

TITLE	Review of Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA's)
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 1 st August 2018
WARD	(All Wards);
DIRECTOR	Director of Corporate Services - Graham Ebers

<p>OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY</p> <p>Accountability and transparency of the delivery of the Council's major projects, policies and service changes and to inform decision making.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION</p> <p>The Committee is requested to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) acknowledge that the review of Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA's) has been completed and to comment on the issues set out in the report; 2) note that a further report will be submitted to the September 2018 meeting of the Committee on progress made in delivering the Council's Equality objectives.
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT</p> <p>This report outlines the main changes that have been made to the Council's approach for conducting EqIA's, including the intended outcomes and the materials and guidance in place for undertaking an EqIA.</p>

Background: The public sector equality duty.

The Equality Act 2010 bestows upon local authorities the public sector equality duty (PSED). Under this duty, the Council must think about how its projects, policies and services impact on the protected groups identified under the 2010 act. These groups are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief

- sex
- sexual orientation

Our duty under the act is as follows:

(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.

To this end, the government recommends that all public bodies carry out an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA's) to ensure compliance with the duty. This is so that we can show, as a Council, that we have complied with the PSED, but also that we are thinking carefully about the impact that our projects, policies or service changes may have on vulnerable residents. This helps to promote good outcomes for everyone during the project as a whole and to promote better decision making at the project initiation stage.

Guidance was created in 2012 around how officers should be carrying out EQIA's. Therefore, a refresh to bring the guidance more into line with developments in the councils operating model since the commencement of 21st Century Council were felt as appropriate.

Since January 2018, Strategy and Commissioning Support have undertaken a review of our current approach to completing EqIA templates and have reformed the process to make it more thorough. This includes the introduction of a new method for assessing impacts through an initial impact assessment, with the view to completing a full impact assessment, with the engagement of protected groups, should negative impacts be identified. At the time of writing, Strategy and Commissioning support has begun working with HR on re-writing the councils e-learning for officers conducting EqIA's. Finally, we are designing a new Council wide approach to project management and it is envisaged that the completion of the EqIA process will become embedded into the formal decision making process that officers follow to formulate projects, policies or service changes.

Analysis of Issues:

Whilst the old template provided a good basis to conduct EqIAs from, it was lacking in:

1. Properly referencing engagements that were carried out with protected groups.
2. Monitoring of the action plan and ensuring a full review was carried out.
3. Embedding the EqIA as part of a minimum standard of project management.
4. Being as user friendly as it could have been with officers at times unsure what sections needed to be completed with what.

The decision to split the EqIA template into two separate documents reflects the aim of the changes we are proposing:

1. To make the process for competing EqIAs more user friendly by having up to date guidance and two separate assessments which are completed sequentially.

2. By having two sequential parts to the assessment the council ensures it is making assessments more thorough by strengthening the criteria for determining levels of impact and making sure justifications are given for this assessment.
3. By embedding the engagement approach at the full impact stage and ensuring the equality improvement plan is based upon the outcome of any engagement.
4. To ensure that if negative impacts are identified, officers have a plan in place which can be monitored to ensure we are fulfilling our obligations.
5. Finally, to have an EqIA published as part of the executive paper which accompanies the project, policy or service change and to be published on the council's website.

The proposed approach ensures we are updating our template and guidance to ensure a more thorough compliance with our statutory duties to pay due regard to, and foster positive relations between groups of protected characteristics, to ensure upon proper consultation should negative impacts be identified and to bring stronger governance oversight of mitigating negative impacts.

Our review to our e-learning module aims to reflect this change of approach in how we approach EqIA's. The revised learning outlines the importance of EqIA's in promoting the Public sector equality duty, the process for undertaking them and the potential impacts not conducting one could have on protected groups and the council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None
Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)
This report covers the whole of the council's operations
Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
None

List of Background Papers
None

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