

Appendix B

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Engagement and our equality duty

Whilst [the Gunning Principles](#) set out the rules for consulting ‘everyone’, additional requirements are in place to avoid discrimination and inequality.

Cheshire East Council is required to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Equality Act 2010 simplified previous anti-discrimination laws with a single piece of legislation. Within the Act, the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149) has three aims. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act, by consciously thinking about equality when making decisions (such as in developing policy, delivering services and commissioning from others)
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, by removing disadvantages, meeting their specific needs, and encouraging their participation in public life
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not

The Equality Duty helps public bodies to deliver their overall objectives for public services, and as such should be approached as a positive opportunity to support good decision-making.

It encourages public bodies to understand how different people will be affected by their activities so that policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people’s needs. By understanding the effect of their activities on different people, and how inclusive public services can support and open up people’s opportunities, public bodies are better placed to deliver policies and services that are efficient and effective.

Complying with the Equality Duty may involve treating some people better than others, as far as this is allowed by discrimination law. For example, it may involve providing a service in a way which is appropriate for people who share a protected characteristic, such as providing computer training to all people to help them access information and services.

The Equality Act identifies nine 'protected characteristics' and makes it a legal requirement to make sure that people with these characteristics are protected from discrimination:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnerships
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Applying the equality duty to engagement

If you are developing a new policy, strategy or programme you may need to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment. You may be able to ascertain the impact of your proposal on different characteristics through desk-based research and learning from similar programmes, but you also need to carry out some primary research and engagement. People with protected characteristics are often described as 'hard to reach' but you will find everyone can be reached – you just need to tailor your approach, so it is accessible for them.

Contacting the [Equality and Diversity mailbox](#) will help you to understand how you can gain insight as to the impacts of your proposals and will ensure that you help the Council to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Section 1 – Details of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure

Proposal Title	Recommissioning of the Universal Information and Advice Service
Date of Assessment	September 2023
Assessment Lead Officer Name	Kelly Brighthouse
Directorate/Service	People / Integrated Commissioning
Details of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure.	<p>The Universal Information and Advice (UIA) service provides financial information and advice to all residents of Cheshire East. This thereby enables improved choice and control, improved mental health and wellbeing and leads to reduced demand on statutory services.</p> <p>Citizen’s Advice Cheshire East are contracted to provide this service and the contract is due to end at 31st March 2024. Therefore the service needs to be recommissioned in line with the Council’s Corporate Procedure Rules.</p>
Who is Affected?	All Cheshire East residents are able to access the Universal Information and Advice service where they need support in relation to a variety of areas such as debt advice, housing issues and employment rights.
Links and impact on other services, strategies, functions or procedures.	<p>The recommission of the UIA service links to the following areas of work in the Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy • Carers Strategy • Library service consultation. <p>This service contributes to the Council’s Corporate Plan 2021-25 objective of being a Council which empowers and cares about people and the priority to ‘reduce health inequalities across the borough’</p>

<p>How does the service, service change, strategy, function or procedure help the Council meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty?</p>	<p>The UIA service helps the Council to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty by supporting residents including protected characteristic groups with advice via a range of channels.</p>
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Section 2- Information – What do you know?

<p>What do you know?</p>	<p>What information (qualitative and quantitative) and/or research have you used to commission/change/decommission the service, strategy, function, or procedure?</p>
<p>Information you used</p>	<p>We have used demographics data supplied by the service provider as part of contract monitoring to assess the current client base using the UIA service. We have also used data produced as part of the recommissioning consultation. This includes survey responses and intelligence from focus groups. National reports on the provision of this type of service have also informed the approach.</p>
<p>Gaps in your Information</p>	<p>N/A</p>

3. What did people tell you?

<p>What did people tell you</p>	<p>What consultation and engagement activities have you already undertaken and what did people tell you? Is there any feedback from other local and/or external regional/national consultations that could be included in your assessment?</p>
<p>Details and dates of the consultation/s</p>	<p>Survey work took place in Autumn 2022 with stakeholder organisations and residents. This was followed by drop-in meetings and focus groups in Aug-Sept 2023. It also included an engagement session with Councillors.</p>

