

Colchester Borough Council

Equality Impact Assessment Form - An Analysis of the Effects on Equality

Section 1: Initial Equality Impact Assessment

Name of policy to be assessed:

- Benefit New Claims

NB: 'Policy' is meant broadly to mean policy, strategy, service, function, activity or decision.

1. What is the main purpose of the policy?

- To ensure the benefits new claim form is widely available, and the maximum number of customers can access their benefit entitlement

2. What main areas or activities does it cover?

- Benefit new claims

3. Are there changes to an existing policy being considered in this assessment? If so what are they?

- No, reviewing existing policy

4. Who are the main audience, users or customers who will be affected by the policy?

- Benefits Officers
- Customer service Advisors
- Residents making new benefit claims

5. What outcomes do you want to achieve from the policy?

- Aim to help prevent customers from taking unnecessary journeys through a process that they do not qualify for by improving understanding through education and clear information. It also aims to enable customers to access the information they require 1st time to reduce the current average of four contacts per case to one, or zero where possible.

6. Are other service areas or partner agencies involved in delivery? If so, please give details below:

- The Citizens Advice Bureau,
- Age UK,
- TACMEP (Tendering and Colchester Minority Ethnic Partnership)

7. Are you aware of any relevant information, data, surveys or consultations¹ which help us to assess the likely or actual impact of the policy upon customers or staff?

- The Council's Research and Engagement Team used Mosaic, a modelling tool, to help identify the key characteristics of our Revenues and Benefits customers and gain a better understanding of our customer base.
- The CSC ran a report on the caseload and related data for benefit customers.

8. The 'general duty' states that we must have "due regard" to the need to:

(a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation

(b) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a 'protected characteristic'² and those who do not³

¹Click on [surveys or consultations](#) for more information. The Council's surveys and consultations include 'equality monitoring information' to help us identify any particular concerns or views expressed by any particular group or 'protected characteristic'. It can also help us to assess how representative of our customers the respondent group is. Local Data on the Protected Characteristics is available [on this page](#) of the Hub.

²The Equality Act's 'protected characteristics' include age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sex and sexual orientation. It also covers marriage and civil partnerships, but not for all aspects of the duty.

³This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to: (a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic; (b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it, and (c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

(c) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not⁴

Not all policies help us to meet the ‘general duty’, but most do.

Where applicable, explain how this policy helps us to meet the ‘general duty’:

The policy helps us to ‘eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation’ in the following way(s):

- Ensuring all customers can access our services in the best and most efficient way.

The policy helps us to ‘advance equality of opportunity...’ in the following way(s):

- With a wider access to our services more customers are able make applications than before the e claim was available

The policy helps us to ‘foster good relations...’ in the following way(s):

- Making it more accessible for customers to apply for benefit, making it far easier and efficient and reducing the time taken to pay the benefits to residents.

9. This section helps us to identify any disproportionate impacts. Please indicate in the table below whether the policy is likely to particularly benefit or disadvantage any of the ‘protected characteristics’.

Remember to include reference to any relevant consultation, data or information.

| ‘Protected characteristic’ group | | Positive Impact | Explain how it could particularly benefit the group | Negative Impact | Explain how it could particularly disadvantage the group |
|----------------------------------|--|-----------------|---|-----------------|--|
|----------------------------------|--|-----------------|---|-----------------|--|

⁴ This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to (a) tackle prejudice, and (b) promote understanding.

| 'Protected characteristic' group | | Positive Impact | Explain how it could particularly benefit the group | Negative Impact | Explain how it could particularly disadvantage the group |
|----------------------------------|--|------------------------|--|--------------------|---|
| Age | Older people (60+) | More accessible | Customers can access the form from home at any time to apply for benefits. | Online application | There may be a reluctance to use the internet, particularly to claim benefit. |
| | | Faster processing time | We can greatly reduce the time it takes for the whole process insure those entitled can be in receipt of benefits quicker. | No internet access | May not have internet access at home. |
| | | Green option | Removes a large number of paper applications. | | |
| | Younger people (17-25) and children (0-16) | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| Disability | Physical | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| | Sensory | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| | Learning | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| | Mental health issues | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| | Other – <i>specify</i> | | | | |
| Ethnicity ⁵ | White | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| | Black | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| | Chinese | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| | Mixed Ethnic Origin | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| | Gypsies/ Travellers | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| | Other – <i>please state</i> | | | | |
| Language | English not first language | As above | As above | As above | As above and may not be able to understand the form |

