

Cover Report for Equality Impact Assessment (EqIAs) supporting the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the process used to develop the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) documents and to outline the cumulative potential implications.

In considering the budget, Woking Borough Council (WBC) must consider its public sector duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity between all irrespective of whether they fall into a protected category such as race, sex, religion, etc. [Read more information about the Council's equality duty.](#)

Having due regard to these duties does not mean that the Council has an absolute obligation to eliminate discrimination but that it must consider how its decisions will contribute towards meeting the duties in the light of all other relevant circumstances such as economic and practical considerations.

This report should be read in conjunction with the EqIAs as [published on the Council website.](#)

1. Background

Due to the serious financial situation the council is faced with, as referred to within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) report, officers embarked on a series of detailed reviews to identify what the minimum viable provision for the service offer. This Gateway Review process was carried out for every service within the council and looked at options for identifying savings, increasing income, or stopping the service altogether. A benchmarking exercise has also been carried out to understand the level of spend and provision of WBC against other similar sized councils. Identified that, in most areas reviewed, the Council has historically spent more than its statistical neighbours. In some service areas there has been increased spend even though the population and household figures have not increased significantly.

The Government intervention and the subsequent issuing of the Section 114 notice compounded the need for reducing the size of the organisation. The issuing of a Section 114 Notice restricts all new spending apart from protecting vulnerable people and statutory services.

The July MTFS report outlined several savings proposals, and these were further developed in the September MTFS report after the resident consultation on non-statutory services.

The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) agreed two guiding principles to support the design of the new council.

- A smaller council focussed on statutory services.
- Discretionary services must be self-funded.

A new vision has been developed which builds on these guiding principles and this is set out in the budget report.

Ahead of making any decision on reducing or stopping any services, a public consultation was initiated on all proposals to change services for residents, to understand the views of

residents and to feed into the decisions required. There is a separate consultation [report](#) outlining the approach and findings of the consultation.

Other service changes under review not included in the consultation or impact assessments include the review of play areas and green spaces. A more detailed review is currently taking place.

2. Approach to developing the Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs)

It is important that the Council seeks to understand the equalities impacts of proposed service changes and any potential mitigations which can be offered. Given the scale and complexity of the proposed change required to balance our budget, the Council's efficiency proposals for 2024/25 have been analysed to understand positive and negative impacts on both residents and staff with protected characteristics, particularly where they may be impacted by multiple efficiency proposals.

The Council has received support from Surrey County Council on the Equality Impact Assessment process. Senior colleagues from Policy and Strategy at Surrey County Council provided a session to WBC colleagues sharing expertise and resources.

The Corporate Leadership Team and Members were briefed on the 16 October 2023 on the approach and the importance of EqIAs in decision making of the proposed savings.

Further support, guidance, expertise, and resources were offered by Local Partnerships to WBC's Equalities officer and officers writing the EqIAs. This was part of our sector support offer from the Local Government Association (LGA). They provided an independent review of each of the EqIAs and supported an EqIA Member review meeting where a small panel of Members provided feedback on the EqIAs.

3. Summary of mitigations

Each Equality Impact Assessment includes a detailed analysis of the impacts of the proposed service changes and how it can be mitigated.

Across all EqIAs the following groups have been identified as potentially mostly impacted.

- Young children and young people aged 16 to 25
- The elderly
- Those who are from a disadvantaged socio-economic background.

Across all EqIAs the following key mitigation themes have been identified.

3.1 Increase in fees and charges

Some savings such as the proposed fees and charges increases for Pool in the Park and changes to day services have been scrutinised in detail including benchmarking to compare the service offer, financial analysis (continues to be monitored) and user data to support decision making on the proposed savings. Consultation with residents, community groups, stakeholders and face-to-face meetings also supported a proposal for price increases to services that were at risk of being removed. This is positive in that it means the service will be maintained; however, this may impact those on concessions.

3.2 Identify other funding streams

Community Grants are discretionary and therefore the Council does not have a legal responsibility to offer them.

