Title

Customer Access Strategy – Equality Impact Assessment

Purpose

Additional Information for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) following the meeting dated 16th May 2018

Author(s)

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Contents

1. Summary

An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken to help ensure that the intentions of the proposed new Customer Access Strategy:

• were fair and equal to all

• created no unintentional or unseen barriers that might otherwise have affected some customers or residents disproportionately

2. Conclusion

The Equality Impact Assessment has not identified any negative implications.

3. For further information:

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Equality Impact Assessment

Customer Access Strategy 2018

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Finance and Customer Services

Equality and Diversity

1. Promoting equality of opportunity, eliminating discrimination and building cohesive and inclusive communities are all part of making life better for RMBC residents, service users, customers and the Council's own employees

2. The Equality Act 2010 includes the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 which came into force in 2011. This covers councils and other public sector organisations such as the Police, Health and schools. It also applies to organisations RMBC contracts with who are carrying functions on our behalf.

3. The General Duty has three aims. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:
   - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
   - advance equality of opportunity by:
     - o removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons
     - o taking steps to meet the needs of persons that are different from others
     - o encouraging people to participate in public life or activity in which participation is disproportionately low
   - foster good relations by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding

4. The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled people involve taking account of a person's impairments and making reasonable adjustments. Compliance with the duties may involve treating some persons more favourably than others.

Protected Characteristics

The Act sets out specific protected characteristics which are:
- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race (ethnicity, colour and nationality)
- religion or belief (includes no religious belief)
- sex (men, women and other)
- sexual orientation
- marriage and civil partnership (only in relation to eliminating discrimination)

Equality Impact Assessments (EIA's)

1. One of the ways RMBC assesses the effects of proposals, policies or projects on different people within the borough is to carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs).
2. All proposals, including those in the budget, projects and policies, have appropriate EIAs. The annual budget has an overview EIA that summarises potential areas of impact. This EIA and the individual service EIAs are focussed on the impact on the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010.
3. RMBC also uses the EIA process to assess the impact on other issues such as financial exclusion and poverty, voluntary, community and faith sector, carers, cohesion and health and wellbeing.
4. EIAs aid good decision making, help ensure that the services we provide are fair and accessible to all and help RMBC meet it's equality duty. Without conducting an EIA there may be unseen barriers or aspects of service delivery that might affect some customers or residents disproportionately, even if this is not the intention.

Equality Impact Assessment - Customer Access Strategy refresh

1.1 What is being assessed? Is it new? What is the main aim or purpose?

- A new Customer Access Strategy is required to replace the now expired Customer Access Strategy 2011 to 2015.

  http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/info/200119/customer_services/649/how_we_deal_with_your_enquiries

- The new strategy forms the framework for the way customers access services and the way the Council delivers them. It has a more digitally focused emphasis to reflect changing customer behaviours and expectations and technology advancements.

- The Council is taking a 'digital first' approach rather than 'digital by default.' The aim is to increase digital inclusion so that more people can enjoy the wider benefits of being online; whilst also ensuring that all Rotherham customers, regardless of personal circumstances and preference continue to have access to the help, advice, and information they need.

1.2 Who is responsible for the assessment?

- Head of Customer Services

1.3 Who will implement the strategy

- Cabinet will be asked to approve the final version on 21st May 2018.
- Subject to cabinet approval the Head of Customer Services will make arrangements to publish the 'live' version of the Strategy online.
- The Customer Service & Efficiency Board will be responsible for the delivery of the underpinning work programme.

1.4 How does the strategy impact on people? Who is affected and how?

- The Customer Access Strategy impacts a wide range of people; the main focus being RMBC residents, businesses and communities, with potentially a much wider audience including visitors to the region, partners, voluntary sector and other organisations.

- The strategy describes how the Council aims to:
  - Make it easier and more attractive for people to access services online
  - Increase digital inclusion;
  - Encourage and support more people to regularly 'self-serve' rather than choosing to phone or visit a council office;
  - Make sure everyone continues to have equal access to the information and help they need regardless of their individual circumstances;
  - Deliver excellent customer service and enhance customer experience ;

- Involve customers in designing and building services around their needs;
- Making better use of customer feedback to continually develop and improve;

1.5 How has the draft customer access strategy been promoted or explained to these groups of people? What analysis has been done to identify if this is meeting the needs of <u>ALL</u> these groups of people?

- The initial draft Customer Access Strategy was shared with informal cabinet, SLT and the Customer Service & Efficiency board and updated following feedback.
- Whilst there is no requirement for the Council to formally consult on the refreshed Customer Access Strategy, the updated draft was subsequently shared with partners, community groups and the general public.
- A copy of the draft strategy was made available in an audible format.
- Feedback was encouraged through a mixture of meetings, email alerts, social media broadcasts, the website carousel and staff newsletters. Notices in libraries were also displayed advising customers of the draft strategy.
- The Head of Customer Services attended the Council's Community Reference group to talk about the strategy and its intended improvements and outcomes.
- A Customer Service Manager has attended various community group meetings to explain the purpose of the strategy and invite comment.
- All stakeholders were encouraged to complete an online survey which sought to gather views and opinions on the strategy itself as well as general thoughts around service improvement. (Assisted digital was offered in libraries)
- Responders were also asked to express interest in helping the Council test and design services, and/or volunteer to take part in the creation of video content. In the future it is envisaged that these volunteers will help the Council ensure new/redesigned services continue to meet customer needs.
- Appendix I (Stakeholder Engagement) provides further details regarding stakeholder involvement.

