

Equality Impact Assessment

Reception October 2021



Section 1: Introduction and background

What is being assessed?	Reception Services
Business unit	Customer Services Unit (CSU)
Job title of assessor	Customer Care Manager
Strategic Management Lead	Paul Anderson
Date of assessment	07.09.21
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	Existing function. New arrangements effective from 4 October 2021

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 characteristics¹ they relate to (not all assessments will encounter issues relating to every protected characteristic)**

The reception area of the Council offices at Pippbrook welcomes visitors to the authority and provides space for meetings, appointments and the opportunity to self-serve in order to access Council services.

The main users of reception are the general public, although partners, agencies and colleagues from other authorities may also attend Pippbrook for various reasons and will enter via the reception area.

The opening hours of and services provided by the reception area will impact on all visitors to Pippbrook. This was taken into consideration during the development of the revised working arrangements. It is intended that the opening of reception by appointment only will provide positive benefits which are reflected in this document. The negative of the shortened hours of operation (9am to 2.30pm) have been suitably negated through providing services in a different manner such as online and by phone. The ability to make an appointment to see an officer in person will positively impact those who find it difficult to use a computer or the telephone due to a disability.

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

Opening reception on an appointment only basis and on reduced hours aligns with some of the guiding principles of the Council Strategy including Living within our means, Openness and Accessibility and Putting People First. It also aligns with the Community Wellbeing priority: 'Active communities and support for those who need it'.

¹The 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)

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			√	It is not considered that the opening of reception by appointment only 9am to 2.30pm will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on a person's age. People of working age may find the offer of an appointment more suitable in order to manage their work time, as opposed to sitting and waiting. Outside of these opening hours, people of working age can access services remotely e.g. online, by telephone
Sex			√	It is not considered that the opening of reception by appointment only 9am to 2.30pm will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on a person's sex
Disability	√			The Community Wellbeing priority is focussed on active communities and support for those who need it . This expresses the Council's commitment to help provide support in person for those who need extra assistance or where self-serve is not available. The ability to make an appointment to see an officer in person will positively impact those who find it difficult to self-serve online or use the telephone due to a disability.

Pregnancy and maternity			√	It is not considered that the opening of reception by appointment only 9am to 2.30pm 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 the opening of reception by appointment only 9am to 2.30pm will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on a person's race or ethnicity
Religion and belief			√	It is not considered that the opening of reception by appointment only 9am to 2.30pm will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on a person's religion or beliefs
Gender reassignment			√	It is not considered that the opening of reception by appointment only 9am to 2.30pm will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on people who have undergone or are undergoing gender reassignment
Sexual orientation			√	It is not considered that the opening of reception by appointment only 9am to 2.30pm will have a significant impact, positive or negative, based on a person's sexual orientation
Marriage and civil partnership			√	It is not considered that the opening of reception by appointment only 9am to 2.30pm 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			√	No immediate implications
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?

Services previously offered at reception have already been adjusted to avoid the need for residents to visit in person:

- Waste sacks are delivered to those customers who need them
- Replacement food caddies are delivered on request
- Payments can be made online, via the telephone payment line and by cheque (the kiosk will be removed)

Deliveries will continue to be received via reception. Outside of opening hours an officer can be called to collect items

Meetings can still be held outside of reception opening hours and managed by the service area concerned and supported, if necessary, by Customer Services

Many services offer remote support using telephone, social media, email etc..

Customers can self-serve using our website – more than 65 forms are now online

Pre-booked appointments can be made to see an officer in person if required

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

Who are the beneficiaries? How have they benefited?

By offering pre-booked appointments customers will avoid the possibility of a long wait

By speaking to the customer first, services may be able to assist them remotely thereby negating the need for them to make a special journey to Dorking

By delivering certain items that would previously have been collected, we are making it more convenient for customers to access those services (sacks and caddies)

Self-serve computers are provided in reception if required

If a customer were to arrive without an appointment, a telephone consultation can be arranged so the visit is not wasted

The desired outcome of this approach is to ensure that we continue to provide remote support where at all possible while also ensuring that should a face to face meeting be necessary, this can still be provided.

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)

Evidence of decreasing footfall prior to the coronavirus pandemic together with improved service delivery via other means, has helped to inform this revised approach.

The review of reception services has taken into account the learning from the impact of coronavirus. For much of the past 18 months reception has been closed and services have developed other ways of being able to support residents remotely. We have also improved services by offering home delivery of some items. Where we have been able to offer appointments for a face to face visit during the pandemic these have been well received. Appointments enable visitors to plan ahead for their visit to Dorking and by agreeing the appointment in advance with the relevant staff member it is possible ensure that a resident arrives with all relevant documentation, making the visit as efficient as possible. Operating by appointment also avoids the potential for extended waiting for an officer to become available.

The opening hours of 9am to 2.30pm ensures that the most popular time for appointments (the morning) is still fully provided for, together with the flexibility to extend into the afternoon if required. These opening hours also ensure an efficient use of resources while still maintaining service delivery during the lunch period.

A survey of other Surrey authorities has shown that reduced hours and/or appointment only are approaches being taken by a number of other Councils.

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 discussed these arrangements prior to implementation

A review of service provision and usage of reception before and during the pandemic has helped inform this approach.

Recommendations
Summary of the main recommendations (if any) arising from the assessment
None

Section 4: Action Plan

Actions needed to implement the EqlA recommendations (if any)

Issue	Action	Expected outcome	Who	Deadline for action