

Cambridge City Council Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

This tool helps the Council ensure that we fulfil legal obligations of the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) to have due regard to the need to –

- (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.

Guidance on how to complete this tool can be found on the Cambridge City Council intranet. For specific questions on the tool email Helen Crowther, Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer at equalities@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223 457046.

Once you have drafted the EqIA please send this to equalities@cambridge.gov.uk for checking. For advice on consulting on equality impacts, please contact Graham Saint, Strategy Officer, (graham.saint@cambridge.gov.uk or 01223 457044).

1. Title of strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service
Customer Service Operating model as at 15 June – restricted service due to Covid-19

2. Webpage link to full details of the strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service (if available)
N/A

3. What is the objective or purpose of your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?
<p>Prior to lockdown being enforced on the UK as a result of COVID19 in March 2020, the Customer Service Centre (CSC) operated a drop in and appointment facility for customers to visit Mandela House to receive advice & guidance regarding Cambridge City Council Services.</p> <p>Additionally, customers were able to make payments at the cash office or by using the payment kiosk and could use the facilities in the self-serve area and use internet enabled PC's to make applications for Housing, Benefits, carry out job searches etc. Partner organisations such as Cambridge & District Citizens Advice, Credit unions and Cambridge Online also operated out of the self-serve area to support customers as appropriate.</p>

As the UK comes out of the reactive phase of the pandemic and CCC management activities turn towards planning for recovery, there is a steer from SLT, endorsed by Councillors, that reception points should not re-open with the same delivery models. To comply with national guidance regarding COVID19, a decision has been taken that during the recovery phase, customers should only be seen face to face at CSC when they have emergency circumstances, or it is essential that a Council Officer has personal interaction with customers to resolve their query/complete their service request.

Customers will call into Customer Services, where Advisors will assist, coach customers to/or complete on customers behalf, Online service requests to minimise the need for customers to be seen face to face. Where an appointment is required one will be booked for them.

Examples of where customers may need an appointment are if customers are homeless, if the customer is clearly vulnerable, or where despite escalations to senior staff/managers, it is clear the customer's query has not been resolved, possibly through communication difficulties. Any enquiry that would be easier to explain with a visual could need a face to face appointment, for example customers with impaired hearing, learning difficulties, or anyone who needs support with technology.

When calling customer services, customers receive messages that explain that receptions are closed except for essential appointments. There is information on Cambridge City Council's website and reception points have posters explaining the appointment service.

The CSC will not open for ad-hoc personal visits at this time, a review of this decision will be made in the Autumn of 2020 when more certainty over COVID19 and Cambridge City Council's recovery plan is known.

Customer Services will continue to offer a full contact centre, email, and social media customer response service during the hours of 9.00am – 5.15pm Monday to Friday with emergency out of hours cover being provided by our contract with Hunts CCTV team 24/7 at weekends and bank holidays and overnight when Customer Services are closed.

This EqlA does not cover appointments required to deliver housing repairs or to resolve tenancy queries.

4. Responsible service

Customer Service

5. Who will be affected by this strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?

(Please tick all that apply)

- Residents
- Visitors
- Staff

Please state any specific client group or groups (e.g. City Council tenants, tourists, people who work in the city but do not live here):

Any resident or visitor to Cambridge has the potential to be affected by this change.

6. What type of strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service is this?

- New
- Major change
- Minor change

7. Are other departments or partners involved in delivering this strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service? (Please tick)

- Yes
- No

If 'Yes' please provide details below:

8. Has the report on your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service gone to Committee? If so, which one?

Suzanne Hemingway took a paper to executive councillors at the beginning of May 2020 who agreed that reception services should not re-open for ad-hoc customer visits until a clear steer about the planned Customer Services review is known, anticipated in Autumn 2020.

9. What research methods/ evidence have you used in order to identify equality impacts of your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?

- Complaints have been reviewed – one complaint specifically about the closure of reception services has been received.
- Customer feedback has been monitored – the feedback which has been received since reception services have closed in response to COVID19 has been mainly positive, there has not been any negative comments about reception services.

