

# Cambridge City Council Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

This tool helps the Council ensure that we fulfil legal obligations of the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) to have due regard to the need to –

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Guidance on how to complete this tool can be found on the Cambridge City Council intranet. For specific questions on the tool email Helen Crowther, Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer at [equalities@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cambridge.gov.uk) or phone 01223 457046.

Once you have drafted the EqIA please send this to [equalities@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cambridge.gov.uk) for checking. For advice on consulting on equality impacts, please contact Graham Saint, Strategy Officer, ([graham.saint@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:graham.saint@cambridge.gov.uk) or 01223 457044).

<b>1. Title of strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service</b>
--

Customer Service Operating Model
----------------------------------

<b>2. Webpage link to full details of the strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service (if available)</b>
--

The council website for customer services can be found here: <a href="#">Contact us - Cambridge City Council</a>
--

<b>3. What is the objective or purpose of your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?</b>
---

The new service model has been in operation for 8 months now so a review of the EqIA has been undertaken to check for impacts and action measures to mitigate these if required.
--

<b>The background to the original EqIA is below:</b>
--

Prior to lockdown being enforced in the UK as a result of COVID19 in March 2020, the Customer Service Centre (CSC) operated a drop-in and appointment facility for
--

customers to visit Mandela House to receive advice & guidance face-to-face regarding Cambridge City Council Services.

Additionally, customers were able to make payments at the cash office or by using the payment kiosk and could use the facilities in the self-serve area and use internet enabled PCs to make applications for housing, benefits, and carry out job searches etc. Partner organisations such as Cambridge & District Citizens Advice, credit unions and Cambridge Online also operated out of the self-serve area to support customers as appropriate.

A decision was taken in May 2020 with endorsement from Members that these face-to-face facilities should not re-open with the pre-COVID19 delivery model but that revised arrangements should be shaped, and these were implemented from April 2021.

A consultation took place regarding the service to be delivered at Arbury Road. The outcome of the consultation was that Arbury Road reception did not re-open.

A consultation on the customer services delivery model and structure took place between 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and the outcome of the consultation is that from April 2021:

- That face-to-face customer service delivery became by appointment only – there is assisted digital support in place to help drop-in customers self-serve
- That advisors educate, coach and support customers to use the available digital options where appropriate and possible, providing an enhanced support offer to customers with vulnerabilities and/or complex needs
- That Cambridge City Council will operate as a cashless authority

### **Triage**

An enhanced triage service was introduced across all access channels and consists of anything from signposting to facilities to access information, guidance, and self-service online to more intensive digital support. In addition, customers identified as being vulnerable or with complex needs are supported via a face-to-face service where appropriate, including advocacy to navigate council and partner services. This includes support via a specialist pathway for instance in an emergency e.g. someone presenting as homeless as a result of domestic violence. The customer service centre has been reconfigured at Mandela house to enable staff to provide a triage service to customers when they enter the centre.

## **Appointments**

Appointments are available to customers at the Customer Services Centre (CSC) where customers present as requiring co-ordination of multiple services, have complex needs, in emergencies or where it benefits the council (e.g. to make an arrangement to pay council tax arrears). An immediate or same day appointment is arranged where appropriate.

## **Cashless**

Customers can continue to make cash payments at Banks, Post offices and PayPoints, however a facility is not be available to pay cash to the council directly. Cashiers at both at the CSC and at Arbury Road reception have been closed. Most councils moved away from receiving cash a number of years ago and have reported little adverse response from customers following pro-active engagement with potentially disadvantaged groups.

Support is provided to customers who want or need to make payments in cash. This is tailored according to the customers circumstances.

## **Communications**

When the new service model was introduced customers were informed in the following ways:

- Messaging on the contact centre lines – customers are made aware that self-service options will be discussed with them and that an appointment will be made where a face-to-face discussion is appropriate
- Auto acknowledgements on emails signpost customers to the correct portal or digital option to have their query resolved in the most efficient way
- Advisors discuss digital options with customers, coaching them or signposting them to these options where it is confirmed customers have capability
- The customer services webpage updates customers about how they can receive assistance, informs them of the need for an appointment as well as directing customers to the appropriate digital option
- A pavement sign at Mandela House informs customers of the need for an appointment before entering reception

