Aberdeenshire COUNCIL

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Stage 1: Title and aims of the activity ("activity" is an umbrella term covering policies, procedures, guidance and decisions).	
Service	Corporate Services
Section	Customer Communication and Improvement
Title of the activity etc.	Improving the Customer Experience
Aims of the activity	This assessment concerns the Improving the Customer Experience, (iCE) project budget within Customer Communication & Improvement. The £2.7m budget, profiled to reflect 3 years of planned project activity is funded from the Invest to Save fund. This supports the delivery of a customer services strategy through staff resource & technology budget. The strategy aims to make it easy for our customers to access services at a time & in a way that meets their needs by: • Delivering the top council transactions through the website. • Managing telephone queries at first point of contact. * • Providing customer Service Points in each of the main settlements. * * - The Contact Centre & Service Points have separate budgetary provision & are business partners / enablers to the project. The iCE Team has 3 full time members of staff (rising to 5 w/ef April 2014). Given the project's aims all posts could have a positive impact on groups with protected characteristics.
Author(s) & Title(s)	(Project Manager Improving the Customer Experience)

Stage 2: List the evidence that has been used in this assessment.	
Internal data (customer satisfaction surveys; equality monitoring data; customer complaints).	The following informed the project: • Online & office based customer surveys (500+ respondents). • Viewpoint 32 citizen's panel 2013 survey. • iCE online customer satisfaction surveys (by service). • Corporate complaints / compliments. These sources informed the project aims & established how customers currently contact the council, their preferred methods in future & satisfaction with the services received, (pre & post improvement). This evidence supports continued investment in the project & will be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure continued fitness for purpose.

Internal consultation with staff and other services affected.	Surveys & interviews with managers responsible for the top customer facing services informed the project activities. Consultation with DMT's, Customer Services steering group, Business Transformation Programme Board, Management Team & Elected Members supports continued investment in the project.
External consultation (partner organisations, community groups, and councils.	. The iCE team, Improvement, Customer Services & ICT partners regularly monitor / attend related channel shift & customer service approaches, publications & events. These consultations coupled with the project's 6 monthly review process ensure that it remains continually fit for purpose & reflective of current local & national trends, initiatives & approaches. Discussions are ongoing with Community Planning with a view to creating an iCE customer engagement panel to test new / improved services prior to live roll out.
External data (census, available statistics).	- The Equality Act 2010 - http://homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities/ - http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/ - http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/contactus/particular-needs.htm - Consumer Expert Group in their report Barriers to accessing the internet for disabled people. - http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality - HM Revenue and Customs: VAT – consultation on the next steps for moving VAT online. - The e Accessibility Action Plan: Making Digital Content Accessible to Everyone. - Fujitsu – Online Government Services and the Older Offline Generation. - www.socitm.net/insight - Cultured Technology: Internet and Religious Fundamentalism Karine Barzilai-Nahon, Gad Barzilai - Ministerial Conference "ICT for an inclusive society" of the Austrian Presidency of the European Council and of the European Commission (Declaration). - A survey commissioned by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) into the take up of digital services. - Digital by Default? - Online public services and digital inclusion in Wales. - The Commons Science and Technology Committee. - Digital by default – Citizen Advice response to HMRC. - The Low Incomes Tax Reform Group (LITRG) - http://www.socitm.net/betterconnected - Manifesto for a Networked Nation - The ten principles of inclusive web design: creating beautiful, usable and accessible websites - Data Protection Act 1998 - Public Records Scotland Act 2011 - LEARS Act 2006

Other (general information as appropriate).	N/A.

Are there any gaps in the information you currently hold?	Current baseline information on customer volumes, experience & satisfaction with certain services covered within the project, (pre & post improvement) may not exist or be of sufficient volume or quality to be informative & shape future service delivery.

Stage 4: Measures to fill the evidence gaps.