<p>and/or engagement activities</p>	<p>Resident Survey: A large proportion of respondents, 85%, had heard of the Information and Advice Service (aka Citizens Advice Services in Cheshire East), with 74% aware the service provides financial information and advice. In addition, a large majority of those that had heard of the service were “always aware of the service” (72% of respondents). Of those that had contacted the service, the most popular way of contacting it was “in person – attending an appointment” (37%) and “by phone” (34%) and the most popular reasons for contacting the service were “legal issues” (24%), “benefits advice” (20%) and “consumer issues” (17%). Respondents listed the main barriers to managing finances as the cost of living crisis (50%); knowing benefits that there were entitled to (33%), knowing where to go for help (32%). No specific equality impacts were raised although some of the issues listed pertain to this such as timeliness of advice and the requirement for face-to-face support.</p> <p>Stakeholder Survey: 65% of respondents said their understanding of the Information and Advice Service was “very good” or “good”. When asked if they knew the service was commissioned by Cheshire East Council, half (50%) said they didn’t, 39% said they did and 12% were unsure. The top three barriers listed that stakeholders perceived for residents, were difficulty in completing forms (89%); understanding benefit entitlements (58%) ; and knowing where to go for help (54%).</p> <p>Focus Group/Drop-Ins: Key issues highlighted were problems with people accessing financial information online/applying for benefits due to problems with lack of access to IT/ lack of IT skills. Face to face drop-in meetings were also seen as extremely important especially if the issue was complex. Form filling was seen as a gap with limited capacity of alternative services locally to support this.</p> <p>Stakeholder Event: A large amount of feedback was received. Key points were: the need to build resilience was seen as important to prevent issues recurring with individuals. A gap was also highlighted around lack of available services to support form filling. In addition, timeliness of support was seen as a barrier.</p>
<p>Gaps in consultation and</p>	<p>No specific gaps but ongoing feedback from service provision will be used to refine service delivery e.g. customer feedback forms, complaints/compliments.</p>

engagement feedback	
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4. Review of information, consultation feedback and equality analysis

Protected characteristics groups from the Equality Act 2010	What do you know? Summary of information used to inform the proposal	What did people tell you? Summary of customer and/or staff feedback	What does this mean? Impacts identified from the information and feedback (actual and potential). These can be either positive, negative or have no impact.
Age	Clients across a broad age range (15-99) accessed the service in 2022/23. However, the peak age range to use the service is circa 30-64.	<p>Older age groups in particular had issues with use of IT to access financial support. This included lack of internet access as well as lack of IT literacy. This can often inhibit them in applying for benefits such as Personal Independence Payments. The service will need to ensure that it supports this need.</p> <p>A growing reported problem currently is issues with people aged circa 30-60 paying their mortgages and accessing privately rented accommodation. The service supports this need by providing specialist debt advice including debt management plans as well as support on housing rights.</p> <p>It is also known that older people can often benefit from large print materials</p>	The impact of this service is positive by supporting this group of people to access financially related support that they would not otherwise be able to obtain easily. This includes help in applying for benefits.

		as there are growing issues with sight as people age.	
Disability	in 2022/23 on average 54% had a disability or long-term health condition. Of these: 29% had multiple impairments and 28% had a mental health condition	Reference was made to mental health issues by users of the service (as well as stakeholder organisations). Note - it was not always clear whether these had been precipitated by issues to do with finance or whether these had helped to cause them. It is known that a physical disability can inhibit an individual to access an office space i.e. if it is not wheelchair friendly.	The impact of this service is positive by supporting this group of people to access financially related support that they would not otherwise be able to obtain easily. This includes help in applying for benefits.
Gender reassignment	No data recorded on clients but the service is accessible all Cheshire East residents	No specific issues were raised in relation to this protected characteristic but the service would support a range of issues which might pertain to this including employment rights.	The impact of this service is positive by supporting this group of people to access financially related support that they would not otherwise be able to obtain easily. This includes help in applying for benefits.
Pregnancy and maternity	No data recorded on clients but the service is accessible all Cheshire East residents	No specific matters were raised in relation to this protected characteristic. However, the service would support on issues in relation to maternity e.g. employment rights.	The impact of this service is positive by supporting this group of people to access financially related support that they would not otherwise be able to obtain easily. This includes help in applying for benefits.
Race/ethnicity	8% of clients of clients accessing the service recorded as BAME	No specific issues were raised in relation to this protected characteristic. Although people without English as a first language may require translation support.	The impact of this service is positive by supporting this group of people to access financially related support that they would not otherwise be able to obtain easily. This includes help in applying for benefits.

