

Equality, Fairness and Rights Impact Assessment

The purpose of this assessment is to consider how your policy could impact on the needs of those protected by the Public Sector Equality Duty, the Fairer Scotland Duty and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

- [Public Sector Equality Duty](#)
- [Fairer Scotland Duty](#)
- [United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child](#)

In making the assessment you must consider relevant evidence, including evidence received from equality groups. Having considered all of these elements, you must take account of the results of such assessments. This requires you to consider taking action to address any issues identified, such as removing or mitigating any negative impacts, where possible, and exploiting any potential for positive impact. If any adverse impact amounts to unlawful discrimination, the policy must be amended to avert this.

Name of policy*:	Budget Savings Proposal: Customer Services Reduction (Ref: BOP 1.2)
Completion date:	19 February 2023
Completed by:	S Hayes, Customer Services Manager
Lead officer:	S Hayes
Department:	Business Operations and Partnerships.

**The term 'policy' should be understood as activity of East Renfrewshire Council i.e. all policies, provisions, criteria, functions, practices and activities including the delivery of services; essentially everything we do.*

You should complete the Screening Section (1) to establish if a full assessment is required.

1. Screening

1.1 What is the nature of this policy?
<input type="checkbox"/> Policy or Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Programme or Plan <input type="checkbox"/> Project <input type="checkbox"/> Service or Function <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Budget proposal <input type="checkbox"/> Another decision. Please state: Click or tap here to enter text.
<input type="checkbox"/> New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Review or change to existing <input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please state: Click or tap here to enter text.
1.2 What would happen as a result of this policy? Select all that apply
<input type="checkbox"/> Change to charging arrangements (including introduction, removal, increase or decrease) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Change to how a service is delivered (including addition, change or removal of practice/procedures/processes) <input type="checkbox"/> Change to options or entitlements <input type="checkbox"/> Change to priorities or criteria <input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please detail: Click or tap here to enter text.
1.3 How relevant is this policy to impact assessment?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The policy would have consequences for people (positive/neutral/negative) <input type="checkbox"/> The policy has potential to advance equality for people <input type="checkbox"/> The policy will affect children and young people up to the age of 18 <input type="checkbox"/> The policy has no impact on people
1.4 What people would be affected?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> East Renfrewshire Council employees <input type="checkbox"/> Organisations or individuals carrying out a service on behalf of the Council

- Voluntary sector groups/organisations
- People living in a specific area of East Renfrewshire. Please detail: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
- Everyone living in East Renfrewshire
- People working, studying or volunteering in East Renfrewshire
- Visitors to East Renfrewshire
- A group of people with a shared interest:
 - Experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage (this includes low/no wealth, low income, area deprivation or material deprivation)
 - Being in a particular age category
 - Being from a black or minority ethnic group e.g. Gypsy/Travellers
 - Speaking a language other than English
 - Women/girls
 - Identifying as Lesbian, Gay Bisexual or Transgender
 - Belonging to a particular religion or belief
 - Pregnant women or those on maternity/paternity leave
 - Having a long term limiting health condition or disability
 - Providing unpaid care for others
 - Another group e.g. those experiencing homelessness, offenders/ex-offenders. Please detail: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
- Children and young people living in East Renfrewshire
- Children and young people using East Renfrewshire Council services
- Children and young people visiting East Renfrewshire
- None of the above

Review your answers above.

- If the policy has no impact on people, an impact assessment is not required. **GO TO SECTION 9**
- If the policy will have an impact on people, you should complete the full assessment. **GO TO SECTION 2**

