Stage 1: Equality Impact Assessment

1. **What are the main aims purpose and outcomes of the Policy and how do these fit with the wider aims of the organization?**

The aim of the Customer Service Improvement Strategy and related programme sets out sets out the proposed new model for customer service delivery and what actions we plan to take to deliver this. The vision of the Strategy is that;
"Customers can access high quality public services with confidence, at any time, wherever they are"

Delivery of the strategy and programme will lead to a model which is:

- Digital first with a full range of services provided via the website and/or through apps
- Reduced desire for person to person calls and increased automated telephone service
- Face to face available through appointments at our offices and partners supporting transactions
- Possibility of online and telephone points throughout the borough and hosted by partners

Key principles for designing the optimum model of customer service delivery were agreed with key officers and members, with the starting point and overarching principle being one of the service design principles detailed in the Strategic Plan:

Residents and businesses are the starting point for services; every service must be considered from the perspective of the citizen and delivered at the lowest possible level – a bottom-up approach.

Any future model of customer service delivery must meet the following principles:

1. Enable as many customers as possible to be self sufficient

2. Be affordable

3. Ensure services are accessible to the most vulnerable

4. Have high quality service standards consistently applied

5. Be sustainable and adaptable for the future

The strategy aligns with the Council's priority of Corporate and Customer

Excellence and the priority outcomes:

- Services are customer focused and residents are satisfied with them.
- Effective, cost efficient services are delivered across the borough.

2. How do these aims affect our duty to:
- **Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization and other conduct prohibited by the act.**
- **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.**

The strategy will not affect the above three elements, however it will advance equality of opportunity for all our customers by improving accessibility to digital channels and improving the ways customers can transact.

In addition it is recognised that not being to transact online leaves people excluded from a number of benefits, the strategy outlines how the Council will work with others to raise the level of digital skills in the borough.

3. What aspects of the policy including how it is delivered or accessed could contribute to inequality?

Delivery of the strategy and related programme will include service redesign and potential changes to policy, the key aspect of this as shown in the model below will be a move to service delivery predominately via digital channels

- Digital first with a full range of services provided via the website and/or through apps
- Reduced desire for person to person calls and increased automated telephone service
- Face to face available through appointments at our offices and partners supporting transactions
- Possibility of online and telephone points throughout the borough and hosted by partners

As some customers will be unable to or have more difficulty accessing digital channels, the council will need to ensure that all customers are able to access council services. Protected characteristics will need to be considered

as part of any reviews or changes to services.

4. Will the policy have an impact (positive or negative) upon the lives of people, including particular communities and groups who have protected characteristics ? What evidence do you have for this?

Yes as explained in section two it will advance equality of opportunity for all our customers by improving accessibility to digital channels and improving the ways customers can transact. Comments from members of the Disability Focus Group have been supportive of the new strategy, with caveats that an accessible and customer friendly website is required, those who cannot transact online must not be forgotten e.g. older people and some people with disabilities and potential issues that people with sight impairments have with learning new routes if the location we deliver face to face services from changes.

As part of a recent review of customer service delivery, focus groups were held with a cross-section of different people from across the borough and followed up in August 2012 by a survey sent to 3000 residents (506 returned) to more widely test findings the council learnt that some customers both with and without protected characteristics find accessing some services difficult as the same level of service is not available via digital channels. Unexpected difficulties also emerged because of the cost of using certain channels.

The strategy and programme set out how the council will advance equality of opportunity for all our customers by improving digital channels and improving the ways customers can transact.

 In addition the council recognises that not being to transact online leaves people excluded from a number of benefits, it is important to work with others to raise the level of digital skills in the borough. The Council understands that some customers both with and without protected characteristics find accessing some services difficult.

If the answer to the second question has identified potential impacts and you have answered yes to any of the remaining questions then you should carry out a full EQIA set out as stage 2 below.

Stage 2: Equality Impact Assessment

Name of Policy/Service/Function
Customer Service Improvement Strategy
Purpose
What are you trying to achieve with the policy / service / function?
The aim of the Customer Service Improvement Strategy and related programme is to improve the way the council delivers its services to its customers. The vision of the Strategy is that;   **"Customers can access high quality public services with confidence, at any time, wherever they are"**   Delivery of the strategy and programme will lead to the following outcomes: • Digital first with a full range of services provided via the website and/or through apps   • Reduced desire for person to person calls and increased automated telephone service   • Face to face available through appointments at our offices and partners supporting transactions   • Possibility of online and telephone points throughout the borough and hosted by partners   Any future model of customer service delivery must meet the following principles: 1. Enable as many customers as possible to be self sufficient   2. Be affordable   3. Ensure services are accessible to the most vulnerable   4. Have high quality service standards consistently applied   5. Be sustainable and adaptable for the future
Who defines and manages it?
The Programme is defined by the Programme Sponsor, Alison Broom   The Programme is managed by the Programme Manager, Georgia Hawkes
Who do you intend to benefit from it and how?
All customers will have an opportunity to benefit from the introduction of the

strategy and programme as the council will be developing the way it delivers customer services and increasing the channels through which customers can access services.

What could prevent people from getting the most out of the policy / service / function?

- Poor communication
- A lack of awareness about the changes
- People feeling alienated by the design of the model and feeling that they are not suited to their particular needs.
- Lack of consultation with customers, partners and other stakeholders

How will you get your customers involved in the analysis and how will you tell people about it?

The strategy is based upon evidence sought from customer focus groups and surveys along with Mosaic analysis of customer contact. Members as representatives of residents have been consulted on the model as have the Disability Focus Group as representatives of the groups most vulnerable to the changes proposed.