Religion or belief	No data recorded on clients but the service is accessible all Cheshire East residents	No specific issues were raised in relation to this protected characteristic. However, there is a general need for cultural sensitivity when delivering the service to people of different religions or beliefs e.g. for people of the Muslim religion there is specific advice in the Quran around debt.	The impact of this service is positive by supporting this group of people to access financially related support that they would not otherwise be able to obtain easily. This includes help in applying for benefits.
Sex	Around 60% of clients are female with the rest stated as male.	No specific matters were raised in relation to this protected characteristic. However, the service would provide support on a range of issues in relation to gender e.g. employment rights.	The impact of this service is positive by supporting this group of people to access financially related support that they would not otherwise be able to obtain easily. This includes help in applying for benefits.
Sexual orientation	No data recorded on clients but the service is accessible all Cheshire East residents	No specific issues were raised in relation to this protected characteristic although the service would deal with matters such as employment rights.	The impact of this service is positive by supporting this group of people to access financially related support that they would not otherwise be able to obtain easily. This includes help in applying for benefits.
Marriage and civil partnership	No data recorded on clients but the service is accessible all Cheshire East residents	No specific issues were raised in relation to this. But the service would support people seeking advice around divorce and marriage counselling.	The impact of this service is positive by supporting this group of people to access financially related support that they would not otherwise be able to obtain easily. This includes help in applying for benefits.

5. Justification, Mitigation and Actions

Mitigation	What can you do? Actions to mitigate any negative impacts or further enhance positive impacts
Please provide justification for the proposal if negative impacts have been identified?	There is a need to ensure that the service is offered via a variety of channels. This includes face to face in addition to online and telephone. The service also needs to be offered at a

<p>Are there any actions that could be undertaken to mitigate, reduce or remove negative impacts?</p> <p>Have all available options been explored? Please include details of alternative options and why they couldn't be considered?</p> <p>Please include details of how positive impacts could be further enhanced, if possible?</p>	<p>variety of locations within the Borough to support people with transport issues (inc. due to limited finance) or a physical disability. This will be taken account of in the new service specification and performance management framework. The service will also need to be available at a variety of times to support people within employment (which would affect people generally aged under 65).</p> <p>Training for volunteers and staff members needs to encompass mental health issues. This includes in relation to suicide prevention. It should also provide training in relation to cultural sensitivity.</p> <p>Venues will need to be accessible to people with a physical disability e.g. to be wheelchair friendly.</p> <p>Translation services should be offered where English is not a first language. This includes information materials being available in a variety of languages.</p>
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6. Monitoring and Review -

Monitoring and review	How will the impact of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure be monitored? How will actions to mitigate negative impacts be monitored? Date for review of the EIA
Details of monitoring activities	Monitoring will include information on whether actions to mitigate negative impacts have achieved their desired outcome. This will be via monitoring of complaints and compliments and customer feedback forms. It will also involve discussions with the provider in contract management meetings.

Date and responsible officer for the review of the EIA	Kelly Brighthouse, Oct 2023
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7. Sign Off

When you have completed your EIA, it should be sent to the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Mailbox](#) for review. If your EIA is approved, it must then be signed off by a senior manager within your Department (Head of Service or above).

Once the EIA has been signed off, please forward a copy to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer to be published on the website. For Transparency, we are committed to publishing all Equality Impact Assessments relating to public engagement.

Name	N.Darwin
Signature	N.Darwin
Date	08/09/2023

8. Help and Support

For support and advice please contact EqualityandInclusion@cheshireeast.gov.uk