

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	WorkplaCE (Estate Rationalisation MTFS #68)
Date of Assessment	12.07.23 (Reviewed 9/11/23)
Assessment Lead Officer Name	Alex Thompson
Directorate/Service	Director of Finances and Customer Services
Details of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure.	<p>Please provide a summary of your proposal.</p> <p>Transforming the Council’s estate had been a feature of the Council’s workplace strategies prior to the pandemic. Improved ICT, including mobile technology, enhanced a hybrid way of working that supports efficient use of Council office space. The pandemic forced an acceleration of homeworking, using new technology, to protect the health and wellbeing of customers and staff. During that period from 2020 to 2022 the Council has gained a greater understanding of alternative ways of working.</p> <p>Hybrid working mixes an office workplace with home working and has become an established way of working for most council staff since the pandemic. How we utilise our corporate offices has been under continual review, both pre and post pandemic, which evidenced under-utilisation of the available workspace even prior to 2020. The current way of working has increased this under-utilisation, which has enabled the Estates Transformation Programme, now called the WorkplaCE Project, to be accelerated.</p> <p>The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023 to 2027 included a proposal for:</p> <p>“Rationalisation of the Council’s office space buildings to reflect increased hybrid working, and to secure reduction of business rates and holding costs. Also targeting additional Carbon benefits in retained buildings. Key assets in the North and South of the borough will be retained and invested in to provide modern workplaces for staff, Members and stakeholders. Consultation will also consider the option to relocate Macclesfield Library to the nearby Town Hall. Surplus assets will be considered for alternative use to generate income through rental or a capital receipt” (MTFS– approved February 2023).</p>

A review of office accommodation presents further opportunities to increase achievement of the Council's Environment Strategy. The strategy targets carbon reduction through improvements in our buildings and our approach to transport. Whilst a significant amount of work has already been undertaken to reduce carbon within our buildings, the under-utilisation of office space makes buildings highly inefficient. This is also important when considering the large increases in energy costs caused by inflation, improved management of under-utilised space will help to reduce both carbon and cost.

The approach to "provide modern workplaces for staff, Members and stakeholders" has continued via needs assessment and building relationships with partners. The assessment identified that there is no 'one size fits all' solution for services to meet the demands of our customers. But that a reduction in office space is clearly appropriate. There may be future options for incorporating partners within our corporate estate, although it is essential that we are certain the Council's requirements are met.

The needs assessed data determined a total requirement of 10,176 m² for Council Staff in corporate offices.

This was compared to an estate provision of 21,000 m² across five main offices located across:

Macclesfield,
Middlewich,
Sandbach and Crewe.

The options appraisal considered what could be an appropriate mix of accommodation, whilst maintaining a presence at either end of the Borough (Macclesfield and Crewe) in accordance with the MTFS.

Decisions to date have included the closure of Cledford House (Middlewich), where staff relocation is currently underway; and the re-purposing of offices at the Municipal Buildings (Crewe) to make way for the Technical and Digital Innovation Centre (TADIC) - approved by the Economy and Growth Committee in March 2023. This reduces the available office space by 5,102 m².

Further assessment also considered the most appropriate location for corporate offices based on reducing travel, space availability within buildings as well as providing access to facilities and accessibility for customers. The data supported a presence being required in the north and the south within the borough's largest towns, supporting regeneration.

