

## EQUALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## STAGE ONE: INITIAL SCREENING

1	Basic information	
1.1	<b>Name of service/function</b>	Democracy Commission
1.2	<b>What is being assessed?</b>	<p>The Democracy Commission has made a series of recommendations aimed at making Council Assembly more responsive and accountable to local people. Here is a brief summary of the recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore suitable alternative venues for housing Council Assembly meetings through out the borough in different locations.</li> <li>• Hold an annual State of the Borough meeting</li> <li>• Be more flexible on timing of meetings. For example a meeting on Health and Social Care that would particularly affect older people might be scheduled earlier in the evening or a ‘State of the Borough’ debate might be better held in the daytime.</li> <li>• Hold new informal sessions at the beginning of the meeting for informal dialogue and to allow residents to mix with members, to give information out about debates, explain the paperwork and meeting rules.</li> <li>• Make it easier for residents, the community and members to bring topical issues to assembly meetings by making it easier to bring deputations &amp; petitions and through strengthening links with community councils. It has been decided that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The amount of signatures that a resident needs to bring a petition to council assembly and trigger a debate is lowered from 2,500 to 1,500</li> <li>○ Up to three deputations are allowed at a meeting on “first come, first served” basis</li> <li>○ During members questions one member of community council will be allowed to submit a question on behalf the community council</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Introduce new themed meetings and debates to inform plans at an early stage. These will be on issues like housing, social care, budget cuts, services for young people etc.</li> <li>• Involve the community and residents in themed debate by holding early discussions in community councils and local forums prior to council assembly, as has been done recently with the budget. These will be led by the relevant Cabinet member.</li> <li>• Make better use of new technology, Southwark Life, local newspapers, notices board and bulletins to engage and communicate with residents and gather opinion and questions on debates held at Council Assembly on themes and plans.</li> <li>• Improve feedback</li> <li>• Work with of community partners to plan debates: for example the Youth Council might be involved in planning a themed debate on Families, children’s and young people.</li> </ul>
1.3	<b>Is this a new/existing function?</b>	The recommendations of the Democracy Commission will result in changes in the way the Council Assembly is organised (e.g. themed meetings) and run (e.g. use of alternate venues). It is therefore regarded as a new function for the purposes of this impact assessment.

1.4	<b>Has this function previously been impact assessed?</b>	No
1.5	<b>If no, what other evidence is there regarding the impact (positive/negative) of the service on equality groups?</b>	<p>The recommended changes to the Council Assembly reflect a broad community consultation process examining the state of democracy in Southwark and barriers and enablers to community participation.</p> <p>They were specifically designed to promote inclusion, community empowerment and greater accountability of elected representatives to local people.</p> <p><b>Community consultation</b></p> <p>The work of the commission has included extensive public consultation and involvement and has carried out specific work to consider the different access and equality needs across the six strands of the council's equality agenda: age, disability, faith/religion, gender, race and ethnicity and sexual orientation. Specifically, the Commission has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published information on the council website (<a href="http://www.southwark.gov.uk/democracy">www.southwark.gov.uk/democracy</a>) and encouraged people to fill out an online questionnaire.</li> <li>• Sent information by post and email to around 2,000 people that invited them to complete a paper questionnaire.</li> <li>• Analyzed the 262 questionnaires returned.</li> <li>• Held two focus groups with members of the public on Council Assembly. Members of the public viewed the 14 July Assembly meeting and then gave their comments on how public participation could be improved via two recorded discussions and written questionnaires.</li> <li>• Conducted a questionnaire with Members and held two focus groups with 4 Members in August.</li> <li>• Held a focus group with community leaders from the voluntary sector.</li> <li>• Recorded vox pops of the public out and about in Southwark. Around 100 voices of elected members, residents, and community leaders have been recorded so far (including recorded focus groups).</li> <li>• Held a conference attended by around 120 people with speakers from the Young Foundation and Birmingham University, a panel discussion, workshops and 'cafe conversations' on 'involving older people'; 'increasing access for disabled people' &amp; 'involving new &amp; BME communities'.</li> <li>• Officers contacted members of the LGBT Forum, the Multi-faith Forum and BME groups to invite members to participate to in focus groups, complete questionnaires and attend events. At the conference the Chairs of the Disability and Pensioners Forum were invited to attend and help facilitate these conversations.</li> </ul> <p>Each strand of the consultation work was monitored to measure which equality groups participated most in each engagement activity to help interpret the result, inform further work and gap analysis. Here are examples of some of the feedback received from specific groups</p> <p><u>Cafe conversation on BME engagement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language needs are also accessibility needs</li> <li>• Use of jargon – to be explained, carefully, bearing in mind that the explanations are being made to non-English speakers</li> <li>• Explain what the procedures are, e.g. for the Council Assembly</li> <li>• Formal documents should be translated also, e.g. Rent statements</li> </ul> <p><u>Cafe conversation with Older people</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold 1 council meeting in the afternoon a year because pensioners tend not to turn up if meetings are held late</li> </ul>

