



Northumberland County Council

Equality Impact Assessment Guidance and Assessment Form

Version	3
Policy Sub Group & approval date	
Date approved by Joint Consultative Committee	
Name of policy author	Irene Fisher / Amy Norton
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Target audience	All NCC Employees

Equality Impact Assessment Guidance

This document provides guidance for completing an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).

Northumberland County Council is committed to promoting equality and participation in all our activities, in the work we do with residents and for visitors to our county and in our responsibilities as an employer. As a public sector organisation, the County Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and is legally required to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations when making decisions and developing policies.

To do this, it is necessary to understand the potential impacts of what we do on different groups of people.

What is an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and why do we need to complete one?

An equality impact assessment (EIA) is an evidence-based approach designed to help organisations ensure that their policies, procedures, practices, and decision-making processes are fair and do not present barriers to participation or cause disadvantage to any protected groups. This covers both strategic and operational activities.

An EIA will help to ensure that we are meeting our PSED duties and:

- we understand the effects of a proposed policy or decision by assessing the potential impacts on different groups of residents or staff
- any negative impacts are identified, and actions are taken to remove or mitigate them
- any positive impacts are highlighted
- decisions are based on evidence and meet legal requirements

When might I need to complete an EIA?

Whether an EIA is needed or not will depend on the likely impact that the policy may have and relevance of the activity to equality. If a policy or decision will affect employees or service users, then it is likely to need an assessment. The EIA should be started when the need to change a service, a new policy or a new proposal is being developed, or when an existing policy or procedure is reviewed. Advice can be sought from the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion team when you are considering the impact of a new policy or other proposal.

The EIA should form part of the development of any new policy or proposal and be factored in at an early stage in the same way as other considerations such as risk, budget or health and safety.

Who is responsible for completing and signing off the EIA?

The Head of Service will identify who will be responsible for completing the EIA and a manager who will sign off the EIA. It is helpful to involve more than one person, if possible, to take account of different perspectives.

The responsibility for deciding whether an EIA is needed, and the evaluation of any impact identified after completing the EIA lies with the decision maker, budget holder, project board or the most relevant senior manager. Heads of service can delegate responsibility for signing EIAs to appropriate managers in their service. Further advice is available from the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion team.

What is discrimination?

Discrimination is when someone is treated less favourably or put at a disadvantage because of their protected characteristic. The different groups covered by the Equality Act are referred to as protected characteristics these are: disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, sex, and age.

Discrimination is usually unintended and can often remain undetected until there is a complaint. Improving or promoting equality means you are proactive in identifying ways to remove barriers and improve participation for people or groups with a protected characteristic and you do not wait until there is a complaint. The EIA process is a way of positively considering and promoting equality.

Finding the evidence to make a judgement

In cases of new policies or management decisions there may be little evidence of the potential effect on protected characteristic groups. In such cases you will need to make a judgement that is as reliable as possible based on the information you do hold. Consultation will help to make decisions that avoid unintended prejudices or assumptions. It is important to show that consultation has involved a diverse range of people. Equality monitoring is important in consultation as it shows who has responded. Where groups have been underrepresented in a consultation, or where the proposal has the potential to impact on particular protected groups, additional targeted consultation with those groups may be needed. You should also consider any evidence from national or regional research, specialist reports or national consultation.

Consultation

Consultation can add evidence to the assessment. Consultation is important and is a keyway to demonstrate that the County Council is meeting its equality duties, but any consultation needs to be proportionate and relevant. Considering the degree and range of consultation will safeguard against 'groupthink' by involving a diverse range of consultees. These are the key considerations, to avoid over-consultation on a small policy or practice and under-consultation on a significant policy or an activity that has the potential to create barriers to participation.

Provisional Assessment

At the initial stages, you may not have all the evidence you need but you can still carry out a provisional assessment. A provisional assessment will identify plans to gather the required data needed to enable a full assessment to be completed within a reasonable timeframe. The scale of these plans should be proportionate to the activity at hand. When enough evidence has been collected, a full impact assessment can be carried out. Only one EIA needs to be created for each policy because, as more evidence becomes available, the provisional assessment should be reviewed and built upon.

Valuing Differences

EIAs (Equality Impact Assessments) are about making comparisons between groups of employees, service users or stakeholders to identify differences in their needs and/or requirements. If the difference is disproportionate, then the policy may have a detrimental impact on some and not others.

You are looking for bias that can occur when there are significant differences (disproportionate difference) between groups of people in the way a policy or practice has impacted on them, asking the question “Why?” and investigating further.