2. The Assessment: Your scoping

2.1 How long will this policy be in place and when is it scheduled for review?
<p>The proposed budget reduction will result in a reduction in customer service resource, impacting service availability and provision. This will continue to be reviewed over the next 3 years.</p> <p>It is important to note that, since 2016/17, there has been a 14.5% reduction in Customer First/Money Advice & Rights Services, equating to 8 FTE. Whilst there has been a good transition to online/self-service over the last few years (63% online in 2021/22 vs 11% in 2019/20), the cumulative impact of successive cuts to frontline services should not be underestimated, potentially leaving less support in place for those less able to self-serve using online services.</p>
2.2 Are there known inequalities within the subject matter(s) of the policy? For example: access to transport; organisational pay and composition; or bullying in schools.
Research as part of the Council's Customer Experience Strategy in 2022 showed that there are differences in how people access customer services and their preferences and needs in this regard. (See below)
2.3 Are there known impacts on children and young people within the subject matter of the policy? For example, changes to education services, employment support for parents, playparks.
No
2.4 How have people who might be affected been consulted and involved in the development of the policy ? Please provide dates and information
Budget Engagement <p>Throughout October and November 2022 a public budget consultation was carried out using a number of methods including an online survey, focus groups and a Citizens Panel survey which is more reflective of the demographic profile of the area. The methods used for the consultation allowed for a breadth of engagement. There was a dedicated Budget Panel event for secondary school pupils to engage young people, the panel events also attracted a number of older residents. Women predominated the public online survey results at 70%. The 35-44 year age category accounted for 46% of the total responses, which is 34% above that age group representation with East Renfrewshire demographic profile. Younger and older people were much less represented in the survey (1.7% of 16-24 year olds and 4.3% of people aged 65+). The Citizens Panel survey however had a higher proportion of older adults represented, with 37% of respondents aged over 65. This is 11% above East Renfrewshire population profile where older adults make up 26%. The</p>

gender split was slightly more even with men accounting for 44%. The Citizens Panel also demonstrated a reach to minority ethnic communities at 7% of respondents nearly 3% above the proportionate demographic population of East Renfrewshire.

Employees were also encouraged to participate in the public consultation, and 345 completed the online survey. There has been no separate consultation exercise for staff yet until decisions are made at the Council's Budget meeting. Staff will be consulted on any proposed changes through HR processes once budget decisions have been made by Council.

Through the consultation key themes emerged, in particular around protecting Education, however there was also a strong commitment from residents to protect our most disadvantaged residents and tackle inequalities, and the online survey rated customer services as quite high for protection.

A number of common underlying principles emerged from the various **Budget Panels**, as follows:

- The Council should prioritise maximising "efficiencies" before cutting services or increasing charges or costs; in particular, this would include demonstrating that the Council is adapting to new methods of working post-pandemic in terms of its premises requirements and use of digital technology.
- There should be protection of services that impact on the most vulnerable individuals and communities.
- Beyond this, seeking to ensure that budget savings or other changes do not add to existing disadvantage and inequality (whether economic or otherwise).
- Maintaining some level of service where possible, even if lessened in scope or different model of delivery is used, however don't just cease delivery.

There was an understanding that reductions in Customer First and Revenues & Benefits services would impact negatively on quality/standard of service but this was less of a concern than the loss of "visible" services.

Through all the consultation methods there is a strong commitment to protecting the most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents. Fairness, inclusivity and addressing inequalities remains important to many East Renfrewshire residents.

Customer Experience Strategy

In addition, as part of development of the Council's Customer Experience Strategy in 2022 internal and external user engagement was completed. The external user engagement was carried out by an independent contractor and included 423 surveys completed and 20 detailed interviews. Key research findings showed that:

- 50% of research participants felt that Council services are usually available when they need them
- 25% of participants have changed their contact preferences since the pandemic, with less use of 'in person' contact

- 33% have experienced instances of being required to contact the Council multiple times to resolve an issue

User research was used to create 'customer personas' to guide design of our services. Research showed that:

- 8% contact the Council in person, although most of these appeared to be relatively comfortable using web-based contact methods if necessary
- Participants were most likely to want to make contact in person when they wanted to a) report a problem or fault (30%); make a complaint (30%) or ask a question (25%). The main reasons that people like to see a person were as follows: a) better at understanding your needs; b) resolve issues more quickly; c) more effective in dealing with more complex or difficult enquiries
- 45% contact the Council by phone, with the majority satisfied that customer service officers understand their needs, however participants were less positive about issues being resolved in just one call – 56% managing this sometimes and 26% most of the time.
- 85% contact the Council via digital channels – 61% by website, 37% by email, 11% by social media and 4% by Live Chat. Most common reasons for not using the website were difficulties navigating it or not being able to find the services they need online.

2.5 Where children and young people will be affected, how have they been consulted and involved in the development of the policy? Please provide dates and information

There was a specific Young People/students panel group as part of the wider Budget cuts held on the 14 and 28 November 2023, although it primarily focused on Education savings proposals.

3. Impact on Equalities

In order to impact assess any new or existing policy it's important to consider the evidence about how it may affect people. Log information about the experiences and needs of people on the basis of different characteristics/circumstances, and whether the proposed policy could have a positive or adverse impact on that.