Further customer involvement will be undertaken within each project with customers to understand their requirements and to get them involved with the changes to the service.

Customer involvement will be sought, through existing customer contacts, the services, members, partners and public notices including social media.

Evidence

How will you know if the policy delivers its intended outcome / benefits?

The measures of benefits have been outlined below underneath their related objectives

1. Efficient, accessible and customer focussed services

By 2016:

- Our website will be our main service channel and we will have shifted at least 50,000 contacts from face to face and telephone channels to online

- We will have reviewed all our customer facing services, taking into account what our customers tell us is important to them, and made efficiencies in the way we deliver services equivalent to at least 23,400 hours of officer time (or 18 full time staff)[1]

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[1] 18 full time staff assuming 1 full time staff member is productive for 1,300 hours

- Our services will be more easily accessible and we will respond to the needs and preferences of our most vulnerable customers

2. Secure and well managed information

- By 2016 we will have refreshed our standards and procedures for the collection, use, and secure storage of information we hold, including customer data to ensure the information management arrangements we have are appropriate and robust

- By 2014, we will have identified whether it is value for money to introduce a single account for every customer. We will have implemented any solution to achieve this that we decide upon by 2016

3. Enabling people to do more for themselves

By 2016:

- We will have supported our partners, particularly Kent County Council, in ensuring that as many people in the borough as possible have access to super fast broadband so local residents and businesses are able to access the Internet, including our website, and transact online

- We will have worked with private, public and third sector partners to increase the level of digital skills in the borough and get more people transacting online

4. Affordable and sustainable customer service delivery

By 2016:

- We will have reduced the numbers of items of post we send out and receive by at least 30%, saving us approximately £50,000 in postage costs

- We will have re-designed our face to face customer service arrangements, making the optimum use of our accommodation to ensure value for money

- Staff numbers will be reduced where appropriate to make cashable savings

How satisfied are your customers and how do you know?

At the last residents' survey 63% of customers were satisfied with the way council runs things.

What existing data do you have on the people that use the service and the wider population?

Substantial data has been collected which has shown us:

- How frequently customers contact us

- What they are contacting us about/which services have the largest customer contacts

- Which contact channels are used

- Preferences for channel usage

- The type of transactions they are completing

- Motivations for channel usage

This information has been analysed by Mosaic grouping.

What other information would it be useful to have? How could you get this?

For the population of Maidstone, the programme is trying to identify

- Access to the internet

- Access to broadband

- Access to a computer

- Range of digital skills

The programme will also try to identify by service area as much as it can about the customers that use those service.

Access to this information will be sought through partners, surveys, focus groups, interviews and reviewing information held internally.

Are you breaking down data by equality groups where relevant (such as by gender, age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity)?

To date information has been broken down by age, disability, gender and ethnicity. There has been no reason to analyse data, sexual orientation, marital status, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity.

In addition data has been analysed by Mosaic group which gives an indication of age, disability, location, career and education. This information is important as it offers insight into different types of people in terms of: the type of services accessed, the way they are accessed, the communication methods preferred and frequency of use.

The project will continue to analyse data by age and disability as these are large factors which influence channel preference in accessing the service. If other equality groups are highlighted as influencing factors in any the projects this

data will be explored at that time.

Are you using partners, stakeholders, and councillors to get information and feedback?

Customers, businesses and councillors have been consulted prior to the development of the strategy and programme.

Members and the Disability Focus group have been consulted on the model and on the new website design.

A stakeholder analysis has been completed for the Customer Service Improvement Strategy. Partners, stakeholders and councillors will be consulted as relevant on individual projects within the wider programme.

Impact

Are some people benefiting more – or less - than others? If so, why might this be?

Currently services are not accessible across all channels therefore some customers cannot access services in the way they would prefer. The changes would therefore benefit more customers than previously.

Actions

If the evidence suggests that the policy / service / function benefits a particular group – or disadvantages another - is there a justifiable reason for this and if so, what is it?

N/A

Is it discriminatory in any way?

No

Is there a possible impact in relationships or perceptions between different parts of the community?

No

What measures can you put in place to reduce disadvantages?

Ensuring accessibility is one of the key cornerstones of the strategy; therefore an essential consideration of all projects within the strategy will be if one channel is given preference, is there an alternative way of accessing the service if needed.

To support this, consultation will be undertaken with customers to identify the

relevant issues and test potential solutions.

A key project is to work with partners to combine and target resources towards digital inclusion and ensure those in need are given the opportunity to access alternative channels.

Do you need to consult further?

Consultation has been undertaken as part of the research for the development of the strategy, further consultation has been undertaken on the strategy with the Disability Focus Group.

However further consultation have will be undertaken for specific projects within the programme of work which supports the strategy.

Have you identified any potential improvements to customer service?

One of the key aims of the Customer Service Improvement Strategy is to improve the way services are delivered to all customers. Consultation with customers as part of the development of the strategy demonstrated that customers are frustrated by the way some services are delivered and believe that the Council should be accessible as private organisations.

Who should you tell about the outcomes of this analysis?

A stakeholder analysis has been undertaken and the analysis will be disseminated based upon stakeholders' requirements. This will include:

- Customers
- Officers
- Members
- Partners

Have you built the actions into your Service Plan or Policy Implementation Plan with a clear timescale?

Yes, the programme is a three year programme of work. The Customer Service Improvement Strategy has a supporting Customer Service Improvement Programme which sets out the component projects and related timescales.

When will this assessment need to be repeated?

The assessment may need to be repeated if there is a significant change to the direction of the strategy. Individual assessments will need to be undertaken as appropriate for projects delivered as part of the programme of work which supports the strategy.