Stakeholders have been consulted with to support them and discuss how they can operate without WBC funding. The Volunteer Woking Funding Officer will offer support to identify alternative funding streams, arrange meetings with the local National Lottery funding officer and provide a source of free advice to all the organisations who face a cut in funding.

Organisations have also been asked to provide alternative business models, information about similar offers delivered by neighbouring councils and looking at pricing models to make them self-funding.

On 18 January 2024, members of Woking Borough Council's [Executive agreed to reallocate £601,000 of external funding](#) to support six community projects. In 2022 the Council received £1million from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which was launched to help councils build pride in place and increase life chances.

3.3 Identify alternative provision of similar services

Residents of Woking have a choice of health and well-being activities offered by a variety of providers across the borough. This includes private organisations, schools, other nearby local authority facilities, community groups, charities and churches offering activities such as arts, sports and leisure activities. The Council is working to map alternative services and will signpost residents to alternative options.

For example, services such as the translation services can be provided by other partner organisations offering a similar service. An NHS framework is already in place, which will be used to sign-post those needing the translation service.

Business support services are available from a number of organisations across Surrey. Local businesses within Woking will be sign-posted to these organisations when the service is removed. Funding from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to Surrey County Council and WBC has been earmarked to support local businesses.

The closure of public toilets will impact residents as well as community groups using these when participating in organised activities. Users of these public toilets will be sign-posted to nearby facilities as well as considering the management of these by community groups.

3.4 Build community capacity

There are many organisations providing services to the community in Woking. Going forward WBC could act as the facilitator encouraging and empowering these organisations to work together to provide residents with the offer and support, but with a stronger volunteer base in place. Private organisations could play a pivotal role in supporting these charitable organisations as part of their corporate social responsibility.

3.5 Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Scheme

Consultation with clubs, community groups and other hirers have shown interest in running the pavilions. A Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy and supporting process, is due to be adopted by Council in February 2024. Many other councils across the country have adopted a similar policy. However, ahead of adopting this policy, engagement with community groups is taking place to ensure there is a robust plan of action. It needs to be acknowledged that the process of transferring assets to community groups will take time to implement.

3.6 Supporting organisations to move to new operating models

Woking Borough Council is working with organisations, encouraging organisations to review their current business models and find an alternative model that will help them to become self-funding. Examples: Community Transport, The Lightbox, Citizens Advice Woking.

4. Conclusion

In view of the Council's current financial constraints, and the resulting need to reduce all subsidies, the Council recognises the potential negative impacts based on the options being considered and has/will as far as is possible put in place mitigating actions to reduce the negative impacts. However, it recognises that it cannot completely remove all impacts.

5. Recommendations

1. Develop a communication plan about all service changes. This will inform residents, community groups, key partners, stakeholders, and businesses of the changes.
2. Develop an aggregated Equality Action Plan which monitors implementation of the mitigations proposed.
3. Propose a mapping exercise of statutory and discretionary service provision including providers. This will enable the Council to work collaboratively and more efficiently in future.
4. Propose future monitoring of the EqlAs as part of performance management and service review plans.

The following Equality Impact Assessments were developed supporting the MTFS. Please note that Equality Impact Assessments are living documents and are updated as new information become available. [Read the published Equality Impact Assessment documents on the Council's website..](#)

Directorate: Place

- Proposed closure of public conveniences (toilets)
- Proposed removal of business support to local businesses and the Business Liaison Team
- Proposed service changes in Neighbourhood Services
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Directorate: Community

- Proposed increase in fees and charges for Pool in the Park
- Proposed closure of pavilions
- Proposed changes to Centres for the Community: Relocation of day care services
- Proposed removal of sports, arts and cultural support and funding
- Proposed removal of community grants
- Proposed removal of funding and support to Citizens Advice Woking
- Proposed removal of funding for Woking People of Faith
- Proposed removal of funding for Woking Community Transport
- Proposed removal of funding for the York Road Project
- Proposed removal of funding for Woking Asian Business Forum
- Proposed removal of funding for The Lightbox
- Proposed removal of Woking Interpreting and Translation Service
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Directorate: Corporate Resources

- Proposed changes to opening times of the Contact Centre telephone lines