- Payment Data has been reviewed – In March and April the data shows that there was an increase in internet/telephone payments which accounted for a significant proportion of the payments which had previously been taken via the cash office, indicating that customers are utilising digital means to make their payments.
- Service feedback – as part of Cambridge City Council’s recovery plans, service areas have been asked to review how to deliver their services in light of the impact of COVID19 including how to do this without ad-hoc reception services and all have indicated that this is possible, processes have been changed/streamlined to enable a majority to be completed by telephone or on-line.
- Research undertaken by gov.uk states that 7% of residents in the eastern region of the UK do not use the internet. The alternative means of accessing Council Services mitigate the impact of implementing an appointment only service for customers.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide>

10. Potential impacts

For each category below, please explain if the strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service could have a positive/ negative impact or no impact. Where an impact has been identified, please explain what it is. Consider impacts on service users, visitors and staff members separately.

(a) Age

Customers

The move to an appointment only service at Mandela House could have a positive impact for service users who are digitally competent, especially likely to be younger people as on-line options are developed. These options will deliver more end to end service delivery which should result in quicker response times/results for customers.

Older customers may be disadvantaged, as they are more likely to be digitally excluded. Feedback from advisors taking face to face payments is that older people are used to making payments or making applications with assistance by dropping into Mandela House. As lock down eases there is likely to be an expectation from customers that services will resume as they were before, communications about our telephony first approach needs developing to ensure that the message that only where needed, will an appointment be booked is received by residents of Cambridge.

Visitors

Visitors to the city are not high users of the CSC, very occasionally directions may be asked, however signage in the city is good and Tourist Information is nearby so the impact of not having a drop in reception open is a limited negative on.

Staff

Customer Services employs 43 staff between the ages of 24 – 63 made up as follows:

Age Bracket	Number of staff
20-29	6
30-39	16
40-49	10
50-59	8
60 - 69	3

Any member of the Customer Services team could have been required to assist customers face to face, so this aspect of their role will be much reduced until a definitive decision about face to face service provision is made.

The impact of moving to an appointment only service on customers on the basis of age is not known at this stage and will be monitored through staff one to ones.

(b) Disability

Customers

Disabled people are more likely to be digitally excluded so the ability to offer face-to-face appointments in emergencies will be of benefit to those who are digitally excluded. At the same time, some people with mobility impairments benefit from digital options, so the ability to experience quicker resolutions with these, as they are not required to travel to have their query resolved will be positive for them.

There is a possibility that there could be a negative impact as a result of the introduction of an appointment only service for customers who suffer with their mental health and may have chaotic lives. Customers experiencing poor mental health are not always able to plan and the removal of a drop-in service could impact them and delay support measures available for them being put in place. If we identify any adults at risk as a result of mental health issues, the Council shall follow our safeguarding procedure.

Mandela House is usually a hate crime reporting centre for disabled people. However, the building will not be open for people to come off the street to report hate crime. Nevertheless, people can still report hate crime to us on the phone and there has been a visible police presence in the city centre during lockdown.

Visitors

Visitors to the city are not high users of the CSC, very occasionally directions may be asked, however signage in the city is good and Tourist Information is nearby so the impact of not having a drop in reception open is a limited negative one.

Staff

Staff members with physical disabilities or reduced mobility can still access Mandela House through the main doors, which is an accessible entrance. As now, there is an expectation that staff will not allow customers to tailgate them into council offices so this will need to continue.

There could be a negative impact for staff needing to still work from home who have mental health conditions which are improved with social interaction with colleagues. With remote working being more commonplace for staff, isolation could affect them. At the same time, staff needing to meet people face-to-face for emergency appointments may feel anxiety about coming back to work in relation to their safety and safety of their families.

To mitigate both these impacts, managers are having regular and more frequent one to ones/catch ups with staff members, specifically checking on their welfare. Regarding anxiety about returning to work, explanations about the measures being put in place to minimise the spread of COVID19 have been held. Giving staff opportunity to ask questions and assure them of the measures in place has been positively received.

(c) Gender reassignment

Mandela House is usually a hate crime reporting centre for people who are transgender. However, the building will not be open for people to come off street to report hate crime. Nevertheless, people can still report hate crime to us on the phone and there has been a visible police presence in the city centre during lockdown.

