



## Equality Relevance Assessment

1. Details of proposal	
Policy title	Transfer of planning and environmental health enquiries to Customer Service Centre
Lead officer	Craig McCoristen - Head of Planning and Economic Development
Date relevance considered	03/01/14
2. Does the council have control over how this policy will be implemented?	
YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do you have evidence or reason to believe that this policy will, or may potentially:	
General Duties	Impact on equality (Yes or No)
Reduce or increase discrimination, victimisation or harassment against people covered by the equality protected characteristics?	Yes
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
4. Equality impact assessment required? (Two Yes above = full assessment necessary)	
YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Decision rationale	
<p>The project will change the way some council services are delivered. Services may in the future be delivered online or via the phone, rather than face to face. This has the potential to impact people from protected groups who may struggle to adapt to using a different channel or technology to access council services such as older people, people with disabilities and people whose first language is not English.</p>	

- No assessment required – process ends
- Assessment required – continue to next section

## Equality Impact Assessment

<b>1. Details of proposal</b>	
Details of others involved	Craig McCoristen – Head of Planning and Economic Development Kenny Selbie – Equality Officer Hannah Gardner – Equalities Analyst
Date assessment conducted	15/12/14
<b>2. Aims of the proposed change to council policy or resources</b>	
The measure proposes to transfer planning and environmental health enquiries to the Customer Service Centre where the channel is email or telephone rather than face-to-face. The shift from old to new technologies is a helpful way to streamline services and create efficiencies and is a key theme of Delivering Better Outcomes.	
<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 research conducted by the <i>Improvement Service</i> and <i>Experian</i> in the Scottish Borders Council.	
<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> (Covering: age; disability; gender; gender identity; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief and sexual orientation equality)	

The shift from old to new technologies is a key theme of Delivering Better Outcomes. It is a simple way to streamline services and create efficiencies. However, the increased use of technology, the shift to e-government, and the move away from face-to-face services impacts both staff and services users with protected characteristics.

The use of technology to make contact with the Council and other partners, and moving public services online could potentially isolate older adults who are not technologically up to date. Further, the proposed changes will impact disabled service users who are unable to access the internet independently and those who have physical difficulties using technologies. As a result, these groups may miss out on services they require. The *Centre for Ageing Research & Development* in Ireland indicate that those 55-years and over are less likely to have ITC skills, and access to the internet. Individuals who have disabilities could potentially face difficulties in obtaining access to e-government websites for many reasons. These include the cost, the nature of their impairments making computer use difficult – possibly requiring the use of special equipment or adaptations – and (for many) their general unfamiliarity with computers. There is also the possibility that provision of information and services through the Internet might actually narrow rather than widen choices, because it might lead to the phasing out of traditional ways of providing services preferred by some disabled people (*Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004*).

Research conducted by the *Improvement Service* and *Experian* explored the potential for Channel Shift in the Scottish Borders Council. Results indicate that older people's preference to receive information from the council was from face to face meetings in 'branch' or via local / national newspapers. Older people were less likely to engage with information from the council if it was on the internet, or received via phone or text message. With regard to service provision, similar results were found: older people preferred their services to be delivered in a face-to-face manner, but not by internet, phone, text message or by post.

Additionally, it was identified that a shift towards greater use of email and telephone contact had the potential to impact on individuals whose first language is not English. This is specifically in regard to environmental health service provision and contact with restaurants and hot food retailers.

Channel shifting could also impact those working within the council. It may mean that some employees will have to be trained to use technologies they are unfamiliar with, but could also mean that their role within the council could become superseded by the cheaper online or telephone versions. This has specific consequences on those working within face-to-face customer services.

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

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**

Potential impact will be minimised by the fact that most contact is created by officers engaging proactively with clients face-to-face, this will continue. However, the contact centre requires greater clarity on the use and access of the interpretation and translation service contract.

- **Equality impact assessment completed**