



EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Partial Assessment Form

Policy, practice, function or project assessed	Schedule of Council Meetings, 2011/12
Lead Officer	Holly Adams, Democratic Services Team Leader
Team	Legal & Democratic Services
Start date of assessment	4 November 2010
Completion of assessment	8 December 2010

Please use this form to record your findings in relation to the assessment of an existing policy, function, service or practice.

A. POLICY, PRACTICE, FUNCTION OR PROJECT TO BE ASSESSED

A1. Please describe what are the main aims, objectives, purpose and intended outcomes of the policy or function?

To establish an appropriate scheduling for the 2011/12 meetings of full Council, the sovereign body of the District Council.

A2. Is this policy or function associated with any other Council policy or priority?

Yes, as the Council is the decision-making body responsible for the majority of significant decisions, including the adoption of policies and setting of the Council's priorities.

Specific Council policies would be the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change, the South Cambridgeshire Climate Change Action Plan and 10:10 Commitment (specifically, commitments relating to reduction of electricity and gas consumption and reduction in carbon emissions through reduction of individually claimed business mileage / commuting mileage), Members' Allowances Scheme, Petitions Scheme and the Scheme for Public Questions at meetings of the Council.

The Team Leader (Communities), as lead officer for sustainability and climate change issues, noted in the report to Council on 25 November 2010 about proposed 2011/12 meeting dates that, "Workshops, training events and other meetings are regularly scheduled on the same day as meetings of the full Council to maximise attendance and opportunities for car sharing or use of public transportation, and to minimise the number of journeys to and from the Council office. These are also scheduled during the day to minimise additional heating / cooling, lighting and electricity requirements outside of regular office hours, in accordance with the 2010/11 Council's priority to be an exemplar by reducing its annual carbon emissions by 10% by the end of the 2010/11 Council year (see also Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change, South Cambridgeshire Climate Change Action Plan and 10:10 commitment)."

A3. Who are the intended beneficiaries/stakeholders of the policy or function? How many people are affected and from what sections of the community?

57 District Councillors

Chief Executive, Acting Legal and Democratic Services Manager, Democratic Services Team Leader attend all meetings of full Council. Executive Directors and Corporate Managers also attend most meetings.

Officers from all service areas attend meetings of the Council, depending upon the agenda.

Residents of South Cambridgeshire who might attend meetings.

South Cambridgeshire Parish Councils who might attend meetings or who might experience a clash of meeting times if Council meetings were held in the evenings.

Local press.

Trade union representatives.

A4. Is the policy/function corporate and far-reaching?

Yes and no. Council meetings are essential to make decisions relating to the functioning of the authority and the welfare of South Cambridgeshire's residents; however, setting the meeting schedule is not a corporate and far-reaching function but an administrative undertaking to establish a calendar of meetings which best matches the Council's business needs.

A5. Are you expecting to make any significant change to the policy or service in the near future? If so, please give details.

No.

A6. Is this a new or existing policy or function?

Existing function. The Council meeting schedule is agreed annually.

B. EVIDENCE/ DATA and CONSULTATION

It is important to consider all information that is available in determining whether the policy or function could have a differential impact. Please attach examples of monitoring information, research or consultation reports.

B1. What monitoring or other information do you have about relevant target groups, which will show the impact of the policy or function?

Councillors' monitoring information is sought through voluntary completion of personal details forms upon election (available for updating upon request), which includes birth date, marriage or partners and family. Details of employment and any other paid work are required to be registered in the Register of Members' Interests; the Local Government Association's biennial census of local authority councillors also asks for details of voluntary work and caring responsibilities, and anonymised statistics are sent to all authorities.

Officers' monitoring information is available through the annual Workforce Plan.

Meetings are open to the public, so the local population profile would provide the best information about relevant target groups.

B2. Have you compared the data you have with the equality profile of the local population? What does it show?

No.

B3. Have you identified any improvements or other changes that could be made from monitoring the data?

The Democratic Services team regularly keeps track of public meeting attendance for use when preparing the annual meeting calendar; previous attempts to increase public attendance through scheduling evening Council meetings have not produced any improvements. If the Council seeks to increase public involvement in local democracy, there are other avenues which could be explored (e.g., webcasting), which are outside the scope of this report.

