

# City of York Council Equality Impact Assessment Key findings

## 1. Details of assessed service area

<b>Service area name:</b>	Democratic Services
<b>Lead officer for this EIA:</b>	Dawn Steel
<b>Phone Number:</b>	01904 (55)1030
<b>Job Title:</b>	Democratic Services Manager
<b>EIA start date:</b>	November 2008
<b>EIA finish date:</b>	January 2009
<b>Date EIA will be reviewed:</b>	January 2010
<b>EIA signed off by:</b>	

### Service area description

Democratic services develop support and scrutinise the political management structures in York. It has three arms:

- Democracy support and Members Support
- Scrutiny, and
- Civic

Democracy and Members support services the decision-making machinery of the council.

- It ensures that all information submitted is accurate and that papers are circulated within legal deadlines to all relevant parties.
- It provides procedural and operational advice and organises the 'calling-in' process, whereby proposals are challenged and questioned.
- It looks after members' allowances and expenses, induction and training, personal development, administration of meetings and other related matters.
- It also plays a key role in providing open local government by ensuring public access to council records and background paperwork.

Scrutiny services ensure the work of the Executive is effectively reviewed and checked. The scrutiny manager develops an annual scrutiny plan and commissions scrutiny investigations and reviews. Research from departments and external agencies is commissioned in support of the scrutiny function.

Civic Services support the Lord Mayor and Civic Party in carrying out official engagements. It manages all activities and facilities in the Guildhall and Mansion House including the promotion of events and guided tours in the Guildhall and Mansion House.

## **2. Consultation**

This EIA will be considered by the Council Social Inclusion Working Group. We shall also seek the views of elected members via Group Secretaries.

## **3. Areas for improvement and action**

### **Area 1: Written/verbal information**

When we produce information about Council meetings, there are issues with:

- Size of font
- Style of language used (e.g. Official, Plain English, Easy Read)
- Availability in other languages and formats. We have access to Language Line however it cannot provide simultaneous translation at meetings. We also provide written material in other languages, Braille and tapes upon request by the end user. However the standardised language panel does not explain what the information is about.
- There is no sign language translation available during Council meetings

### **Considerations**

These issues arise because:

- Budgets are very limited
- Legal requirements guide the format and language used during some official Council meetings
- The current buildings are not conducive to modern day communication and interaction

### **Improvement Objective**

Written and verbal communication about Council meetings is accessible to all

## **Action we propose to take**

- We shall ensure that most documentation has copies available in Arial font size 14 unless there are insurmountable issues that prohibit us from doing so in which case documentation will be produced in Arial font size 12.
- Whenever possible we shall use (and train our councillors and officers to use) plain English both in written and spoken communication.
- We shall incrementally move towards producing easy read versions of all our papers and consider having copies produced in Braille and two of the most popular foreign languages in York at the time when papers become available to the general public.
- We shall consider amending the formats and languages panel on our documentation, to include a brief summary of what the publication is about.
- In the context of our new HQ we shall consider the possibility of a facility that provides for simultaneous translation in other languages including sign language for Council meetings

## **Progress will be measured through**

Feedback from people who attend meetings and Councillors. SIWG feedback.

## **Area 2: Procedures**

- When selecting topics for Scrutiny review, we do not currently consider the effect on or relevance to equality and diversity issues
- Standing Orders, procedures and protocols prescribe the way that Council meetings are run. They are drafted across all local authorities in a very legalistic and stylised manner and have been in place long before legislation changed in relation to Equality and Diversity issues. Current CYC Standing Orders do not currently place any requirement upon the Council to address special needs requirements during meetings for example requirements relating to the needs of carers who cannot attend without alternative care being made available for their charges, people who do not read and speak English, people of certain faiths who may need to pray at regular intervals, people who may have sensory or physical impairment because of age.

## **Considerations**

Some procedures and standing orders arise from legislation and cannot be altered.

## **Improvement Objective**

Modernise our procedures to take on board the needs of people from the equality strands.

### **Action we propose to take**

- We shall amend the Scrutiny Review registration form in a way that will encourage the consideration promotion and inclusion of topics that relate to equality and inclusion and which invite suggested reviews from the public and all sections of the community.
- As part of a wider EIA of the Constitution, we shall seek to amend Council Standing Orders, procedures and protocols accordingly and seek the opinion of community representatives and expert witnesses involved in the Social Inclusion Working Group about the changes before we ask our councillors and staff for their feedback and adoption.

### **Progress will be measured through**

Feedback from SIWG community representatives and expert witnesses, members of the public who attend meetings and Councillors.

## **Area 3: Members support**

- Allowances and expenses regulations do not consider special allowances for councillors with physical and sensory disabilities, but there are allowances for Councillors with caring responsibilities.
- Councillors individual needs in terms of disability are not assessed upon induction

### **Considerations**

Any changes made to the scheme of members allowances have to be recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

## **Improvement Objective**

- Inclusive members support
- Modernise our procedures to take on board the needs of people from the equality strands, who want to take part in public life.