- Have meetings at Housing Neighbourhood Offices, to encourage people who would not otherwise attend because meeting venue is too far a distance to travel
- Have themed meetings for older people
- Councillors not listening enough
- Cater more for people with disabilities – including wheelchair users

#### Cafe conversation on accessibility issues for disabled people

- Participants especially those with hearing impairments found it difficult to contribute and hear due to open plan area and noise levels
- People need to know what facilities are available in advance of the meetings e.g. public transport, blue badge parking facilities, disabled toilets
- Need timely documents in advance in accessible format – not everyone has access to the internet. You can use IT for disabled people e.g. audio text for blind/partially sighted/hearing impairments

#### **Issues that were repeatedly mentioned across groups from several equality strands were:**

- Use of plain, un-jargonised English
- Provision of translation into other languages
- Need to explain structures and processes of local democracy (rules and procedures of Council Assembly, relation to central government etc.)
- Ensure full physical accessibility
- Importance of using appropriate communication channels and networks (not just the internet) to inform people about debates and how to get involved

It is proposed that a period of further consultation will inform how to go about addressing these potentially negative impacts.

#### **Next steps: Stage 2 community consultation**

In order to complete the consultation process and further inform this equalities impact assessment, it is proposed that the Commission's recommendations are disseminated through the following channels or groups. This will be accompanied by a specific call for feedback related to the equality strands, and suggestions on how to address known areas of concern (within budget constraints):

- Council website
- Community Councils email database
- To the 262 local people who completed questionnaires
- Members of the Youth Council, Pensioners Forum, Disability Forum, Multi-Faith Forum, LGBT Forum and BME groups
- Newer communities in Southwark – e.g. Polish, Latin American and French-speaking African groups

<p>Indicate on the following grid whether the proposed changes will have an adverse impact on communities related to <u>each</u> of the equality areas listed below. Where possible, address each equality strand in turn. Will it contribute to <u>inequality</u> or have a negative impact on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>equal opportunities</b> i.e. will it benefit or disadvantage certain groups on the basis of the grounds listed below?<sup>1</sup></li> <li>▪ <b>the elimination of discrimination</b> i.e. will it have a disproportionate impact on any of the groups listed below?</li> <li>▪ <b>promoting good relations</b> i.e. is there are risk that it will lead to worsening relations between members of different groups or exacerbate tensions between communities?</li> </ul>	
<b>EQUALITY STRAND</b>	<b>MIGHT THERE BE AN ADVERSE IMPACT?</b> Briefly explain why
<b>Race</b> (please add more categories as required)	
<b>Asian</b>	No. The recommendations should have a positive impact (see section 1.4) provided they are accompanied by targeted promotion and outreach into local communities with specific attention to addressing the race equality strands.
<b>Black</b>	As above.
<b>White</b>	As above.
<b>Mixed</b>	As above.
<b>Other (including gypsies and travellers, refugees and asylum seekers)</b>	<p>As above.</p> <p>For those whose first language is not English, the use of technical language and jargon has been highlighted as a barrier. There have been requests for plain English to be used. Whilst being mindful of the fact that the business of the Council is rooted in constitutional and legislative provisions, we propose to take this suggestion to the Council Assembly Business Panel to consider in their meeting in late January 2011. The Democracy Commission has recommended simplifying Council Assembly paperwork and this also needs to be addressed.</p> <p>Translation is offered at Council Assembly and Community Council meetings however there is no specific budget for this. If we are going to publicise these services more widely we will need to consider the impact they on engagement and crucially how they will be funded.</p>
<b>Gender</b>	
<b>Female</b>	No. The recommendations should have a positive impact (see section 1.4) provided they are accompanied by targeted promotion and outreach into local communities with specific attention to addressing the gender equality strands.
<b>Male</b>	As above.
<b>Transgender</b>	As above.
<b>Disability</b>	
<b>Learning disability</b>	No. The recommendations should have a positive impact (see section 1.4) provided they are accompanied by targeted promotion and outreach into local communities with specific attention to addressing the disability equality strands.
<b>Physical disability</b>	As above.
<b>Mental health</b>	As above.
<b>Deaf or hard of hearing</b>	<p>As above.</p> <p>Additionally, a new PA system is being requesting which will include an infra red-hearing aid system.</p> <p>Signing is offered at Council Assembly and Community Council meetings however there is no specific budget for this. To increase engagement we will need to publicise these services we will need to consider the impact on engagement and how they will be funded.</p>
<b>Visually-impaired</b>	<p>No. The recommendations should have a positive impact (see section 1.4) provided they are accompanied by targeted promotion and outreach into local communities with specific attention to addressing the disability equality strands.</p> <p>Additionally, It is important to ensure that information displayed on visual equipment (e.g. plasma screens) is clearly visible from public areas of the venue. Papers should be made easily available in large font and audio recordings of the meetings made available.</p>
<b>Other, including</b>	No. The recommendations should have a positive impact (see section 1.4) provided they are

<sup>1</sup> Special consideration is also to be given to Gypsies and Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers and people living on low incomes.