You may wish to refer to the following sources:

- o Input from local Councillors
- o Findings from engagement or involvement activities
- o Information or feedback from groups of people, such as equality interest organisations and groups who speak on behalf of others
- o National, regional or local statistics
- o Analysis of enquiries or complaints from customers
- o Recommendations from inspections or audits
- o National or regional research to identify similar issues
- o Comparisons with similar policies in other departments or authorities to identify similar issues

Is it possible to collect new evidence that you don't have but think will be relevant? For example: speaking to colleagues; adapting engagement approaches; setting up meetings or focus groups; and consulting interest organisations.

Characteristics/circumstances	Experience and needs (include sources)	Impact category (positive/neutral/negative) and assessment of impact
Socioeconomic disadvantage	<p>East Renfrewshire Council is the largest employer in the Authority with a high proportion of employees living in the area</p> <p>East Renfrewshire has the highest percentage of data zones of all the Scottish Local Authorities classed as being in the 20% least deprived in Scotland. Eight of the 122 data zones (population units) in East Renfrewshire are classed as being within the 20% most deprived in Scotland, this represents 7% of data zones in East Renfrewshire. They are located within Barrhead, Auchenback and Neilston. Three of the data zones are classed as being within the 10% most deprived in Scotland and one of these is classed as being within the 5% most deprived areas (Equalities Mainstreaming Report)</p>	<p>If staff are unable to identify new roles through redeployment then this may result in job loss and a social economic impact.</p> <p>A reduction in customer services resources may impact on the opening hours, location and methods of contact for customer services. Where there are more online methods of contact this can impact on those that cannot afford or readily access digital devices and internet connection.</p>
Age	<p>East Renfrewshire has an aging population with a 26 per cent increase in the number of residents aged 85 and over during the last decade. By 2043, almost one quarter of East Renfrewshire is projected to be aged 65 or over (23.8%), in line with Scottish projections. Between 2011 and 2020, the rate of change in age-specific population groups in East Renfrewshire was most pronounced among the 65 and older population with a 19.6% increase. The number of children and young people aged 0-15, and the working</p>	<p>As above. For older adults who are not online or confident with communicating digitally this may create a barrier for engagement.</p>

	age population aged 16-64, also increased over the last 6 years, 9.6% and 1.2% respectively. However, this has been at a slower rate than the 65+ population growth. This highlights the changing age structure within the authority (Planning for the Future)	
Disability or long term health condition	In East Renfrewshire, 17 per cent of the population limited either a 'little' or 'a lot' by long-term health problem or disability. East Renfrewshire had the fourth highest proportion of population in Scotland with one or more long-term health conditions (Planning for the Future)	As above- people with visual or hearing disability may also require a number of options for engagement and contact e.g. People who lip read may prefer face-to-face support. A reduction in provision or methods of contact may have a negative impact on this group
Ethnicity	As above JRF research shows that ethnic minority groups are more at risk of poverty. East Renfrewshire is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse areas in Scotland with significant Muslim and Jewish communities. The 'Asian' population showed the largest increase and at the time of the 2011 Census represented 5 per cent of the total East Renfrewshire population (PFTF)	Older generations or new arrivals to Scotland may primarily speak a Language other than English. They may require family support for interpretation and flexible opening hours to make arrangements e.g. if family member is working.
Gender (including gender reassignment)		Neutral
Marriage/Civil Partnership (only applicable to Council employment policy)		Neutral
Pregnancy / Maternity		Neutral
Religion / Belief		Neutral

Sexual orientation		Neutral
Providing unpaid care		Neutral
Any other relevant groups e.g. unemployed people, people experiencing homelessness, care leavers, people involved in the criminal justice system, people with literacy/numeracy barriers, people living in rural communities.	As a consequence of the council's statutory requirements, customer services act as the first point of contact for Housing Services, delivering information and advice, signposting homeless and roofless people to the correct service, providing guidance and support for all council tax enquiries and dealing with Adult Support and Protection referrals.	Neutral – no planned current change that would affect this

4. Impact on socio-economic disadvantage

Socio-economic disadvantage means living on a low income compared to others in Scotland, with little or no accumulated wealth, leading to greater material deprivation, restricting the ability to access basic goods and services. Socio-economic disadvantage can be experienced in both places and communities of interest. East Renfrewshire communities where people are at greater risk of experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and where resources must be targeted to meet needs are the localities of:

- Barrhead – Dunterlie, East Arthurlie and Dovecothall (ADD2)
- Auchenback
- Neilston
- Thornliebank

Consider the policy itself and the way it will be implemented. How may this result in different experiences for people in East Renfrewshire.