- A range of articles in Open door (newsletter for Cambridge City Council tenants) and Cambridge Matters (magazine for all residents in Cambridge) have updated customers on new digital options and how to receive support
- The Cambridge City Council tenant welcome pack has been updated to reflect the ways a customer can access support

### **Support to access services**

A comprehensive support offer is in place to ensure that all customers are able to access services and that resources are prioritised to assist customers that need it most, specifically:

- digital assistance (helping customers to use a computer or using it on their behalf)
- advocacy and support (for vulnerable groups)

A blend of different types of support is being provided and front-line staff have been trained to be empowered to assess and provide tailored services to suit the individual. This is via a set of clearly defined frameworks (to assess vulnerability and assisted digital needs) in order to deliver the service.

### **Assisted Digital**

The 'assisted digital' service provides access to equipment and the internet at the CSC together with support across all access channels which aim to increase customer confidence, skills, and propensity to want and be able to access council services online now and in the future based on the best practice approach below.

1. Customers who, with access to equipment and the internet, and with a small amount of help and encouragement could access services, including online, now and in the future – Support includes access to equipment, first time assistance, signposting to courses, light touch signposting and navigation of services, information, and guidance
2. Customers with access to equipment and the internet, and who with more intensive support will be able to access services online now and potentially in the future. This can include assistance with using a PC, setting up an email account or 'My Account', side-by-side assistance with completion of forms, explaining service provision and navigation of services, referral to ICT and other courses and/or referral to other services and partners for help and assistance

3. Customers who temporarily or who will always require officer support and/or advocacy to navigate and/or access services – This includes appointments or home visits to facilitate access to services for the customer, including advocacy and referral across multiple departments. These customers would not be expected to self-service

As we increasingly digitise services, we need to ensure that no-one is left behind and that we continue to pro-actively 'reach out' to residents within the community in order to understand their access requirements and to deliver access to equipment, 'connectivity' and activities that will help them to 'get online'. We will continue to develop other access arrangements including via partners such the county library network to join up provision of access to PCs, devices, and the internet.

### **Vulnerability/complex needs**

A vulnerability 'framework' has been developed to assist frontline staff to identify customers needing additional support. Staff are trained to deliver the appropriate support including advocacy to navigate council and partner services on their behalf.

The following are a list of potential characteristics identified through the review, and forms the basis of the framework in place to deliver outcomes for customers through the revised arrangements:

- A disability and/or impairment that significantly impacts on a person's ability to access services even with assistance. This may cover learning disabilities, mental health disabilities or severe physical disabilities. It will always cover severe hearing and visual impairments;
- Those of pensionable age and unable to navigate on-line services even with assistance;
- Those with a significant ill-health issue;
- Situational circumstances e.g. loss of a job;
- Complicated and urgent scenarios e.g. domestic violence, homelessness/evictions;
- Poverty
- Other factors e.g. substance misuse.

## Organisational Design

After reviewing the feedback from the staff consultation and re-visiting the data associated with the original proposal, a revised staff structure and job descriptions were agreed.

The proposals detailed a service reduction of 4.2 Full Time Equivalent posts (FTE) from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, a further 3.6 FTE reduction from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021, and a final reduction of 2.0 FTE on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021. This was a total reduction of 9.9 FTE with reductions across Principal, Senior and Customer Service Advisor roles proportionately in line with the forecast reduction of work effort.

### 4. Responsible service

Customer Services

### 5. Who will be affected by this strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?

(Please tick all that apply)

- Residents
- Visitors
- Staff

Please state any specific client group or groups (e.g. City Council tenants, tourists, people who work in the city but do not live here):

Any resident or visitor to Cambridge has the potential to be affected by this change.

Staff working in the Customer Service Centre and Arbury Road Housing reception. Staff members have been consulted and Human Resources and Union reps have also been involved in the review.

### 6. What type of strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service is this?

- New
- Major change
- Minor change

**7. Are other departments or partners involved in delivering this strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service? (Please tick)**

- Yes  
 No

If 'Yes' please provide details below:

- ICT and digital services
- Housing
- Environmental Services
- Property Services
- Citizens Advice and Cambridge Online
- Cambridge Digital Partnership
- Cambridgeshire County Council

**8. Has the report on your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service gone to Committee? If so, which one?**

Recommendation and approval at Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020 with delegated authority to proceed.