It is worth noting that members of the public and representatives of Parish Councils regularly attend daytime Planning Committee meetings, which suggests that public incentive to attend meetings is based upon items of local interest being on the agenda rather than the meeting start time.

B4. Have you consulted or involved external stakeholders about the policy or function? If so, what were their views?

Cambridgeshire County Council was consulted about the proposed dates and times but no response has been received.

B5. Have you undertaken any consultation with staff to assess their perception of any impacts of the policy or function? If so, what has been learnt from them?

Yes. Staff preference is for daytime meetings to help maintain a work-life balance and minimise impact on childcare arrangements. Daytime meetings afford a greater staff presence, especially if an officer's attendance is requested during the meeting to clarify a matter, assisting in informed decision-making.

B6. Please provide information about any other consultation, research, or involvement undertaken in relation to this impact assessment.

Examination of EQIAs undertaken at SCDC and elsewhere, such as Democratic Services completed in April 2010.

C1. IMPACT OF THE POLICY OR FUNCTION		
Assess the potential impact on each of the following protected characteristics. The impact could be negative, positive or neutral. If you assess a negative impact for any of the groups then you will need to assess whether that impact is low, medium or high. Refer to the evidence you use.		
DESCRIPTION OF IMPACT	Nature of Impact (Positive, Neutral, Adverse)	Extent of Impact (Low, Medium, High)
AGE: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on different age groups.		
It is felt that evening meetings may dissuade some elderly people from attending, particularly during the winter months. Lack of access to a private car and the absence of available public transport to South Cambridgeshire Hall in the evenings would compound these challenges.	Adverse	Medium
It is felt that evening meetings may encourage younger people to attend, particularly those who are approaching voting age but whose education commitments could prohibit attendance at daytime meetings.	Positive	
DISABILITY: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on disabled people.		
Reduced care arrangements and lack of available public transport to South Cambridgeshire Hall in the evenings could limit the potential for disabled people to attend evening meetings, particularly those who are unable to drive (partially sighted, mobility issues).	Adverse	High
GENDER REASSIGNMENT: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on people that have changed gender identity.		
It is felt that the meeting times and dates would not have a differential impact on individuals who have undergone or are undergoing gender reassignment.	Neutral	
MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on people who are married or in a civil partnership.		
It is felt that the meeting times and dates would not have a differential impact on individuals who are married or in a civil partnership.	Neutral	

PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on pregnant or maternal mothers and those women who wish to breastfeed.		
<p>Whilst daytime meetings place a challenge on parents and carers of very young children, when one parent could be at work, late afternoon or early evening meetings impact on parents and carers of older school aged children or other dependents.</p> <p>The Council currently does not have facilities for mothers to breastfeed whilst attending Council meetings (this is being addressed by the Customer Service Excellence project).</p>	<p>Neutral</p> <p>Adverse</p>	
RACE: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on different ethnic groups, including national origins, colour and nationality.		
It is felt that the meeting times and dates would not have a differential impact on individuals based on their race.	Neutral	
RELIGION/BELIEF: Identify the potential impact the policy or function on different religious/faith groups.		
<p>It is felt that the meeting times and dates would not have a differential impact on individuals based on their religion or belief. The 2011/12 Council meeting dates have been compared to the BBC Interfaith Calendar (http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/). Although two of the Council meeting dates correspond with events in the Jewish and Sikh(*) calendars, the events concerned are not religious holidays in the UK, nor do they have requirements which would prohibit followers from attending meetings on those dates, regardless of the meeting time.</p> <p>(*) The correspondence between dates was accurate at the time this EQIA was prepared, but representative institutions of the Sikh community are divided over a move to change the date of observing the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur from 24 November to 10 December from 2011.</p>	Neutral	
SEX: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on men and women.		
Guidance issued by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in October 2010 gave the example of a possible discrimination claim being made against an authority by a woman who was unable to attend an evening event because of childcare responsibilities, and if she could	Neutral	