4.1 In what way would the policy alleviate or entrench inequalities from socioeconomic disadvantage?

Guidance note

Consider common inequalities such as poorer skills and attainment; lower paid and less secure work; greater chance of being a victim of crime; less chance of being treated with dignity and respect; lower healthy life expectancy; lower feeling of control over decisions that affect you.

There is a risk that this could impact with longer wait times for customers to seek assistance. We will aim to mitigate this with improved telephony technology and future developments and improvements of online services, though for some more underrepresented and disadvantaged groups digital and online methods of contacts may further entrench inequalities and socioeconomic disadvantage.

Changes to payment opening hours will be in line with current customer demand so should not add to disadvantage.

4.2 What opportunities are there within this policy and the way it will be implemented to promote inclusion, participation, dignity and empowerment of people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?

Customers have a range of different methods for making contact with customer services. Customers continue to be able to contact Customer Services face to face, via phone and online methods.

We will aim to mitigate impact of reductions in service with improved telephony technology and future developments and improvements of online services, which will be communicated to customers. With more customers choosing to move online this allows the service to continue to support different service delivery methods for those that need it.

Changes to payment opening hours will be in line with current customer demand so should not add to disadvantage. These will be communicated. We will engage with third sector stakeholders, East Renfrewshire's FAIRER Group, HSCP, GP surgeries, faith community groups to communicate changes in addition to social media and online communications.

Our website accessibility means customers can:

Change colours, contrast levels and fonts

zoom in up to 300% without the text spilling off the screen

navigate most of the website using just a keyboard

navigate most of the website using speech recognition software

listen to most of the website using a screen reader (including the most recent versions of JAWS, NVDA and VoiceOver)

Translation services are available on request for online, phone and face to face contact. There is currently low demand for translation, interpretation and communications support, but there are arrangements in place to support customers on request and these are publicised.

For those contacting us by phone or visiting in person we provide a text relay service if required. This can assist people who are deaf, hearing impaired, have a speech impediment. Our offices also have induction loops or customers can contact us in advance to arrange a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter.

4.3 What will be done differently to focus on addressing the multiple inequalities experienced by some people in Auchenback, Barrhead, Neilston and Thornliebank?
There are service improvements planned and ongoing to improve access to council services, promotion of online services for customers who can help themselves at times that suit them. These changes will allow us to focus resource on providing services to customers who require more help.

5. Impact on Children’s Rights

This section must be completed if any potential impact on children and young people up to the age of 18 has been identified in sections 1-3.

If there are no impacts on children and young people GO TO SECTION 6

Which General Principles of UNCRC are relevant to this policy/measure? Tick all that apply.	Which additional articles are relevant to this policy/measure? List all that apply	Which particular groups of children and young people are affected by this policy/measure? (e.g. young children, disabled children, children living in poverty, children in care, young people who offend).
Article 2 Non-discrimination Children should not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of their rights. No child should be discriminated against because of the situation or status of their parent/carer(s).	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Article 3 Best interests of the child Every decision and action taken relating to a child must be in their best interests. Governments must take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures to ensure that children have the protection and care necessary for their wellbeing - and that the institutions, services and	<input type="checkbox"/>	

facilities responsible for their care and protection conform with established standards.			
Article 6 Life, survival and development Every child has a right to life and to develop to their full potential.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Article 12 Respect for the views of the child Every child has a right to express their views and have them given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Children should be provided with the opportunity to be heard, either directly or through a representative or appropriate body.	<input type="checkbox"/>		

In relation to the articles identified above, please explain how the impact will be positive, negative or neutral.

Relevant identified Article of UNCRC	Impact category (Positive/Negative/Neutral)	Assessment of impact (including consideration of whether the policy/measure might impact differently on different groups of children and young people affected).

6. Your results

Considering the evidence logged above, complete the following questions where possible.

6.1 In what ways, if any, would this policy help to eliminate discrimination or undermine it? Consider any potential adverse impact identified above.

The reduction in resources will be undertaken in line with legislation and any selection processes will ensure there is no potential for discrimination. We will continue to develop online services and improve access to council services through a new telephony platform, to allow staff to focus on helping customers who are unable to go online or require urgent assistance.