⁵ National Census 2011 categories are: Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, Other Asian (Asian or Asian British), African, Caribbean, Other Black (Black or Black British), White and Black African, White and Asian, White and Black Caribbean (Mixed), British, Irish, Other White (White), Chinese, Other (Other Ethnic Group).

| 'Protected characteristic' group | | Positive Impact | Explain how it could particularly benefit the group | Negative Impact | Explain how it could particularly disadvantage the group |
|----------------------------------|---|------------------------|--|--------------------|---|
| Pregnancy and Maternity | Women who are pregnant or have given birth in last 26 weeks | More accessible | Customers can access the form from home at any time to apply for benefits. | Online application | There may be a reluctance to use the internet, particularly to claim benefit. |
| | | Faster processing time | We can greatly reduce the time it takes for the whole process insure those entitled can be in receipt of benefits quicker. | No internet access | May not have internet access at home. |
| | | Green option | Removes a large number of paper applications. | | |
| Religion or Belief | People with a religious belief (or none) | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| Sex | Men | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| | Women | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| Gender Reassignment ⁶ | Transgender/ Transsexual | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| Sexual Orientation | Bisexual, Heterosexual, Gay or Lesbian | As above | As above | As above | As above |
| Marriage and Civil Partnership | People who are married or in a civil partnership | As above | As above | As above | As above |

⁶ The protected characteristic of gender reassignment is defined by the Equality Act 2010 as “a person proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex.” This is a personal process that may involve medical interventions such as counselling, psychotherapy, hormone therapy or surgery, but does not have to. NB: It is generally held that transgender people disguise their features or clothing to resemble their preferred sex, whereas transsexual people wish to change their body to completely resemble their preferred sex.

10. If you have identified any negative impacts (above) how can they be minimised or removed?

(This is a key section: Please deal with each negative impact noted above in turn.)

There may be a reluctance to use the internet, particularly to claim benefit.

- Customers can get online assistance at the Library Community HUB
- There are still alternative ways to apply.
- Customers can still contact via the phone

May not have internet access at home.

- Customers can get online assistance at the Library Community HUB
- There are still alternative ways to apply.
- Customers can still contact via the phone

May not be able to understand the form due to language barriers

- Customers can take advantage of free online translation services, such as Google translate
- For go online advice such as this we have a “go Online Advisor”
- Customers can still contact via the phone, where we have language line available
- Customers can get online assistance at the Library Community HUB, where we have language line available

11. Could the policy discriminate⁷ against any ‘protected characteristic’, either directly or indirectly⁸?

⁷ The Council has a general duty to ‘eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation’. Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another in a comparable situation because of their ‘protected characteristic’ whether on grounds of age, disability, pregnancy and maternity, ethnicity; religion or belief; sex (gender), sexual orientation, or marriage and civil partnership. Indirect discrimination occurs when an apparently neutral provision or practice would nevertheless disadvantage people on the grounds of their ‘protected characteristic’.

⁸ If you answer ‘yes’ to question 11 (above) you will need to complete this section *and* go on to complete Section 2 in order to conduct a full Equality Impact Assessment.

(Please read the footnotes below before completing this section.)

- *No*

Summary and findings of Initial Equality Impact Assessment

12. Please put a tick in the relevant box to confirm your findings, and what the next step is:

| Findings | Action required |
|---|---|
| No negative impacts have been identified <input type="checkbox"/> | Sign off screening and finish. |
| Negative impacts have been identified but have been minimised or removed X | Sign off screening and finish. |
| Negative impacts could not be minimised or removed <input type="checkbox"/> | Sign off screening and complete a full impact assessment – Section 2. |
| There is insufficient evidence to make a judgement. <input type="checkbox"/> | Sign off screening and complete a full impact assessment – Section 2. |

13. Name and job title of person completing this form:

- Daniel Halls, Customer Services Manager

14. Date of completion:

- October 2015

15. Date for update or review of this screening:

- October 2018 unless significant changes to the policy