What measures will be taken to fill the information gaps before the activity is implemented? These should be included in the action plan at the back of this form.	Measures:	Timescale:
	Google, Contact Centre & Service Point analytics on customer experience will / are being captured. Customer satisfaction surveys will / are being developed for each area of service delivery covered by the project capturing both satisfaction & potential improvements in service delivery. These will be shared with service delivery teams, BTPB & steering group.	April 2013 – March 2016

Stage 5: Are there potential impacts on protected groups? Please complete for each protected group by inserting "yes" in the applicable box/boxes below.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unknown
Age – Younger	Yes	Yes		
Age – Older	Yes	Yes		
Disability	Yes	Yes		
Race – (includes Gypsy Travellers)	Yes	Yes		
Religion or Belief		Yes		
Gender – male/female			Yes	
Pregnancy and maternity			Yes	
Sexual orientation – (includes Lesbian/ Gay/Bisexual)			Yes	

Gender reassignment – (includes Transgender)			Yes	
Marriage and Civil Partnership			Yes	

Stage 6: What are the positive and negative impacts?		
Impacts.	Positive (describe the impact for each of the protected characteristics affected)	Negative (describe the impact for each of the protected characteristics affected)
Please detail the potential positive and/or negative impacts on those with protected characteristics you have highlighted above. Detail the impacts and describe those affected.	**Race** Digital services have the potential to help with language barriers through improved translation applications. Per a recent Equality and Human rights survey around 70% of ethnic minorities in Scotland have used or have access to some form of internet / online services.	**Race** Poorly developed digital services could reinforce existing negative impacts. Some cultures may perceive digital services as inappropriate.
	Disability Digital service channels can reduce the need to travel and potentially make communicating and accessing customer contact and council services easier.	**Disability** Failing to ensure that appropriate accessible design principles and staff training are incorporated can lead to digital services mirroring existing barriers and discrimination. Graphics, pop ups and automatic log out times can also present difficulties for some users with impairments.
	Age Digital services form part of many people's everyday lives and are particularly accessible to the younger generation who have grown up with and are quick to adopt the technology. Being digitally included has many benefits including improving the quality of later life by utilising social networks to combat loneliness and isolation, empowering individuals as consumers and enabling greater community participation.	**Age** Research by Age Concern has shown that digital inequalities can replicate / compound existing inequalities including age, race, educational background and disability. 60% of people aged over 65 do not currently use the internet – rising to 80% of people over 80. More than 70% of older people say that if more internet services were provided they would still visit or phone their local council for services.

		Religion & belief
		Interactions between some forms of religious fundamentalism and the internet are complex. There is evidence that interaction between online and offline communities among religious fundamentalists are much less evident than other groups.
		Research on communities has shown that their seclusion and the cultural boundaries that surround them are part of their collective identities as communities. As a result, the scope for seclusion may be enhanced through the Internet rather than reduced.

Stage 7: Have any of the affected groups been consulted?	
If yes, please give details of how this was done and what the results were. If no, how have you ensured that you can make an informed decision about mitigating steps?	No direct consultation specifically aimed at the protected characteristics groups was conducted, however the project has developed out of various national trends and initiatives and the research / general public consultation used to support these, (outlined in section 2), has ensured that consistent, informed decisions have, and continue to be made.

Stage 8: What mitigating steps will be taken to remove or reduce negative impacts?		
These should be included in any action plan at the back of this form.	Mitigating Steps	Timescale
	iCE has developed a set of design principles and seeks to incorporate these into its services to address equalities considerations throughout.	To be applied throughout the project (Apr 13 to Mar 16)
	iCE aims to extend the opportunity to involve all sectors of the community in usability testing its services before they are launched to address any equalities issues where possible.	To be applied retrospectively and then throughout the remainder of the project (Apr 14 to Mar 16)

	iCE applies a "digital by choice" approach that ensures that traditional means of contact such as phone and face to face will continue to be available for those that require them. Users that elect to utilise new online self service approaches will effectively free up access to the traditional channels further improving accessibility.	To be applied throughout the project (Apr 13 to Mar 16)

Stage 9: What steps can be taken to promote good relations between various groups?	
These should be included in the action plan.	An iCE communications plan has been developed where key messages that require to be communicated to all stakeholders which will include people with protected characteristics have been identified.