Who is Affected?	<p>Please include details of all those affected by the service/strategy/function or procedure. In some cases, the proposal could affect all Cheshire East residents and/or Council staff.</p> <p>All staff that currently operate from the Westfields, would be impacted if an approval to declare this asset as surplus is reached. There would also be an impact on staff based in Delamere House and Macclesfield Town Hall as staff were relocated to these workplaces. This would also affect Members and stakeholders that currently interact at this site. Residents and members of the public may also be impacted, though it should be noted that the Westfields offices do not offer a formal public facing Customer Service facility.</p> <p>Please include evidence of how you believe that these groups will be affected.</p> <p>Approval of Westfields as a surplus asset will necessitate a physical relocation to Delamere House and or Macclesfield Town Hall. In some instances, this could see an increase in travel to an alternative office for staff, members and or residents.</p> <p>From the Phase 1 Consultation with trade unions and staff, no specific equality, diversity and inclusion issues were raised. If an approval to declare Westfield as a surplus asset was reached, there would be individual consultation to understand and, where needed, mitigate against the impact on an individual level. At this stage, given the size and make-up of the workforce, it is anticipated that there may be staff with caring responsibilities and disabilities who may be negatively affected by the decision as a result of increased distance and travel time to the office (impacting on working time and transport options), and lack of on-site parking. As part of the individual consultation, there would be careful consideration for appropriate measures to mitigate against the impact on them.</p>
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	<p>In the case of a specific service, strategy, function or procedure please include details of the customers and/or staff affected.</p> <p>Democratic Services and the various Committees that they support would need an alternative venue to conduct these from. Alternative facilities are built into the proposed option that we are consulting on, which includes an option to conduct these meetings & committees from either Crewe (Delamere House) or Macclesfield Town Hall.</p> <p>The Executive Suite & Members Area would cease from Westfields and again, the proposed option would see these facilities replicated (and improved) in both Delamere House and Macclesfield Town Hall. The Executive Suite would be a bookable area that staff & members could access when not in use.</p>
<p>Links and impact on other services, strategies, functions or procedures.</p>	<p>Does the proposal link to other areas of the council’s work?</p> <p>WorkplaCE encompasses the council’s approach to service delivery throughout the borough, focusing more on ‘how we work’ rather than ‘where we work’.</p> <p>Could the proposal impact on other services, functions or procedures?</p> <p>A new Head Quarter postal address would be required if, subject to approval, Westfields was deemed surplus and repurposed in any way. There is potential within the proposal for key stakeholders and partners to integrate into the rationalised estate, creating greater synergies in working practices.</p> <p>How does it link to the Corporate Plan and other major council policies?</p> <p>The WorkplaCE project aligns and supports the council’s commitment to reducing its Carbon emissions to nett neutral by 2025. It further supports the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2023- 2027.</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 Public Sector Equality Duty is a legal requirement contained within the Equality Act 2010 which requires public authorities and others carrying out public functions to have due regard to the need to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation. • Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. • Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. <p>The above aims may be more relevant to some proposals than others, and they may be more relevant to some protected characteristics than others. However, it is advisable that the proposal be assessed against each of the above aims.</p>
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Section 2 - Information – What do you know?

What do you know?	What information (qualitative and quantitative) and/or research have you used to commission/change/decommission the service, strategy, function, or procedure?
<p>Information you used</p>	<p>Please include details (including weblinks) of the information you have used to inform your proposal. This should include information relating to relevant protected characteristics which are covered in the Equality Act 2010. These are: - age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religious or faith groups, sex and sexual orientation. In many cases a proposal will be relevant to more than one protected characteristic.</p>

	<p>You should consider the information and research already available locally, regionally and nationally. This can include equality monitoring information, Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) information, performance monitoring reports, inspection reports and desktop research (local, regional and national).</p> <p>A needs assessment survey was carried out with Heads of Service across the corporate assets. This identified the anticipated daily demand for office space for services including fixed working, hybrid working as well as collaboration and meeting space. Within the questionnaire was a specific question in relation to:</p> <p>Are there any equality, diversity, and inclusion requirements of members of your team to be aware of when developing our future workplace? For example, assistive technology and adaptations, cultural or religious requirements. If so, please give details below:</p> <p>In addition to this, Heads of Service were also asked to provide details (i.e. numbers) of staff that had specific ICT requirements such as, equipment following any Display Screen Equipment (DES) assessment or an Occupational Health assessment/referral.</p> <p>To further supplement the approach, we have undertaken a number of weekly desk occupancy surveys throughout the day, identifying the volume of desks occupied in four key office locations. This has provided a consistent working baseline to build from, though it should be noted that the proposal is looking to meet (and where practicable) exceed the `ask` set out from the needs assessment.</p>
<p>Gaps in your Information</p>	<p>Please include details of any gaps in information. Is it possible to undertake further research to fill these gaps?</p> <p>It is recommended that a proportional approach be undertaken. If the impact is likely to be significant for a specific protected group measures should be undertaken to collect the information.</p> <p>Are there impacts which you believe will impact stakeholders, however you are not sure how this impact will impact people.</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 and/or engagement activities</p>	<p>Please include details of all consultation and engagement activities which you have already undertaken to identify the impacts already noted in earlier sections of the assessment.</p> <p>This should include the date, type of consultation i.e. online survey, focus group, virtual consultation, face to face (please exclude personal information), customer satisfaction surveys etc.</p> <p>The number of respondents and a summary of the feedback received should be included</p> <p>Feedback from other local and/or external regional/national consultations could also be used to assess the impact of your proposal on different protected groups.</p> <p>This section needs to be based on what you have already done, not what you are intending to do.</p> <p>In addition to the Heads of Service Needs Assessments, engagement with staff and unions has taken place through the Spring back events and the Pulse surveys. More recently the initial consultation with staff and members has concluded and these reports are included as appendices to accompany the Corporate Policy Committee Report for the meeting scheduled on 30.11.23</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Appendix 1 - HoS Needs Assessment Su</p> </div>