<p>demonstrate that fewer women than men were able to attend due to domestic responsibilities; however, this does not appear to take into consideration the fact that men also have domestic responsibilities, including childcare, and would equally be entitled to possible discrimination claims. The guidance also does not address the impact of daytime meetings on men and women in full-time employment, both of whom could be equally disadvantaged by meetings which clash with part of the working day, or with any of their respective evening commitments.</p> <p>With these issues in mind, it is felt that meeting times would not have a differential impact on individuals based on their sex.</p>		
<p>SEXUAL ORIENTATION: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on lesbian, gay men, bisexual or heterosexual people.</p>		
<p>It is felt that the meeting times and dates would not have a differential impact on individuals based on their sexual orientation.</p>	Neutral	
<p>OTHER CHARACTERISTIC SPECIFIC TO SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE – RURALITY: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on people who are rurally isolated.</p>		
<p>Rurality links in with the age and disability description above. See also the comments by the Team Leader (Communities) with respect to other Council policies and priorities at A2. Furthermore, the rural nature of the district reduces the likelihood of attendees arriving for meetings on foot or by bicycle both because of the lack of footpaths and cycleways linking Cambourne to other South Cambridgeshire villages, and the increased risks of early evening or nighttime walking or cycling, particularly in winter months.</p> <p>South Cambridgeshire has ninety parish councils, one community council and ten parish meetings, all of which meet in the evenings. Local district councillors, if not already members of the parish / community council or meeting, often are invited to attend. South Cambridgeshire District Councillors also represent the authority on outside bodies and partnership groups, or are volunteers for local groups in their own right, and the vast majority of these (and all of the parish councils) meet in the evening. It would be impossible to schedule evening meetings which did not clash with one or more meetings Councillors would also be expected to attend.</p>	<p>Adverse</p> <p>Neutral</p>	High

PLEASE NOTE: Following completion of the section above, if the nature of the impact is adverse then you may need to proceed to a full equality impact assessment.

C2. Could you minimise or remove any adverse or potential impact that is high, medium or low significance, in advance of a full impact assessment? Explain how.

Daytime meetings would minimise adverse or potentially adverse impacts on elderly and disabled people, or people travelling on foot or by bicycle, would help the Council meet its commitment to reduce its carbon emissions and the number of business miles claimed for individual journeys, and would improve the attendance at short notice by officers to provide additional clarification, ensuring informed decision-making; however, daytime meetings also have a likely adverse impact on younger people and people in full-time employment who are unable to claim time off during working hours as afforded to Councillors by the Employment Rights Act 1996, Section 50.

C3. Does the policy or function actively promote equal opportunities and good community relations? Or could changes be made so that it does so?

The schedule of Council meetings is largely an administrative decision, although the business conducted by the Council at these meetings will take account of equal opportunities and good community relations for each separate issue under consideration. See also C4.

C4. Please provide any further information, qualitative or quantitative that does not fit into the questions but you feel has a likely impact on this assessment.

Guidance issued by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in October 2010 stated that: "Children's bed times dictate when parents need to be at home, shift patterns mean some people are working in the evening and older people may feel vulnerable when out after dark. The idea of a consultation is to get the views of a community on important issues. So that it gets the broadest range of representation on which to base decisions, it's sensible for a public body to think about who it wants to consult with and what time of day those people might be available."

The Council should consider its desired outcome from changing meeting times: is it to increase public attendance?

If so, the evidence of the past few years shows that it is not the meeting time but the business being conducted at the meeting which generates public interest. The highest level of public attendance is at Planning Committee meetings, which have always been held during the day, because the decisions being made by the Planning Committee have personal relevance to the attendees; public questions about drainage in Lower Cambourne and remediation works at Hauxton were put to Council at a daytime meetings in 2010/11 because these were issues of significant local importance. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee's analysis of its meetings held outside the Cambourne offices also concluded that public attendance was highest when an item of local interest was on the agenda, e.g., the Mays Avenue Bedsit Scheme in Balsham was considered at a meeting held in Balsham village.

Another important consideration is to maintain a consistent approach: a mixed schedule of daytime and evening meetings for the same body increases the confusion about when meetings are being held: again citing the Planning Committee as an example, it is very easy to remember that it meets on the first Wednesday of each month at 2 pm in the Council Chamber, but it is less easy to remember that Cabinet meets usually every other month on the first or second Thursday, sometimes at 2 pm and sometimes at 7 pm.

