

# Equality Impact Assessment

Enable increased access to Council services by continuing to increase opportunities for on-line access 24/7 (including HelpShop closure)

## Section 1: Introduction and background

<b>What is being assessed?</b>	Closure of Helpshop
<b>Business unit</b>	Customer Services
<b>Job title of assessor</b>	Customer Care Manager
<b>Strategic Management Lead</b>	Paul Anderson
<b>Date of assessment</b>	13 October 2021
<b>Is this a new or existing function or policy?</b>	Existing

### Description of the function or policy, including:

- **The aims and scope**
- **The main beneficiaries or users**
- **The main equality issues and barriers, and the protected characteristics<sup>1</sup> they relate to (not all assessments will encounter issues relating to every protected characteristic)**

Enable increased access to Council services by continuing to increase opportunities for on-line access 24/7 (including HelpShop closure)

The HelpShop is located in the Leatherhead library. The allocated room is small and does not allow for social distancing. Prior to the pandemic it was staffed by one member of the Customer Services team providing local residents with the opportunity to access some limited council services in person without having to travel to Dorking. The most common reasons for visiting the HelpShop were:

- Sacks/food caddies
- SCC enquiries (e.g. bus timetables)
- Payment kiosk
- Parking enquiries

Footfall at the HelpShop prior to the coronavirus outbreak was low. Annual stats demonstrate a steady decrease with 6,611 for 2013-14 falling to 2,724 in 2019-20. For January to December 2019 (so no COVID-19 effect) on average we received just 11 enquiries a day; on many days this would reduce to single figures and on 30 occasions we recorded either 0 or 1 enquiries received. The HelpShop has been closed since March 2020 due to the pandemic.

It is considered that the main beneficiaries were those who preferred face to face contact, those who were visiting the library anyway and could therefore pop in and those who were unable/unwilling to engage with the council over the phone or online.

We do not collect personal data specific to people with protected characteristics when they contact the Council. It is possible that some elderly or disabled people might experience difficulties in using online services or possibly using a telephone in which case there is mitigation in place to assist these residents.

<sup>1</sup>The protected characteristics are age, sex, disability, pregnancy and maternity, race and ethnicity, religion and belief, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, and marriage and civil partnership (Source: Equality Act 2010)

**Description of how the function or policy fits into the Council's Corporate Priorities or other local, regional or national plans and priorities**

Closing the HelpShop aligns with the guiding principle of the Council Strategy of 'Living within our Means' and 'Openness and Accessibility' The work we have done to provide services in other ways fits with the principle of 'Acting Sustainably' and 'Putting People First'.

## Section 2: Analysis and assessment

Indicate for each protected characteristic whether there may be a positive impact, negative impact, a mixture of both or no impact – using a tick <input type="checkbox"/> in the appropriate columns				
Protected characteristics	Positive	Negative	No impact	Reason
Age		✓		Closing the HelpShop may impact the elderly who prefer a face to face visit or who do not have access to a computer.
Sex			✓	It is not considered that closing the HelpShop will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on a person's sex
Disability		✓		Closing the HelpShop may impact those who are disabled and find it difficult to use a phone or computer e.g. due to hearing loss or physical disability
Pregnancy and maternity			✓	It is not considered that closing the HelpShop will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on people who are pregnant or on maternity leave
Race and ethnicity			✓	It is not considered that closing the HelpShop will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on a person's race and ethnicity
Religion and belief			✓	It is not considered that closing the HelpShop will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on a person's religion and beliefs
Gender reassignment			✓	It is not considered that closing the HelpShop will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on any gender reassignment
Sexual orientation			✓	It is not considered that closing the HelpShop will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on a person's sexual orientation

Indicate for each protected characteristic whether there may be a positive impact, negative impact, a mixture of both or no impact – using a tick  in the appropriate columns

Protected characteristics	Positive	Negative	No impact	Reason
Marriage and civil partnership			✓	It is not considered that closing the HelpShop will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on whether a person is married or in a civil partnership
Other aspects to consider	Positive	Negative	No impact	Reason
Carers			✓	No immediate implications
Rural/urban access issues		✓		There could be implications for those who may have difficulty travelling
HR issues (how will staff with protected characteristics be affected?)			✓	No immediate implications

**What can be done to reduce the effects of any negative impacts?**  
 Where negative impact cannot be completely diminished, can this be justified, and is it lawful?

Customers are used to the HelpShop being closed and are engaging with us in other ways. In addition services previously offered at the HelpShop have already been adjusted to avoid the need for residents to visit in person:

- Customer Services can be contacted by telephone 8.30am-5pm Monday to Friday
- A textphone is also available during these hours
- Our website is available 24/7 with more than 69 online forms available to enable easy access to services online
- Waste sacks are delivered regularly to those customers who need them
- Replacement food caddies are delivered on request
- Payments can be made by card online and via the telephone payment line, by cheque and by bank transfer. Revenues are exploring the addition of barcodes on the annual council tax bill to facilitate cash payments at other outlets
- Many services offer remote support using telephone, social media, email etc..
- Appointments can be made to visit the Dorking offices if necessary
- The Mole Valley Employment and Skills Hub located in the Swan Centre provides employment and skills support to local residents and businesses and is used by various community groups including Clarion Housing

- The Leatherhead Community Hub provides support to the people of North Leatherhead

During 2020/21 we have re-designed many of our online forms to be more user-friendly and we are seeing a considerable uptake in their usage.

Leatherhead library has re-opened which means that residents with general enquiries (HelpShop visitors often don't know which Council they should be contacting) can be addressed to library staff who are able to refer to the MVDC website if appropriate. Customers who do not have access to a computer themselves can make use of the self-serve PCs available at Leatherhead library or at the Pippbrook offices.

**Where there are positive impacts, what changes have been or will be made?**

Who are the beneficiaries? How have they benefited?

No positive impacts for people with protected characteristics have been identified in this assessment

**Section 3: Evidence gathering and fact-finding**

**What evidence is available to support your views above?**

Please include:

- A summary of the available evidence
- Identification of where there are gaps in the evidence (this may identify a need for more evidence in the action plan)
- What information is currently captured with respect to usage and take up of services.
- What the current situation is in relation to equality and diversity monitoring (where relevant)

Footfall data for the HelpShop has been collected regularly and has been used to inform this assessment. Statistics are set out in the first section of this assessment: 'Description of this policy or function'. No formal complaints have been received in relation to the HelpShop following closure in March 2020.

We do not keep records of any data specific to people with protected characteristics who contact the Council whether that is by phone, email or in person

**How have stakeholders been involved in this assessment?**

Who are they, and what is their view?

Service Managers and the Strategic Leadership Team have been involved in considering the revised arrangements. The Customer Care Champions group has also been consulted. A review of service provision and usage of HelpShop before the pandemic has helped inform this approach.

### Recommendations

Summary of the main recommendations (if any) arising from the assessment

Given the already significantly reduced usage of the HelpShop service prior to coronavirus and the improvements made to service delivery over the past 18 months while the HelpShop has been closed, there are no compelling reasons to retain this service. The financial saving that would be made is significant.

There are no specific recommendations relating to protected groups arising as a result of this assessment. The mitigations already in place, as set out in the section 'What can be done to reduce the effects of any negative impacts?' are considered to be sufficient.

### Section 4: Action Plan

Actions needed to implement the EqlA recommendations (if any)

Issue	Action	Expected outcome	Who	Deadline for action
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a