Stage 10: How does the policy/activity create opportunities for advancing equality of opportunity?
The iCE project supports the modernising of local government service delivery through a "digital by choice" channel shift approach that makes services available to customers at a time and in a way that meets their needs, advancing equality of opportunity for all. The associated budget will support major customer facing service delivery areas across the council in improving the quality and increasing accessibility of first point of contact customer service. Customers can select their preferred contact channel, whilst utilising online service delivery will improve access to services, particularly for those with mobility, visual impairment, literacy, or for those where English is not their first language as the project and associated technology develops.

Stage 11: What equality monitoring arrangements will be put in place?	
These should be included in any action plan (for example customer satisfaction questionnaires).	As part of the iCE forms design principles customer satisfaction surveys will allow service users to continually identify improvements, these will be fed back to the service delivery teams for action including those with equalities implications.

Stage 12: What is the outcome of the Assessment?		
Please complete the appropriate box/boxes	1	No negative impacts have been identified –please explain.
	N/A	
	2	Negative Impacts have been identified, these can be mitigated - please explain. * Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen.
	Possible negative impacts have been identified; these are outlined in section 6. these can be mitigated by the actions reflected in section 8 and the accompanying action plan.	
	3	The activity will have negative impacts which cannot be mitigated fully – please explain. * Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen
	N/A.	

* Stage 13: Set out the justification that the activity can and should go ahead despite the negative impact.

The project aims to increase customer choice and accessibility for all groups by allowing them to access services at a time and in a way that meets their needs. The negative impacts identified would generally only be encountered where the project is poorly or inconsistently implemented or becomes unreflective of ongoing customer input. Given the mitigating actions, the benefits of the project are considered to far outweigh any potential negatives for those with protected characteristics and are consistent with national initiatives and expectations for future service delivery approaches.

Stage 14: Sign off and authorisation.				
Sign off and authorisation.	1) Service and Team	Corporate Services, Customer Communication and Improvement.		
	2) Title of Policy/Activity	Improving the Customer Experience		
	3) **Authors:** I/We have completed the equality impact assessment for this policy/ activity.	Name: ☐ Position: Project Manager Improving the Customer Experience Date: 19/11/2013 Signature: ☐		Name: Position: Date: Signature:
		Name: Position: Date: Signature:		Name: Position: Date: Signature:
	4) Consultation with Service Manager	Name: ☐ (Head of Customer Communication and Improvement) Date: 19/11/2013		
	5) Authorisation by Director or Head of Service	Name: ☐ Position: Director of Corporate Services Date:		Name: Position: Date:
	6) If the EIA relates to a matter that has to go before a Committee, Committee report author sends the Committee Report and this form, and any supporting assessment documents, to the Officers responsible for monitoring and the Committee Officer of the relevant Committee. e.g. Social Work and Housing Committee.			Date:
	7) EIA author sends a copy of the finalised form to: eia@abdnshire			Date:
(Equalities team to complete) Has the completed form been published on the website? YES/NO				Date:

Action Plan					
Action	Start	Complete	Lead Officer	Expected Outcome	Resource Implications
iCE has developed a set of design principles and seeks to incorporate these into its services to address equalities considerations throughout.	Apr 2013	Mar 2016		Increased satisfaction with, and accessibility to customer services.	To be met within project resources
iCE to extend the opportunity to involve all sectors of the community in usability testing its services before they are launched to address any equalities issues where possible.	Apr 2014	Mar 2016		Increased satisfaction with, and accessibility to customer services.	To be met within project resources
iCE will continue to apply a "digital by choice" approach ensuring that traditional means of contact such as phone and face to face will continue to be available for those that require them.	Apr 2013	Mar 2016		Increased satisfaction with, and accessibility to customer services.	To be met within project resources

Continue to develop the iCE communications plan which includes key messages that require to be communicated to all stakeholders including those with protected characteristics.	April 2013	Mar 2016		Increased satisfaction with, and accessibility to customer services.	To be met within project resources
Project to address any gaps in customer data quality through Google, Contact Centre and Service Point analytics and satisfaction surveys.	April 2013	Mar 2016		Increased satisfaction with, and accessibility to customer services.	To be met within project resources