1.6 What data, and information has/will be available to use in the assessment now and in the future?

- 15 people submitted responses and provided useful feedback that was taken into account ahead of submitting the final version of the strategy for Cabinet approval.
- Comments from the survey will be further considered when reviewing the Customer Service standards; a piece of work that will be undertaken later in 2018.
- After the new Customer Access Strategy has been published, there will be a mechanism for customers and communities to continuously share their thoughts and suggestions. The strategy will be reviewed annually and this feedback will be taken into account; with any proposed changes subject to Cabinet consideration/approval.
- Volunteers will be involved in the design and testing of services so that their thoughts can be taken into account before new services go live.
- Engagement with community groups will be ongoing using existing mechanisms – this will ensure the requirements of any protected groups are recognised and acted upon.
- ONS statistics will be useful in terms of measuring any changes to digital inclusion levels across the borough; albeit that it is unlikely this could be directly attributed to the strategy itself.

• Changing customer behaviours in terms of channel demand;
• Attendance at the member led community reference group on an ongoing basis;
• Social media comments;
• Complaints;
• Website page feedback forms;

1.7 Does the information suggest that the strategy could have a differential impact on certain groups of people?

No.
- The Council is adopting a digital first approach rather than digital by default. It emphasises the need to ensure everyone continues to have equal access to the information and help they need regardless of their individual circumstances.
- The strategy recognises that there are people who can be supported and encouraged to do more online whereas for other customers this may not be possible. For this reason the strategy makes reference to other self-serve options being available too. For example text messaging, automated telephone service.
- The strategy also reminds customers that they can still contact the Council by phone or in person at one of the Neighbourhood Hubs.
- The strategy supports the aims of the Digital Strategy and is intended to make it easier for people to access services digitally, thereby allowing the Council to prioritise its resources where help is most needed.
- This EIA has been shared with the Performance, Intelligence & Improvement team who also provided additional support in terms of community group names and contacts.

1.8 Impact

Group	Impact
AGE (*Across the whole age spectrum*)	• Although some people may consider age to be a barrier to customers accessing services online the aim of the strategy is to support all customers with digital skills. • The survey seeks to tease out the reasons why people don't currently access services online so we can better understand any perceptions or shortcomings of the offering as it is now. • The Council is not withdrawing service access via other channels (eg. Phone, in person), and will continue to work with community groups and the voluntary sector to support greater digital inclusion across all age groups.
DISABILITY	• The Council is not withdrawing service access via other channels (eg. Phone, in person), and will continue to work with partners, community groups and the voluntary sector to support all customers. This includes regular attendance by a Customer Services manager or their representative at meetings such as the Rotherham Disability network, and Rotherham Visually Impaired group. • Online a number of mechanisms are already in place to support disabled users and in libraries equipment adaptations are in place to support users who want to go online using a Council PC. • The Council provides online accessibility information:

	http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/accessibility (this page will be reviewed in 2018) • The web team also make sure that any published content is written in a format that makes it accessible for assistive technology such as screen readers. • It is anticipated that the strategy will underpin the development of other technologies some of which are likely to provide additional options eg, voice activation. • Engagement with user groups will be ongoing so that any new requirements can be considered alongside anything received via surveys and feedback forms.
GENDER REASSIGNMENT	• No anticipated impact: any published content needs to meet the Council's Equality and Diversity policysurveys and feedback forms will be monitored.
PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY	• No anticipated impact: any published content needs to meet the Council's Equality and Diversity policy surveys and feedback forms will be monitored.
RACE/LANGUAGE BARRIER	• Customers making contact by phone or in person are supported with interpreting services available through the Big Word service. • Online free web apps such as google translate are also available. • Engagement with user groups will be ongoing so that any new requirements can be considered alongside anything received via surveys and feedback forms.
RELIGION OR BELIEF	• No anticipated impact: any published content needs to meet the Council's Equality and Diversity policy and surveys and feedback forms will be monitored.
SEX	• No anticipated impact : any published content needs to meet the Council's Equality and Diversity policy and surveys and feedback forms will be monitored.
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	• No anticipated impact : any published content needs to meet the Council's Equality and Diversity policy and surveys and feedback forms will be monitored.
MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP	• No anticipated impact : any published content needs to meet the Council's Equality and Diversity policy and surveys and feedback forms will be monitored.
OTHER *(Additional groups that may experience impacts)*	• None currently

2.0   Review – making sure the Customer Access Strategy continues to support access for all customers

- Through the wider customer services & efficiency programme, engagement with user groups will be ongoing so that any barriers or new requirements can be quickly identified.
- An annual review of the Customer Access Strategy will be undertaken.
- There will be a mechanism for customers and communities to continuously share their thoughts and suggestions and this feedback will be taken into account with any proposed changes subject to Cabinet consideration/approval .

Appendix 1

External Stakeholder Engagement

In addition to the wider public engagement via the website and social media, the following partner agencies, community groups and voluntary organisations have each been invited to share their views:

- Action Housing
- Action in Rotherham
- Adult Community Learning
- Age UK
- Carers forum
- Citizen Advice Bureau
- Clearways
- DWP
- Faith groups
- Housing Involvement Panel
- Job Centre
- Lighthouse project
- Mind
- NHS
- Parents Forum
- Pride of Rotherham
- Rainbow project
- Rotherfed
- Rotherham Disability Network
- Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance
- Rotherham Older People's Forum
- Rotherham Pensioners Action Group
- Rotherham Rise
- Rotherham Sight and Sound
- Rotherham United Community Sports Trust
- Rotherham Visually Impaired Group
- Rotherham Youth Council
- Rotherham Youth Parliament
- Shiloh
- sight and sound
- South Yorkshire Housing Association
- South Yorkshire Police
- Speak Up
- Target Housing
- Thursday Project/Crisis
- Voluntary Action Rotherham
- Yorkshire MESMAC