

## Customer Access Review Full Assessment

The main types of activities that impact on others are those that involve decision-making (choosing to do or not to do), communicating and providing assistance. Where possible, activities should be carried out free from bias, inequality, or discrimination i.e. **fair**. If it is not possible to be fair then there needs to be justifiable reasons for exceptional treatment i.e. **reasonable**. Often Council activities are governed by legislation but that should have been designed to be fair or reasonable and then the Council must apply it in a fair and reasonable manner.

If the assessment shows activities are not always fair or reasonable, then steps must be taken to address the issues.

Assessment Details	
<b>Assessment Area</b>	Development Control Charter
<b>Date of Assessment</b>	16 August 2011
<b>Directorate &amp; Service</b>	Regeneration, Development Control
<b>Manager</b>	Alec Lauder
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Alec Lauder

	Key Questions	Answers/Notes
<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Scoping the assessment</b>	
1.	What are you looking to achieve i.e. aims/outcomes?	To set out standards to ensure that service objectives are met. These relate to the provision of pre submission guidance on major proposals; determination of major applications at the Northern Gateway, Stone Pit and Lowfield Street; application turnaround generally; introduction of a local planning application fee setting regime; Customer Access Reviews and incorporation of customer views and feedback in any service developments.
2.	Who will be affected?	Applicants, public at large (especially those affected by new development), Members, staff.
3.	How do the activities/changes a) contribute to any national	a) Service delivery aims to maximise performance against NI 157 a, b and c (Planning application performance)

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	Key Questions	Answers/Notes
	<p>indicators?</p> <p>b) meet or hinder other policies, values or objectives of the Council?</p>	<p>b) Strong links between service delivery and Corporate Plan objectives relating to Economic Development and Regeneration, Safer Communities and Environment and Transport</p>
4.	<p>Which aspects of the activity are dictated by legislation / regulation and where do we have discretion in how they are delivered?</p>	<p>Processes for planning applications and appeals are heavily prescribed by legislation/regulations and there is clear national and local policy setting out criteria against which decisions have to be made.</p> <p>Pre application is discretionary and there is little legislation and guidance relating to it. Enforcement is also discretionary to a degree, though failure to take action where clearly appropriate can amount to maladministration.</p>
<b>Step 2</b>	<p><b>Consideration of data and information</b></p> <p>Note: Ethnic monitoring data from relevant SNAP Surveys and Dartford population data can be found at: &lt;\\serverc\common data\Equality and diversity monitoring&gt;</p>	
5.	<p>What do you know about the groups who will be affected e.g. demographic information etc?</p>	<p>Planning applications are prescribed nationally and do not contain monitoring/demographic data.</p> <p>Because of an exemption in the fee regulations, it would be possible to extract information about applications relating to improvements to a disabled persons home.</p>
6.	<p>What consultation has taken place with affected groups? Who was consulted and what were the key findings?</p>	<p>Occasional customer surveys</p> <p>Complaints</p> <p>All planning applications are subject to statutory notification requirements, little definitive data is available as to findings but there have been cases where there has been potential conflict between groups, e.g., the use of tactile paving for the blind may not be ideal for wheelchair users.</p>
7.	<p>What additional research is needed to ensure that all 'equality groups' needs are taken into account?</p>	<p>Use Origins data to analyse enforcement and planning application records</p> <p>Possibly follow up with monitoring forms depending on outcome</p>

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	Key Questions	Answers/Notes
8.	How do you propose to gather the additional information?	Origins analysis
<b>Step 3</b>	<b>Assessing the equality impact</b>	
9.	Based on information you already know, in relation to each of the following groups, consider: a) for existing activities, how they are actually working in practice for each group b) whether there is anything in any proposed activities/changes that could discriminate or put anyone at a disadvantage or assist in promoting equality of opportunity.	
	<b>Equality groups</b>	
a.	Age	Elderly people could be disadvantaged by the increased use of online services, but access to all services is available in hard copy as well. Children do occasionally comment on applications and in theory, could submit a planning application; though complying with land ownership requirements makes this unlikely.
b.	Disability	An exemption in the fee regulations means that applications are free if they relate to improvements to a disabled persons home. Staff are available to provide assistance with forms etc. and case officers will undertake home visits if requested. Use of e mail is widespread. On large applications, there is often a requirement for lifetime homes and access issues will often be taken into account, though requirements are more covered under the Building Regulations.
c.	Gender (including reassignment)	Gender discrimination is unlikely to arise; female or male officers could be allocated as appropriate on request. It would be possible to change the name of an applicant on a current application due to gender reassignment.
d.	Race	Gypsies and travellers enjoy a special status in planning legislation, though many applications are refused because of conflict with planning policy. A language strap line in consultation letters is to be introduced and there may be occasions when it is more appropriate for an agent to act on behalf of an applicant.
e.	Religion/Belief	Representations from the public relating to places of worship occasionally appear to discriminate but applications must be decided on their planning impacts. Representation letters that are blatantly discriminatory will often be returned.

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	Key Questions		Answers/Notes
f.	Sexual Orientation	None.	
g.	Pregnancy/Maternity	Will be taken into consideration when known, officers can e.g., schedule site visits at appropriate times.	
10.	If the Local Authority works with partners to deliver activities/changes, please describe any that could give rise to inconsistent customer experiences?		The only potential partnership is with Kent Highway Services, who are a statutory consultee on certain types of application. However, their role is advisory and given the specialist nature of their advice, inconsistency is unlikely.
<b>Step 4</b>	<b>Reviewing and scrutinising the impact</b>		
11.	Summarise any positive or adverse impact you have identified and who is affected.		No significant adverse impacts, but some minor tweaks identified. Service seeks to provide fairly for all users.
12.	What changes can be made to address any adverse impact?		A language strap line in consultation letters is to be introduced An option for a male/female officer to be available on request is to be put on the website.
13.	If an adverse impact remains, how can this be fairly justified?		None expected.
14.	Summarise the expected residual impact once steps have been taken to minimise adverse impact and identify who remains affected.		None expected.

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Step 4 continued...	Actions to be inserted into Equality Action Plans			
Based on your answers to questions 11-14, please finalise your actions here. These actions will then be incorporated into our equality action plans.				
Identified impact (including who is affected)	Action	Monitoring (include expected outcomes, milestones and targets)	Date for Completion	Responsible Officer
If an adverse impact was found or unmet needs identified, which actions will you put in place to address this:				
Race and disability	Language strap line in consultation letters  Male/female officer option on the website	DC Manager to sign off	End August 2011	Liz Quogan
If the impact is still unclear, list the actions you will put in place to gather the information you need:				
Race	Origins analysis		January 2012	Liz Quogan/Ruth Scully
Race	Satisfaction surveys annually		January 2012	Liz Quogan
If you did not find any evidence of unmet needs or adverse impact, list the actions you will put in place to maintain good practice:				

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<b>Step 5 Decision making and future monitoring</b>		
15.	Which decision making process do these changes need to go through i.e. who do they need to be approved by?	Will report revised Charter to Development Control Board for adoption. Customer Access review is required to be signed off by the Regeneration Director.
16.	How will you continue to monitor the impact of the activity/service/ policy on diverse groups?	Through customer surveys, complaints
17.	When will you review this Customer Access Review?	Summer 2012
<b>Final steps</b>		
<p><b>For an existing activity/service/policy:</b> Send your assessment to the West Kent Equalities Officer .</p> <p><b>For a new activity/service/ policy:</b> Summarise your findings in the committee report. Ensure planned consultations address the findings of this impact assessment.</p>		