**9. What research methods/ evidence have you used in order to identify equality impacts of your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?**

- Customer contact volume by channel - analysis and forecasting
- Complaints review – No complaints have been received regarding the new service model since April 2021
- Customer feedback
- Service engagement – Services have been engaged through meetings and workshops to develop and refine the new service arrangements.
- Learning from COVID19 – Service delivery and access arrangements have been reviewed as part of Cambridge City Council's COVID19 response and recovery plans
- National sources on digital inclusion - Research undertaken by gov.uk states that 7% of residents in the eastern region of the UK do not use the internet (4% nationally). The alternative means of accessing Council Services mitigate the

impact of implementing an appointment only service for customers.  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide>

- Resident Involvement survey – 74% of tenants say that they have access to the internet

## 10. Potential impacts

For each category below, please explain if the strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service could have a positive/ negative impact or no impact. Where an impact has been identified, please explain what it is. Consider impacts on service users, visitors and staff members separately.

### a. Age

Customers

Older people are more likely to be digitally excluded: According to the Office for National Statistics, almost all adults aged 16 to 44 years in the UK were recent internet users (99%), compared with 54% of adults aged 75 years and over. The Council has invested in significant grant funding to support the Cambridgeshire Digital Partnership to help people get online, including older people. It has also been supporting sheltered housing scheme staff to improve their digital skills, so they can deliver enhanced support to older and more vulnerable customers to utilise digital support channels.

The move to an appointment only service at Mandela House has continued to allow access to council services for service users who visit in person regardless of age. The support offered to customers to use digital options either in person or by telephone has been well received.

Advisors have fed back that customers of all ages continue to access council services in person and there are user stories where advisors have successfully supported customers to sign up for and use digital options using the facilities offered in reception, feeding back that they were pleased with the support received and their new ability to use our systems.

Customers visiting to make payments have been supported to continue to make payments by alternative methods, arrangements to enable cash payments at post offices are in place and in the 2022 financial year, barcodes will be available on council tax bills for those customers who need to make payments in cash to do so easily.

A potential impact of closing Arbury Road reception was that older customers may be disadvantaged due to the need to travel to the Customer Service Centre for face-to-face assistance.

Visitors to the Customer Service Centre have been much lower than anticipated and there have been no complaints received about the need to come to Mandela House.

#### Visitors

No feedback has been received from visitors, directions are still accessible through reception services at Mandela House.

#### Staff

Customer Services employs staff between the ages of 25 – 64 made up as follows:

Age	%
18 or Under	0.00%
19-24	0.00%
25-34	30.00%
35-44	35.00%
45-54	17.50%
55-64	17.50%
65 and over	0.00%

National research shows that people aged 55 and over are less likely to be internet users <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide>. Therefore, customer service staff within this age range may be adversely affected due to lack of digital skills as the service moves towards 'assisted digital' provision.

Training was provided for all staff before the service implementation, additional coaching is part of our routine for staff to develop skills, however this has not been required specifically for digital skills to any significant degree.

## **b. Disability**

### Customers

Disabled people as a group are more likely to be digitally excluded, so the enhanced 'assisted digital' service should have a positive impact for this group. The Council has invested in significant grant funding to support the Cambridgeshire Digital Partnership to help people get online, which has included support for disabled people.

In relation to the new Customer Service model itself, the enhanced triage arrangements and vulnerability/complex needs framework developed ensures that customers requiring assistance can be identified through system prompts, observation, and questioning techniques as well as referral from other organisations such as voluntary and community sector organisations and the County council. There have been no complaints from customers that services could not be accessed on the grounds of disability, and staff resource is prioritised to provide tailored assistance. The revised service supports disabled people who need assistance to access Council Services.

### Visitors

Visitors to the city are not high users of the CSC, no feedback has been received from visitors and directions are still accessible through reception services at Mandela House.

### Staff

Staff members with physical disabilities or reduced mobility can access Mandela House through the main doors, which is an accessible entrance.

10% of the current Customer Service workforce have a known disability. The new service model has not resulted in any of the team raising concerns.

## **c. Gender reassignment**

### Customers:

The enhanced triage arrangements and vulnerability/complex needs framework developed ensures that customers requiring assistance can be identified, prioritised and assisted under the new service model.

