Board during implementation and equality impact assessment is identified as a key enabler for projects.

## 7. Recommendation

- Implement proposal with no amendments
- Implement proposal taking account of mitigating actions (as outlined below)
- Reject proposal due to disproportionate impact on equality

## 8. Mitigating actions and additional outputs

While this measure was deemed relevant to equality, the issues identified in relation to the impact of building rationalisation have been picked up throughout a number of other relevant assessments and the cumulative assessment on the wider financial strategy. The work relating to this measure commenced in 2011 as part of the council's Tough Choices programme and budget setting equality impact assessments were conducted at the time.

- **Equality impact assessment completed**