6.2 In what ways, if any, would this policy advance or undermine equality of opportunity?

Customers - Residents who are more proficient and have access to digital technology, speak English and don't live with a disability may find it easier to access customer services. However as above, staff resourcing will ensure more disadvantaged and underrepresented groups are given a number of options for accessing customer support to meet their needs.

Staff - The HR team support managers with employee relations matters, and ensure cases are managed in line with legislation. Training is provided for managers, and this is already available. Reduced opportunity for career progression for all employees.

6.3 In what ways, if any, would this policy foster or undermine good relations between groups of people? Consider aspects that may tackle prejudice or promote understanding between different groups.

n/a

6.4 In what ways, if any, will this policy advance or undermine the rights of children and young people?

n/a

6.5 In what ways, if any, will this policy protect and promote the wellbeing of children and young people?

n/a

6.6 How will you communicate information about this policy to people who have: hearing and/or sight loss; English as a second language; are digitally excluded; have literacy/numeracy barriers?

Communication to staff and customers in relation to contacting customer services, waiting times and the promotion of online services.

Updates on our website can be made available in different formats like accessible PDF, large print, easy read, audio recording or braille.

Translation, interpretation and communication support services can be provided in alternative formats and languages. Our offices have audio induction loops, or we can arrange British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters.

Communications will be tailored to the employee group, and staff will be asked if any reasonable adjustments are required
6.7 Is this policy to be carried out wholly or partly by contractors? If yes, how will you incorporate equality expectations into the contract?
No

7. Your Outcome

7.1 Select the most appropriate				
<input type="checkbox"/> No major change <input type="checkbox"/> Adjust the policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue the policy <input type="checkbox"/> Stop the policy				
7.2 Are there any significant and relevant information gaps that have not been filled during the development of this policy?				
No				
7.3 What, in brief, does the evidence base underpinning the policy say about its potential impacts on inequalities of outcome?				
All Customers will potentially be impacted by the service reduction, however mitigations and supports will be put in place for any residents who require increased support and will address any potential inequalities to customers for the impact of the reduced service.				
7.4 What, in brief, does the evidence base underpinning the policy say about its potential impacts on the rights of children and young people?				
n/a				
7.5 Consider all evidence and findings of your assessment and complete this short action plan for addressing any potential adverse impact on people, including children and young people, in the policy itself, and in the way it is communicated/ implemented.				
Identified adverse impact	Mitigating circumstances	Mitigating actions	Timeline	Responsible person

Proposal may result in reduction in staff headcount to support service delivery	Due to the Council's financial position it may be difficult to find alternative roles	Prioritisation will be given to people seeking to be redeployed and a stringent recruitment process will be implemented.	March 2023 onwards	Customer Services Manager
Less flexibility with resources	Due to staff reduction there may be less flexibility with resources that could impact service delivery	Continue to review staff development and succession planning.	March 2023 onwards	Customer Services Manager
Increased waiting times	Less resource will impact customer waiting times across the service	Ensure that technology improvements to improve access to council services are delivered and continue to upskill staff and customers on online service delivery. Develop and improve service data to analyse service provision and forecast demand.	March 2023 onwards	Customer Services Manager
Increased inequality for underrepresented/disadvantaged groups.	The Council is legislatively bound to balance the budgets and this includes finding substantial savings over the next three years. Majority of Council spend is on staffing so there will have to be cuts made at staffing levels despite the impact on communities.	Targeted resourcing for customers who are unable to go online or require accessibility/translation supports Improved accessibility on website with ongoing review	March 2023 onwards March 2023 onwards	Customer Services Manager Communications Manager

	The Council is however under statutory obligation to deliver the requirements of the Equality Act /Duties so even with reduced capacity, priority areas of support will remain in place			
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8. Approval

Name of policy/proposal:	Budget Savings Proposal: Customer Services Reduction (Ref: BOP 1.2)
Approval date:	23/2/23
Approved by:	L Pringle, Director
Department:	Business Operations & Partnerships

9. No assessment required

Policy/Decision Title	
Department/ Service	
Responsible officer for taking decision	

Rationale for decision

Please record why an assessment is not required and what your justification is for making that decision. This must include confirmation that the policy/programme concerned does not constitute a strategic decision and/or has no relevance re protected characteristics, human rights or socio-economic inequalities

Declaration:

I confirm that the decision not to carry out an Equality, Fairness and Rights Impact Assessment has been authorised by:

Name and Job Title:

Date Authorisation given: