

# Equality Impact Assessment Record

Date of EIA                      October 2009  
 Directorate                      Corporate Services

<b>Initial Screening Record</b>		
Activity to be assessed	Access to the Democratic Process & Public Engagement	
What is the activity?	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy/strategy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Function/procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Project <input type="checkbox"/> Review <input type="checkbox"/> Service <input type="checkbox"/> Organisational change	
Is it a new or existing activity?	<input type="checkbox"/> New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Existing	
Aim / objective / purpose of the activity – who is the activity designed to benefit/target?	<p>The purpose of the activity is to: make the Council's democratic process transparent and accessible to everyone.</p> <p>The activity is designed for: anyone interested in the democratic process.</p>	
Who is responsible for the activity?	The person/section/team responsible for this policy/function is: Democratic Services	
Did Step 1: Initial Screening indicate that a full EIA was necessary?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes – full EIA completed and recorded below. <input type="checkbox"/> No – full EIA not completed therefore record ends here.	
<b>Full EIA Record</b>		
Who are the members of the EIA team?	Hannah Coman, Kirsty Hunt & Derek Morgan	
What evidence has been found to indicate that the activity might need to be amended? (Include any consultation undertaken)	<p>Lack of public engagement evidenced by poor public attendance at Council meetings, members' comments and public feedback. Some people feel uncomfortable attending the start of a Council meeting as they begin with a Christian prayer.</p> <p>A request was received from a participant in a meeting for somewhere to pray. A room was provided and will be made available in the future, if requested..</p>	
With regard to the equalities themes, which groups might be <b>impacted</b> by the activity? Might any of these groups be impacted <b>adversely</b> ?	<b>Groups Impacted</b>	<b>Groups impacted adversely</b>
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Race and ethnicity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Disability <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gender <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Age <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sexual Orientation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion or belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Race and ethnicity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Disability <input type="checkbox"/> Gender <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Age <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual Orientation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion or belief
What evidence is there to suggest an impact/adverse impact?	<p>The lack of public attendance in general suggests that there is a lack of engagement in the democratic process although it is impossible to say that it affects any particular group. With the exception of the Planning &amp; Highways Committee and Licensing &amp; Safety Committee, there are rarely more than one or two people present at Council meetings. The Planning &amp; Highways Committee tends to attract people who may be concerned about development close to their own property.</p>	<p>Based on existing practice, there is no evidence to suggest that anything within the democratic process is likely to impact adversely on anyone on the grounds of gender or sexual orientation. However, in carrying out this assessment, it has been recognised that, there is a risk of adverse impact in relation to race and ethnicity, disability, age and religion of belief.</p> <p><b>Race and Ethnicity:</b></p>

	<p>The Licensing &amp; Safety Committee attracts groups of people (eg taxi drivers) who are interested in discussion of policies which may directly affect them. The number of people attending these meetings will vary according to the business to be discussed. Their ethnicity is not considered as everyone is treated equally.</p>	<p>All documentation is produced in English, although, if requested, documents could be made available in other languages.</p> <p><b>Disability:</b></p> <p>The lack of a purpose-built council chamber and use of rooms for meetings which are not all easily accessible could lead to an adverse impact.</p> <p><b>Age:</b></p> <p>There is only limited emphasis on encouraging involvement from young people, usually by way of Local Democracy Week activities.</p> <p><b>Religion or Belief:</b></p> <p>There is no prayer room facility within Easthampstead House or other premises used for some meetings. Anyone attending a meeting of the Council is however expected to stand for a Christian prayer before the meeting begins.</p>
<p>On what grounds can impact or adverse impact be justified?</p>	<p>There are statutory reasons why some Council business should be conducted in private.</p>	
<p>Is there any current action that addresses issues for any of the groups impacted/adversely impacted?</p>	<p><b>Race and Ethnicity:</b></p> <p>The Council's web site contains advice for people requiring translated documents on who to contact. Requests have not been made for the translation of committee papers. If a request were to be made, a decision would need to be made on whether the cost could be justified for an individual or small group of individuals, particularly as any policies contained in agendas likely to impact on a particular group would almost certainly have been subject to formal consultation by the relevant service departments. It would not be sensible for Democratic Services to duplicate this process.</p> <p>Democratic Services does not seek to contact individuals or groups regarding meetings unless the business relates directly to them (eg appeals). Democratic Services does however manage a forward plan of items coming up for decision by the Executive or an executive member. This states the nature of the proposed decision and also indicates what consultation will be taking place as well as providing details of a contact for any representations. This gives anyone the opportunity to see what is being proposed and the chance to contact the relevant officer if they wish to make representations. The Forward Plan is available for inspection and available online. The statutory duty is to produce an updated plan on a monthly basis. Whilst the Council does this, items added during the month are published on the web site when first notified and therefore the information is made available as soon as it</p>	