The decisions being made by the Council do have an impact on all South Cambridgeshire residents, but it would be impossible to set a schedule which did not adversely impact some residents. If the Council is genuinely interested in increasing public accessibility to meetings, it could consider alternatives such as recording meetings and making the sound file publicly available, webcasting (either livestreaming or uploaded afterwards to sites such as YouTube, which offer a subtitling service for hearing impaired viewers), or using free social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook to provide live updates of what is happening during a meeting (as done by Blackburn with Darwen District Council on 8 November 2010, cited by *the Guardian* as “A fantastic way to report a council cuts meeting”, and at Kirklees Borough Council to supplement their webcast).

D. CONCLUSIONS			
D1. Was there sufficient data to complete the partial assessment?	Yes?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	If “NO”, what arrangements are in place for evidence gathering and continuing with the assessment?
	No?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
D2. Is the outcome of the partial assessment that the policy or function would have an adverse impact (medium or high impact) on one or more target group?	Yes?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	If “YES”, will you proceed to a full assessment? If so, what arrangements are in place to carry out the full assessment? A full assessment has been recommended by the Equalities Steering Group due to the adverse impacts identified; however, the adverse impacts could be minimised by scheduling daytime meetings or late afternoon meetings (e.g., 4 pm start time during summer months, with meetings timed to end before the last public transport service leaves from Cambourne Business Park in the evening).
	No?	<input type="checkbox"/>	

D3. Is the outcome of the partial assessment that the policy or function would have a neutral or positive impact on equalities?	Yes?	X	If “YES”, have you included proposals in the Action Plan to further improve the impact of the policy or function on equalities? Difficult to say: ultimately the decision on meeting dates and times is up to each constituent body of the Council. If the authority wishes to explore alternative methods of public engagement, that would be a separate issue, but some suggestions are listed in the action plan.
	No?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you plan to review the service or policy again in future to assess whether there has been any change? If so, when? Periodic review should be undertaken every four years to accord with the electoral cycle, unless any significant events (e.g., new legislation) indicate otherwise. Has the Equalities Steering Group and the Consultative Forum reviewed the assessment? If so what were their comments? Yes, and their comments have been incorporated into the body of the assessment.
D4. Do you have any other conclusions/outcomes from the partial assessment? As given under C4: whilst acknowledging that no one meeting time will accommodate everyone, the Council needs to determine what is the outcome sought and whether other ways of promoting decision-making will have a positive impact on increasing public interest in local democracy.			

ACTION PLAN for enhancing existing practice

Recommendation / issue to be addressed	Planned Milestone	Planned completion of milestone (date)	Officer Responsible	Progress
Public-i presentation to Democratic Services, Head of ICT and Facilities Manager on webcasting and video conferencing (potential EU grant funding identified)	Feedback views to Chief Executive Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder December 2010	w/c 29 November 2010	Holly Adams, Democratic Services Team Leader	Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder recommended exploration of hyperlocal websites as part of the 2011/12 Service Plan for Democratic Services, as a means of improving public engagement.
Social media policy and usage guidelines	Final policy adopted by relevant Portfolio Holder (either Policy and Performance – as part of Information and Communications Technology responsibilities, and / or Northstowe – as part of Improvement and Communications responsibilities)	Winter 2010/11	Emma Lowther, Communications Manager	Underway

RESOURCES

Does the above action plan require any additional resources?

Depends upon decisions taken regarding webcasting and social media use. Webcasting could incur significant cost to install, but potential EU grant funding has been identified, and joint procurement could be undertaken with Cambridge City Council and Cambridgeshire Horizons, both of which are also looking at the same system. Social media use would have implications for officers' time, but would otherwise be free of charge.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR MONITORING

Please give your plans for monitoring the achievement of the above actions.

Decisions will be taken in public meetings, administered by the Democratic Services Team, and implementation actions will be overseen by the relevant service area manager(s).

SIGN OFF: The officers below confirm that this partial assessment has been completed in accordance with the Council's guidance

Signature of Lead Officer

Date:

Signature of Corporate Manager or Chief Officer:

Date:

Please retain the original form on your service area and return a copy of the completed form to the Equality & Diversity Officer.