Evaluation Decision

There are four options open to you:

1. No barriers or impact identified; therefore, activity will **proceed**.
2. You can decide to **stop** the policy or practice at some point because the evidence shows bias towards one or more groups
3. You can **adapt or change** the policy in a way which you think will eliminate the bias, or will promote equality
4. Barriers and impact are identified, however having considered all available options carefully, there appear to be no other proportionate ways to achieve the aim of the policy or practice (e.g., in extreme cases or where positive action is taken). Therefore, you are going to **proceed with caution** with this policy or practice knowing that it may favour some people more than others, providing justification for this decision.

In most cases, where disproportionate disadvantage is found by carrying out EIAs, policies and practices are usually changed or adapted (Option 3 above). In these cases, or when a change has been justified, you should consider making a record of this in the report prepared for the person, board, or committee making the decision.

Equality Impact Assessment – Overview and Form

Carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) helps the County Council to meet its Public Sector Equality Duties (Equality Act 2010).

The duties which need to be considered when making decisions are to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

Failure to assess the equality impact may increase the risk of making an unfair decision which could potentially be discriminatory. It also prevents us from identifying opportunities to promote equality and leaves the County Council open to potential legal challenges.

Guidance; Using this EIA template will help to ensure that a decision is made in a fair way, based on evidence. It provides a clear and structured method to assess the potential impact on protected groups. [Further Guidance can be found here.](#)

EIA Form

Section 1: Policy Details

Name of policy, proposal, activity, or decision being assessed

Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025-2035 – development, consultation, finalisation and implementation.

Directorate, Service and Team

Environment and Transport

Neighbourhood Services

Countryside and Green Spaces Team

Summary of aims and objectives of the policy, proposal, activity, or decision being assessed

Guidance; this is where you explain what you are aiming to do. This must be written in plain English with no jargon or abbreviations as it may be read by a member of the public and must be clear and accessible to them.

Development, consultation, publishing and implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the period 2025-2035. The document sets out the aims, objectives and policies in respect of Rights of Way management and enhancement for 2025-2035.

What information is already held, or have you obtained through consultation or engagement activity?

Guidance; You can use [Census Data for Northumberland](#), information from [Know Northumberland](#), any feedback, suggestions or complaints from service users, staff or service user/ residents survey's, information from other organisations (e.g. NCHT, Charites or voluntary organisations), targeted engagement with protected groups who may be affected, national or regional evidence or research if there are gaps in evidence.

Process is currently pre-consultation stage. Stakeholders and partner organisation contact details will be used for consultation. Public consultation will be via online portal (respondents may agree to submit their contact details or may wish to remain anonymous).

Data used to inform the ROWIP is public domain.

Section 2: Impact on Protected characteristics

Protected Characteristic	Additional information to consider	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact? (Yes/No)	Please explain and give examples of any evidence or data used	Potential action to address negative impact (e.g., adjustment to the policy)
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Age guidance:	Older People (65+)	Yes	<p>The ROWIP includes policy and actions to deliver accessibility improvements on the ground and improved access to information relating to rights of way and access.</p> <p>The policy and actions within the ROWIP seek to bring about improvements to health and wellbeing for all groups.</p>	
	Younger People (16-64)	Yes	<p>The policy and actions within the ROWIP are intended to result in positive changes in respect of access to the countryside that will encourage more use and improve health and wellbeing for all.</p>	
	Children (0-16)	Yes	<p>The policy and actions within the ROWIP are intended to result in positive changes in respect of access to the countryside that will encourage more use and improve health and wellbeing for all.</p>	
	Looked After Children	Yes	<p>The policy and actions within the ROWIP are intended to result in positive changes in respect of access to the countryside that will encourage more use and improve health and wellbeing for all.</p>	
Disability Guidance	Physical Disability	Yes	<p>The ROWIP includes policy and actions to deliver accessibility improvements on the ground and improved access to information relating to rights of way and access.</p> <p>The policy and actions within the ROWIP seek to bring about improvements to health</p>	

			<p>and wellbeing for all groups.</p> <p>Information on ROW and access will be available in alternative formats.</p>	
	Sensory Impairment	Yes	<p>The ROWIP includes policy and actions to deliver accessibility improvements on the ground and improved access to information relating to rights of way and access.</p> <p>The policy and actions within the ROWIP seek to bring about improvements to health and wellbeing for all groups.</p> <p>Information on ROW and access will be available in alternative formats.</p>	
	Mental Health	Yes	<p>The ROWIP includes policy and actions to deliver accessibility improvements on the ground and improved access to information relating to rights of way and access.</p> <p>The policy and actions within the ROWIP seek to bring about improvements to health and wellbeing for all groups.</p>	
	Neurodiversity/ Learning Disability	Yes	<p>The ROWIP includes policy and actions to deliver accessibility improvements on the ground and improved access to information relating to rights of way and access.</p> <p>The policy and actions within the ROWIP seek to bring about improvements to health and wellbeing for all groups.</p>	