	<p>becomes available.</p> <p><b>Disability:</b></p> <p>The Council's meeting rooms at Easthampstead House can be accessed by lift and are therefore accessible by people with physical disabilities although the accommodation is not as ideal as would be the case in a more modern building. With plans to move to a new Civic Hub, investment in these facilities which may not have a long term future would be hard to justify. Rooms used in other premises are DDA compliant to ensure that access is not restricted.</p> <p>An induction loop is used in the Council Chamber to ensure that those with hearing impediments can follow the business being conducted.</p> <p>There is currently no formal provision for the visually impaired in the meeting rooms or to assist them reach the meeting rooms. Officers in attendance would assist a blind person to a meeting. Large print agendas are produced on request for the visually impaired.</p> <p><b>Age:</b></p> <p>Democratic Services has participated in Local Democracy Week to encourage young people to develop an interest in the Council's democratic process and will continue to do so as well as looking for other opportunities to engage young people throughout the year.</p> <p>With limited resources, it is difficult to undertake targeted initiatives for any age group to promote the democratic process per se. Key policy documents being considered at meetings would normally be subject to consultation with relevant stakeholders via service departments.</p> <p>Although articles appear in Town &amp; Country from time to time about councillors and leaflets listing them are available, raising awareness of Democratic Services will always be difficult unless by way of a specific activity such as Local Democracy Week. There is however a statutory requirement to post notice of all forthcoming meetings outside the premises at which the meetings are to be held. All agendas and minutes are published online facilitating access to papers. In addition, the Modern.Gov system enables members of the public to subscribe to notifications of the publication of papers relating either to committees they are interested in or the wards in which they live in or in which they have an interest without the need for any involvement from Council officers. For those without computers, the papers can also be viewed online in public libraries. The information is therefore available and there is little more that could be done to publicise the activities of Democratic Services and the democratic process to any age group beyond specific campaigns which would not be a priority for funding in the current economic climate.</p> <p><b>Religion or Belief:</b></p> <p>A room is made available on request for religious purposes.</p>
<p>What changes will you make to the activity reduce</p>	<p>A number of actions are proposed as a result of this assessment.</p>

or remove any differential/adverse impact?

**Race and Ethnicity:**

Equalities monitoring is being considered to coincide with the 2011 local elections. Ideally this should include candidates to provide data both on those seeking election and those actually elected. This will provide information on whether people from ethnic minorities are seeking election to this Council.

**Disability:**

From 1 November 2009, all agenda reports will contain left-aligned text to make them easier for partially sighted people to read.

**Age:**

Opportunities for engagement are being pursued for Local Democracy Week. Consideration will be given to engagement with the Bracknell Forest Youth Forum and the Bracknell Member of the Youth Parliaments and their deputies.

**Religion or Belief:**

Democratic Services will discuss with the Mayor ways in which the traditional prayer at the start of a Council meeting may be made more inclusive or the agenda annotated to indicate that those wishing to attend but not participate in the prayer may join the meeting following it. Council practice is believed to have emerged to replicate that in Parliament. Sittings in both Houses of Parliament begin with Christian prayers and there is currently no multi-faith element. This practice is believed to date back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Members of the public are not allowed into either the House of Commons' or House of Lords' public galleries during prayers, but are not excluded from the Council Chamber until after the prayer prior to our Council meetings.

A room will continue to be made available for prayers on request.

**General:**

Democratic Services aims to make the democratic process accessible to all whilst recognising that in certain circumstances it may be necessary to provide individuals with extra support (eg by provision of interpreters, larger text copies or translated copies of papers). The following actions are applicable to all the groups:

- On agendas, the name of the contact will be amended to a friendlier: "If you require any further information, please contact ..."
- Report and minute writing styles will be reviewed to encourage the use of plain English to make them more accessible, if they are considered to be otherwise although this can be a subjective judgement.
- More information will be provided on the front of each agenda about the nature of each item to facilitate easy understanding of the issues to be discussed.
- Consideration will be given to providing feedback forms at meetings for use by visitors to assess whether

	<p>anything could be done to improve existing arrangements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On occasions when large turnouts have been expected at meetings, arrangements have been made to relay the proceedings to another room to accommodate people unable to fit into the Council chamber or meetings have been moved to larger premises. This principle is also enshrined in the plans for a new civic hub as the current proposals not only envisage relaying business to overflow rooms, but also the atrium, in exceptional circumstances.</li> <li>• Consideration is given to holding meetings in premises other than the Council's offices, however, unless a meeting is dealing with a specific area-based issue, in moving from venue to venue around the borough can in itself reduce accessibility. Someone living in the north of the borough may not have a problem travelling to Bracknell town centre for a meeting but would not wish to travel to Sandhurst or Crowthorne, particularly as meetings are held in the evening when public transport is less frequent or non-existent.</li> <li>• The timing of meetings has been raised with members of the Council but there is strong support for formal meetings to be held in the evening as to hold them during the day may discourage working people from becoming councillors. Neighbourhood Action Groups and Neighbourhood Forums are held in the relevant locality at times determined by their lead members, but attendance is variable.</li> <li>• Web-casting of meetings was trialled some years ago but was not pursued. Not all members welcomed the filming of meetings and there is a cost both in terms of set up and running costs which it would be difficult to justify unless there was more evidence of a tangible benefit from "broadcasting" the meetings.</li> <li>• Consideration will be given to placing an article in the Council's newspaper, Town &amp; Country and making reference to Council meetings in the welcome pack provided to all new residents of the borough. Leaflets have previously been produced to promote overview and scrutiny but there has been no obvious evidence that they have brought about an upsurge in public interest. In the circumstances, producing leaflets to promote democratic services and access to the decision-making process, particularly at a time of financial pressures, is not considered a viable proposition.</li> </ul> <p>The introduction of feedback forms will be carefully monitored to assess whether there is anything else which might lead to greater public interest. Action by other local authorities will also be monitored to identify best practice which might be applied in Bracknell Forest.</p>
Into which action plan/s will these actions be incorporated?	Democratic Services' Business Plan.
Who is responsible for the action plan?	Head of Democratic & Registration Services.
Have any examples of	No.

good practise been identified as part of the EIA?	
Has the EIA been published on the Council website?	Yes
Who is the relevant Chief Officer and have they signed off the EIA?	Director of Corporate Services Alison Sanders
Which PMR will this EIA be reported in?	Corporate Services – Quarter 3, 2009/10.