<b>carers</b>	<p>accompanied by targeted promotion and outreach into local communities with specific attention to addressing the disability equality strands.</p> <p>A carer's allowance is offered at Council Assembly and Community Council meetings however there is no specific budget for this. To increase engagement we will need to publicise these services and consider the impact on engagement and how they will be funded.</p>
<b>Religion/belief</b>	
<b>Buddhist</b>	No. The recommendations should have a positive impact (see section 1.4) provided they are accompanied by targeted promotion and outreach into local communities with specific attention to addressing the religion/belief equality strands.
<b>Christian</b>	As above.
<b>Hindu</b>	As above.
<b>Jewish</b>	As above.
<b>Muslim</b>	As above.
<b>Sikh</b>	As above.
<b>No religion/faith</b>	As above.
<b>Other</b>	As above.
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	
<b>Heterosexual</b>	
<b>Lesbian</b>	
<b>Gay</b>	
<b>Bisexual</b>	
<b>Age</b>	
<b>0-18</b>	<p>The recommendations should have a positive impact (see section 1.4) provided they are accompanied by appropriate outreach into local communities with specific attention to addressing the age equality strands.</p> <p>The use of jargon has been highlighted as a potential barrier. Whilst being mindful of the fact that the business of the Council is rooted in constitutional and legislative provisions, we propose to take this suggestion to the Council Assembly Business Panel to consider in their meeting in late January 2011. The Democracy Commission has recommended simplifying Council Assembly paperwork and this also needs to be addressed.</p>
<b>19-35</b>	As above.
<b>35-65</b>	As above.
<b>65 and over</b>	As above.
<b>Human Rights<sup>2</sup></b>	<p>The recommendations should have a positive impact (see section 1.4) on the human rights of local people.</p> <p>However, due regard needs to be given to a person's right to hold and express views as protected by Article 10 of the Human Rights Act, <b>Freedom of Expression</b>. The changes proposed to Council Assembly are designed to "increase democratic engagement with local people" and provide people with the opportunity to contribute directly to informal debates and bring deputations. This obviously opens up the possibility of views being expressed that may be unpopular or disturbing to others. As a public authority, the Council has obligations in relation to both those that may express such views, and those that may find them offensive or upsetting.</p> <p>The right to Freedom of Expression is protected by the Human Rights Act, but Article 10 also allows for this right to have conditions or restrictions placed upon it, provided that this is a proportionate response that has a legal basis (e.g. through constitutional provisions).</p>
<b>Gender re-assignment<sup>3</sup></b>	The recommendations should have a positive impact (see section 1.4)
<b>Pregnancy and Maternity<sup>4</sup></b>	The recommendations should have a positive impact (see section 1.4). Please see Venue Suitability framework which specifically addresses potential impacts in this area.

<sup>2</sup> The following two links provide useful guidance on the relevance of human rights generally, and specifically within the public sector: [www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/docs/human-rights-making-sense-human-rights.pdf](http://www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/docs/human-rights-making-sense-human-rights.pdf), [www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/docs/human-rights-handbook-for-public-authorities.pdf](http://www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/docs/human-rights-handbook-for-public-authorities.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> This strand or 'protected characteristic' is part of the new 2010 Equality Act and requires consideration

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The following areas are not formal equality strands but are important considerations in the context of this equality impact assessment:

<b>Community cohesion</b>	It is envisaged that the changes to Council Assembly will also have a positive impact on community cohesion. They involve specific measures to enable greater community-level influence and input into debates and meetings, greater flexibility around timings and location of meetings, the integration of technology and new media and an emphasis on greater informality. The community engagement division will play a crucial role in delivering on community cohesion objectives.
<b>Socio-economic exclusion</b>	It is envisaged that the changes to Council Assembly will also have a positive impact on reaching out to groups experiencing socio-economic exclusion. They involve specific measures to enable greater community-level influence and input into debates and meetings, greater flexibility around timings and location of meetings, the integration of technology and new media and an emphasis on greater informality. The community engagement division will play a crucial role in delivering on socio-economic inclusion objectives.

If you have answered **NO** in relation to any of the equality areas:

1. Provide evidence of your assessment (e.g. monitoring data, consultations, surveys)
2. Check your service rating in the schedule of relevance<sup>5</sup>, if your rating is:
  - **LOW - Confirm with Corporate Policy** that no further action to be taken
  - **MEDIUM/HIGH - Present report to Equality and Diversity Panel**

If you have answered **YES** in relation to any of the equality areas:

1. **Contact Legal Services for their feedback**
2. **Present report to Equality and Diversity Panel**

Assessment completed by:	
Name & Division	
Date	

Executive Member/IDM (individual decision making) authorisation <sup>6</sup> :	
Name	
Date	

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<sup>5</sup> [www.southwark.gov.uk/download/548/equalities\\_and\\_human\\_rights\\_scheme\\_2008\\_to\\_2011-schedule\\_of\\_relevance](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/download/548/equalities_and_human_rights_scheme_2008_to_2011-schedule_of_relevance)

<sup>6</sup> All EqlAs must be signed off by the executive Member with the portfolio of your service (individual decision making/IDM). Refer to constitutional guidelines for submitting the report:  
<http://thesource/SectionLandingPage.asp?id=3771&cat=1055>