(d) Marriage and civil partnership

No impact has been identified specific to this equality group

(e) Pregnancy and maternity

Consideration will be given to staff who have childcare commitments to ensure that the impact of implementing an appointment service is mitigated.

There is no impact for customers who are pregnant or on maternity leave.

(f) Race – Note that the protected characteristic ‘race’ refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.

Mandela House is usually a hate crime reporting centre and houses the racial harassment service. However, the building will not be open for people to come off street to report hate crime. Nevertheless, the racial harassment service is open, people can still report hate crime to us on the phone, and there has been a visible police presence in the city centre during lockdown.

(g) Religion or belief

Mandela House is usually a hate crime reporting centre for people of different religions. However, the building will not be open for people to come off street to report hate crime. Nevertheless, people can still report hate crime to us on the phone and there has been a visible police presence in the city centre during lockdown.

(h) Sex

Whilst the implementation of an appointment only service does not impact specific genders, COVID19 has been proven to be more severe in males. A range of precautions have been put in place to minimise the spread of the virus in the workplace and in receptions in line with central Government guidance.

Customers and staff will be afforded the same level of protection while participating in appointments.

(i) Sexual orientation

Mandela House is usually a hate crime reporting centre for people of different sexualities. However, the building will not be open for people to come off street to report hate crime. Nevertheless, people can still report hate crime to us on the phone and there has been a visible police presence in the city centre during lockdown.

(j) Other factors that may lead to inequality – in particular, please consider the impact of any changes on low income groups or those experiencing the impacts of poverty

Other factors that may lead to inequality are the cut back in services offered by other organisations, the potential for a reduction in availability of caring provision, financial assistance, job opportunities are just some of the areas which can affect customers and staff alike.

Regular conversations and one to ones with staff will be held to ensure that any change in caring responsibilities are understood and support measures are put in place. If other impacts/inequalities are established while speaking to staff, managers will refer staff to PAM assist or seek advice from HR as appropriate.

Where it is established customers are facing inequality, advisors will explore their circumstances and assist them to make claims for the appropriate Council Service, signpost to organisations who can help them, DWP/CAB for example.

11. Action plan – New equality impacts will be identified in different stages throughout the planning and implementation stages of changes to your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service. How will you monitor these going forward? Also, how will you ensure that any potential negative impacts of the changes will be mitigated? (Please include dates where possible for when you will update this EqIA accordingly.)

A review of comments, complaints and customer feedback about the new service offering will be undertaken on a monthly basis to understand if any unidentified inequality becomes apparent. This EqIA will be updated to reflect any emerging impacts identified as a result of this.

The communications plan for staff returning to work in Mandela House needs to include support/instructions for staff with mobility issues accessing the building via reception doors in relation to tail gating customers.

12. Do you have any additional comments?

People are likely to experience a positive impact of the move to appointment only face to face service as there will be no waiting times upon arrival, customers will have dedicated time for their enquiry to be resolved and for those using digital options to make service requests, they are likely to experience quicker resolutions as improvements in our digital offerings are rolled out.

Appointments are available and processes are in place to implement emergency temporary housing for customers, this is and will remain an out of hours service to assist customers with housing emergencies and housing repairs.

A range of risk assessments have been carried out to ensure all reasonable adjustments have been made to ensure that Customers, Staff and Service users are seen in a way which minimises the spread of COVID19, including Perspex screens, hand sanitiser stations and one way systems. The precautions have been verbally communicated to staff and formal induction plans have been created for staff to review and access as required.

13. Sign off

Name and job title of lead officer for this equality impact assessment: Clarissa Norman, Customer Services Operations Manager

Names and job titles of other assessment team members and people consulted: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Date of EqIA sign off: 16/06/20

Date of next review of the equalities impact assessment: 31/08/20

Date to be published on Cambridge City Council website: [Click here to enter text.](#)

All EqIAs need to be sent to Helen Crowther, Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer. Ctrl + click on the button below to send this (you will need to attach the form to the email):

[Send form](#)