## **Action we propose to take**

- At present there are no plans to reconvene the Panel to address physical/sensory disabilities of current council members. However, should an individual be elected to council at any point in the future with such needs, arrangements will be made for the panel will be consulted.
- We shall assess Councillors needs vis-à-vis disability on induction and update this annually after the next election.

## **Progress will be measured through**

- The results of annual reviews after each election.
- Collecting data at the end of councillors' term of office on support made available.

## **Area 4: Members training and outside meetings**

- Councillors receive no training on equality and diversity upon election, however, a copy of the equalities statement is included in their induction pack.
- When we decide which outside meetings/groups councillors attend, we do not assess the equality and diversity implications both for the group as well as the councillor

## **Improvement Objective**

- To make equality and diversity training available to all members during their term of office
- To ensure that members with equality and diversity issues are given appropriate consideration when they are being nominated to committees/working groups and outside bodies

## **Action we propose to take**

- We shall ensure that the equalities strategy/policy forms part of the Members Induction Pack. In addition we will make periodic training available to all our Councillors by way of Pre-Council Seminars.
- We shall encourage political groups to consider any equality and inclusion issues for individual group members when considering the nominations to Council Committees, working groups and outside bodies

## **Progress will be measured through**

- The analysis and evaluation of Programme of Training
- Feedback from members following Annual Council on allocation of seats

### **Area 5: Mayoralty**

The Civic Protocol that governs the Lord Mayor's engagements diary does not promote supporting engagements and visits to groups necessarily representative of all the equality strands.

## **Improvement Objective**

The Mayoralty should contribute to the Duties which arise from Equality legislation and Council's own Equality and Inclusion strategy and schemes.

## **Action we propose to take**

We shall amend the Civic Protocol accordingly and consult as necessary upon the type and nature of representative engagements.

## **Progress will be measured through**

Analysing annually the engagements diary.

### **Area 6: Facilities – Mansion House**

- Disabled people or people with other access issues (e.g. buggies) can access the House via a lift provided at the rear. However there is no advice at the front door about this or how to access it.
- The bell at the side door is not always audible by staff in the building although there is a number to ring if you wish access to the building.
- There are no praying/contemplation facilities in the House.

## **Considerations**

- Due to the listed building status of the building, there may be planning difficulties with having an advisory plaque at the front of the building and a bell fixed at the back door.
- Soon Council services will be moving to a fully accessible HQ.

## **Improvement Objective**

Make Mansion House as accessible as possible.

## **Action we propose to take**

- Place appropriate signage near the front door. We shall consider displaying an “A” board whilst events are on.
- Provide the Custodian with equipment that will allow him/her to hear the bell whilst in transit.
- Provide a secondary bell by the back door.

## **Progress will be measured**

Via feedback forms issued to users

## **Area 7: Facilities – The Guildhall**

- Meetings rooms adjacent to the main hall are not easily accessible via the hall.
- The Council Chamber is not accessible without assistance.

## **Considerations**

- The building is listed and there may be planning issues regarding alterations.
- Costs to be incurred given that Council will be moving to a fully accessible HQ in the very near future.

## **Improvement Objective**

Fully accessible facilities.

## **Action we propose to take**

- Provide accessible signage that explains there is an alternative route for people in wheelchairs wishing to access Committee rooms 1 & 2 (past the Liberal Group Rooms), as the ramp provided via the Guildhall is very steep.
- Refurbish the disabled toilet adjacent to Committee Room 2 to make it fully accessible (subject to availability of funding).
- Provide large clearly visible signage that people in wheelchairs wishing access to the Council Chamber may need to be assisted to do so.
- Consider removing seating and barriers in the public gallery and the Chamber itself to make room for wheelchairs.

## **Progress will be measured**

Via feedback forms issued to users

### **Area 8: Performance management**

We do not currently collect equality or satisfaction data about:

- Our Councillors
- Guildhall and Mansion House facilities users
- Members of the public attending Council meetings

## **Improvement Objective**

To collect data that will help us understand how effective the measures we have outlined in this EIA are

## **Action we propose to take**

Consider collecting, analysing and using relevant equality and satisfaction data about Councillors, Guildhall and Mansion House users and members of the public attending Council meetings.

## **Progress will be measured**

Numbers of questionnaire issued and returned used in tracking progress with any adjustments.

### **Area 9: Service planning**

Currently some Equality and Inclusion issues are considered in the planning of the service areas mentioned above but this is not consistent and mainly this is a result of concerns/complaints received.

## **Improvement Objective**

Improve service planning and make it inclusive at design stage

## **Action we propose to take**

Refresh this Equality Impact Assessment every year before we start service planning for the following year to identify areas we need to improve.

## **Progress will be measured**

By Head of Service when he/she approves yearly service plans.