People under the protected characteristic of gender reassignment are especially likely to have mental health issues. The triage arrangements ensure that customers with mental health issues can receive support through face-to-face appointments where this is the best means to support them. (Stonewall research in 2018 showed that in preceding 12 months, 67% of trans people and 70% of non-binary people had experienced depression and almost half (48%) of trans people in Britain have attempted suicide at least once.)

The research, evidence and available feedback does not indicate that the new service model has had a negative impact for people under the protected characteristic of gender reassignment.

The council has contributed funding for a community needs assessment for LGBTQ+ people in Cambridgeshire in 2021/22, which also asks about experiences of LGBTQ+ people of using our services. There may be findings from this that help shape council services, including support for people with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment under the new Customer Services Operating Model.

Staff

No impact has been identified specific to this equality group regarding the new service model.

#### **d. Marriage and civil partnership**

No impact has been identified specific to this equality group since the new service model was launched.

#### **e. Pregnancy and maternity**

Customer:

No impact has been identified specific to this equality group since the new service model was launched.

Staff:

No impact has been identified specific to this equality group since the new service model was launched.

Staff on maternity/paternity were kept informed of changes within the service.

**f. Race – Note that the protected characteristic ‘race’ refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.**

**Customers**

Language barriers can mean that people are digitally excluded and where English is not their first language.

The enhanced triage arrangements, assisted digital and vulnerability/complex needs framework developed ensure that customers requiring assistance can be identified, so staff resource can be prioritised and staff are trained to provide tailored assistance. No impact has been identified specific to this equality group since the new service model was launched.

**Staff**

10% of staff in Customer Services identify as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. No impact has been identified specific to this equality group since the new service model was launched.

The research, evidence, and available feedback does not indicate that the new service model has had a negative impact for people under the protected characteristic of race. The Council has commissioned an Inclusion and Engagement Questionnaire for Minority Ethnic people living in, working in, visiting, or studying in the city, which also asks about experience in accessing Council services, and access to IT equipment and the internet. There may be findings from this that help shape council services, including support for people with the protected characteristic of race under the new Customer Services Operating Model.

**g. Religion or belief**

No impact has been identified specific to this equality group since the service model was launched.

#### **h. Sex**

##### **Customers**

Women are more likely to experience domestic abuse than men (1 on 4 compared to 1 in 6 men) and where they do experience it, this tends to be with much more intensity than for men. This group should benefit from the new arrangements including staff being trained and empowered to identify these types of issues through questioning techniques and ensuring that appropriate support and assistance is provided. The Council is also signed up to the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance and the White Ribbon campaign to help tackle domestic abuse and ensure survivors receive support they need from council services.

##### **Staff**

80% of staff impacted by the new customer service arrangements are female and 20% male as compared to the rest of the council at 48% female and 52% male.

#### **i. Sexual orientation**

No impact has been identified specific to this equality group since the new service model was launched.

The council has contributed funding for a community needs assessment for LGBTQ+ people in Cambridgeshire in 2021/22, which also asks about experiences of LGBTQ+ people of using our services. There may be findings from this that help shape council services, including support for people with the protected characteristic of sexual orientation under the new Customer Services Operating Model.

j. **Other factors that may lead to inequality – in particular, please consider the impact of any changes on:**

- **Low-income groups or those experiencing the impacts of poverty**
- **Groups who have more than one protected characteristic that taken together create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. (Here you are being asked to consider intersectionality, and for more information see: [https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1\\_159kt25q](https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1_159kt25q)).**

### **Low-income groups or those experiencing the impacts of poverty**

#### Customers

People on a low income were identified as a group who may have been negatively impacted following the removal of drop-ins for services and cash payments and an increase in digitised services due to a lack of access to a PC or device and funds for internet access.

The enhanced assisted digital arrangements including access to PCs with staff resource to provide tailored assistance have been available to provide support and a positive impact for this group. Support continues to be available through Citizens Advice and community grants via the Cambridgeshire Digital Partnership related to access to equipment, connectivity, and training.

Links with support organisations to ensure that residents have access to digital equipment continue alongside the facilities at Mandela House.

#### Staff

The new service model was implemented with one staff member being made redundant on a voluntary basis, indicating that the new model did not have an adverse impact on financial inequality for staff.