			Information on ROW and access will be available in alternative formats.	
Marriage or civil partnership Guidance		Yes	The policy and actions within the ROWIP are intended to result in positive changes in respect of access to the countryside that will encourage more use and improve health and wellbeing for all.	
Protected Characteristic	Additional information to consider	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact? (Yes/No)	Please explain and give examples of any evidence or data used	Potential action to address negative impact (e.g., adjustment to the policy)
Gender reassignment Guidance		Yes	The policy and actions within the ROWIP are intended to result in positive changes in respect of access to the countryside that will encourage more use and improve health and wellbeing for all.	
	Gender Identity <i>(although this is not currently a protected characteristic)</i>	Yes	The policy and actions within the ROWIP are intended to result in positive changes in respect of access to the countryside that will encourage more use and improve health and wellbeing for all.	
<u>Pregnancy and maternity</u> Guidance		Yes	The policy and actions within the ROWIP are intended to result in positive changes in respect of access to the countryside that will encourage more use and improve health and wellbeing for all.	

Protected Characteristic	Additional information to consider	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact? (Yes/No)	Please explain and give examples of any evidence or data used	Potential action to address negative impact (e.g., adjustment to the policy)
Race Guidance		Yes	The policy and actions within the ROWIP are intended to result in positive changes in respect of access to the countryside that will encourage more use and improve health and wellbeing for all.	
Religion and belief Guidance		Yes	The policy and actions within the ROWIP are intended to result in positive changes in respect of access to the countryside that will encourage more use and improve health and wellbeing for all.	
Sexual orientation Guidance		Yes	The policy and actions within the ROWIP are intended to result in positive changes in respect of access to the countryside that will encourage more use and improve health and wellbeing for all.	
Sex Guidance	Female	Yes	The policy and actions within the ROWIP are intended to result in positive changes in respect of access to the countryside that will encourage more use and improve health and wellbeing for all.	
	Male	Yes	The policy and actions within the ROWIP are intended to result in positive changes in respect of access to the countryside that will encourage more use and	

			improve health and wellbeing for all.	
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Give details of any Human Rights implications and actions that may be needed to safeguard Human Rights.

Guidance: Although this guidance refers to Northern Ireland, it is also relevant to public bodies in England. [Practical Guide to the Human Rights Act](#)

None

Summarise actions that will promote equality or lessen any potential adverse impact on protected groups.

n/a

What plans are there to monitor and review the actual impact of the policy change, decision, or proposal on equality of opportunity?

We will consider all consultation representations during the forming of the plan in line with the public sector duty and monitor feedback and any comments or complaints in relation to the policies once implemented.

Name and job title of person responsible for follow up review:	Greg Gavin Head of Neighbourhood Services
Date for follow up review:	January 2024

Section 2: Evaluation

Based on a consideration of all the potential impacts, mark one of the following as an overall summary of the outcome of this assessment:

Proceed - The equality analysis has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.	X
Adapt or change -The equality analysis has identified risks or opportunities to promote better equality; the change, decision or proposal will be adjusted to avoid risks and ensure that opportunities are taken.	
Proceed with caution - The equality analysis has identified risks to equality which will not be eliminated, and/or opportunities to promote better equality which will not be taken. Acceptance of these is reasonable and proportionate, given the objectives of the change, decision or proposal, and its overall financial and policy context.	
Stop - The equality analysis shows that the change, decision, or proposal would lead to actual or potential unlawful discrimination or would conflict with the Council's positive duties to an extent which is disproportionate to its objectives. It should not be adopted in its current form.	
Explain below how the judgement above was reached and summarise steps which will be taken to reduce any negative impacts or to enhance any positive impacts on equality:	
Name(s) and job title(s) of person (people) involved in carrying out this assessment	Neil Dawson Countryside and Green Spaces Manager
Authorising director, head of service or authorised Manager	Greg Gavin Head of Neighbourhood Services Simon Neilson Executive Director
Date authorised	
The completed equality impact assessment must be attached to the report that will be considered by the decision maker or decision makers to enable them to give due regard to the impact of the policy, decision, or proposal on protected groups.	

End of Assessment