	<p>The feedback from the WorkplaCE Phase One Consultation is provided in the document below</p>  <p>WorkplaCE Phase One Consultation 202.</p>
<p>Gaps in consultation and engagement feedback</p>	<p>Based upon the evidence that you have used to arrive at a need for change and any engagement with stakeholders which you have already done – where do you think that there are gaps in your knowledge?</p> <p>Following on from the initial consultation we know that further consultation (subject to approval to progress) with individuals, teams & services is critical to ensure that we mitigate any impacts felt as a consequence of the proposal to close a corporate asset.</p> <p>We will need to establish that best location(s) for individuals and teams to relocate to and in what sequence so that staff have sufficient notice of where and when they can expect to work from a new location when they need to work in a corporate asset in Crewe and or Macclesfield.</p> <p>From the Phase 1 Consultation with trade unions and staff, no specific equality, diversity, and inclusion issues were raised. If an approval to declare Westfield as a surplus asset was reached, there would be individual consultation to understand and, where needed, mitigate against the impact on an individual level. At this stage, given the size and make-up of the workforce, it is anticipated that there may be staff with caring responsibilities and disabilities who may be negatively affected by the decision as a result of increased distance and travel time to the office (impacting on working time and transport options), and lack of on-site parking. As part of the individual consultation, there would be careful consideration for appropriate measures to mitigate against the impact on them.</p>

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			Given the size and make-up of the workforce, it is anticipated that there may be staff with caring responsibilities and disabilities who may be negatively affected by the decision. As part of the individual consultation, there would be careful consideration for appropriate measures to mitigate against the impact on them.
Disability			There is potential for staff with a disability requiring parking in close proximity to their workplace. Westfields does afford this in an area used by staff and members of the public. There is some capacity at Macclesfield Town Hall at the rear of the office. Delamere House has no on site parking other than 2 EV charging spaces. There is a public car park at the front of the office with disabled parking bays which the public also utilise and there is a private car park adjacent to the offices.

Gender reassignment			No impact anticipated at this time.
Pregnancy and maternity			No impact anticipated at this time.
Race/ethnicity			No impact anticipated at this time.
Religion or belief			Need to review access to prayer facilities
Sex			Given the size and make-up of the workforce, it is anticipated that there may be staff with caring responsibilities and disabilities who may be negatively affected by the decision. As part of the individual consultation, there would be careful consideration for appropriate measures to mitigate against the impact on them.
Sexual orientation			No impact anticipated at this time.
Marriage and civil partnership			No impact anticipated at this time.

5. Justification, Mitigation and Actions

Mitigation	What can you do? Actions to mitigate any negative impacts or further enhance positive impacts
<p>Please provide justification for the proposal if negative impacts have been identified?</p> <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>No specific issues have been raised. However, as consultation progresses, it is anticipated that there may be staff with caring responsibilities and disabilities who may be negatively impacted by the proposal. Consultation with staff will take place before implementation of any relocation to identify and address any negative impact through appropriate mitigation methods which may include more flexibility, altering hours, flexible locations, provision of equipment or other appropriate measures.</p> <p>Alternatives have been explored but would not achieve the approved MTFS savings required.</p> <p>More flexible and hybrid working arrangements arising out of the proposal can support those with protected characteristics and will be explored further as individual consultation progresses.</p>

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	Please include details of how the impact of the proposal will be monitored e.g. performance monitoring, analysis of complaints, equality monitoring data etc. Monitoring should include information on whether actions to mitigate negative impacts have achieved their desired outcome Staff Surveys & Pulse Surveys will be used to monitor the impact of the relocation of staff.
Date and responsible officer for the review of the EIA	Please include the date, responsible officer and department. It is recommended that the EIA be reviewed approximately 6 months after it has been signed off.

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	
Signature	
Date	

8. Help and Support

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