**Groups who have more than one protected characteristic that taken together create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage**

The council recognises that people may have distinct vulnerabilities due to how different elements of their identity (including protected characteristics) overlap. For instance, older people may have additional vulnerabilities relating to disability and poor health. The enhanced triage arrangements and vulnerability/complex needs framework developed ensures that customers requiring assistance can be identified, prioritised, and assisted under the new service model. Staff are trained to help identify people who might need more tailored support and to consider broad range of circumstances and aspects of individuals' identities that may make them vulnerable.

**11. Action plan – New equality impacts will be identified in different stages throughout the planning and implementation stages of changes to your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service. How will you monitor these going forward? Also, how will you ensure that any potential negative impacts of the changes will be mitigated? (Please include dates where possible for when you will update this EqlA accordingly.)**

The service has been live for 8 months and was a precursor to a wider programme of transformation for Cambridge City Council.

The 'Our Cambridge' programme has begun and will see the council work closely with residents and partner organisations to develop better ways of providing services, including through more use of digital technology.

In keeping with the council's Vision of 'One Cambridge – Fair For All', there will be a clear focus on helping people in the greatest need, tackling climate change and ensuring financial stability of the council, despite its reduced income. This work will fall into three central areas:

**Customer first** – Delivering innovative and efficient services that best meet the needs of customers.

**Community focus** – Developing stronger partnerships with members of the community and supporting them to thrive.

**Empowered people** – Enabling council staff to be innovative and entrepreneurial, making the most of opportunities to work differently, and where appropriate to generate income to reinvest into other council services. The following news release gives more information on the programme.

['Our Cambridge' programme to transform how council provides services and tackles challenges ahead - Cambridge City Council](#)

The new customer service model introduced in April 2021 fits within the customer first theme of the programme and the data, customer experience and outcomes collected within Customer services will feed into the wider transformation programme to continue to ensure that resources are available to support people who are the most vulnerable and/or have the highest needs.

This EqIA is being taken to the Equalities Panel on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022 for feedback and consultation on other means to gather feedback and information on the new model, contacts to consult with regarding the impact of the current customer service model, as well as helping to inform the Customer First area of the Our Cambridge Programme.

## 12. Do you have any additional comments?

In the 8 months since the model was introduced, the following data and feedback has been gathered:

Between April and October 2021, a survey on a sample of 3000 customers calling customer services has found that:

- 7% of customers were vulnerable or had complex needs which required an appointment
- 10.5% of customers had their query resolved digitally with assistance from an Advisor
- 29% of customers accepted being referred to a digital option
- 7% of customers who had digital capacity and capability refused to take up digital option

Whilst information on protected characteristics of customers were not collected in the sample, due to the level of sample it is reasonable to conclude that it encompassed customers in every characteristic.

Reduced face-to-face visits have been seen since the new customer service model was introduced and reception services reopened after lockdown.

Pre-covid customer services saw an average of 4,500 customers per month in reception (inc. cashiers) since the new model has been introduced the average has reduced to 627 per month

Supporting customers to use digital or alternative options to make payments to CCC has been successful, no complaints have been received regarding the closure of the cash office

Between May and November 2021 499 customers have required support from an advisor.

- 57 or 11.5% of customers had their query resolved with assistance from an Advisor
- 34 or 7% of customers were vulnerable or had complex needs which required full assistance from an Advisor
- 408 customers required an appointment as a consequence of their enquiry requiring Advisor input

The percentages of customers requiring digital assistance from Advisors in the contact centre broadly mirrors customers visiting reception.

Due to the digital set up of the customer PCs, reports cannot be run to determine the number of customer sessions on them. Feedback from Advisors indicates that an additional 2% of customers utilised PCs unaided.

Customers have always had access to an Advisor when needed and self-service PCs have also been available with assistance.

No complaints have been received regarding the new service model or the move to becoming a cashless authority.

### 13. Sign off

Name and job title of lead officer for this equality impact assessment: Clarissa Norman, Customer Services Operations Manager

Date of EqlA sign off: 09/12/21

Date of next review of the equalities impact assessment: January 2023

Date to be published on Cambridge City Council website: [Click here to enter text.](#)

**All EqlAs need to be sent to Helen Crowther, Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer ([helen.crowther@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:helen.crowther@cambridge.gov.uk))**

