

# Midlothian Council Equality Impact Assessment Form



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## **Section A: Introduction**

### **1. Title of policy, procedure or function being assessed**

Access to Council and Committee Meetings

### **2. Divisions/organisations/groups involved in doing this Equality Impact Assessment**

Corporate Solutions

### **3. Date started:**

16/05/2022

### **Date completed:**

16/05/2022

## **Section B: Information**

### **4. Please describe the Policy, Procedure or Function you are impact assessing**

Council meetings are currently being held entirely remotely via MS Teams with options presented to Council on 24 May 2022 to retain fully remote meetings, move to hybrid or revert to fully in person meetings.

The Hybrid option being one where whereby Members and the public can view or attend either online or in person in the Council chambers. Fully remote would be streamed live but fully in person would only be accessible by physical attendance at the meeting.

### **5. What information and consultation data do you have to inform your assessment? What does it tell you?**

We have taken account of many years of Member and public engagement at in person meetings and the past two years' experience of remote only meetings.

## 6. Do you need more information or more consultation/engagement data?

- Do you need anything more:
  - i. to do this Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)
  - ii. to monitor or assess, in future, the impact of the policy/procedure or function you are EQIAing on people with different equalities characteristics
- Lack of data is not a sufficient reason to conclude there is no impact. It is insufficient to state that a policy will affect everyone equally without having considered the different barriers some people may encounter.

No further consultation is required at this point. If Hybrid is adopted then consultation with Members would be taken forward as part of the detailed design phase.

## Section C: Assessment

Midlothian Council equality impact assesses on **all** of the characteristics in the shaded area below, so you should consider all of these in your assessment. If you want you can consider other groups as well.

**Race** (this includes ethnic or national origins, colour and nationality)

**Disability** (e.g. physical disabilities, sensory impairments, learning disabilities, mental health conditions or long-term illnesses)

**Sex**(male/female)

**Age** (all ages)

**Sexual Orientation** (gay man, gay woman/lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual/straight)

**Religion or belief** (including having no religion or belief)

**Pregnancy and maternity** (having just had a baby or being pregnant)

**Gender reassignment** or transgender status (a person who is proposing to undergo is undergoing or has undergone a process to change their sex)

**Marriage and Civil Partnership**

**People experiencing poverty or at risk of poverty:** (poverty may be simply defined as not having enough money to meet one's basic daily needs or to have the things that most people in the UK take for granted).

**As you answer questions 7i. to 7iv. over the page:**

- a) **Think about the policy, practice or function you are assessing and**
- people with the above characteristics
  - people associated with them (e.g. a parent or carer)
  - people mistakenly assumed to have the above characteristics

Remember to consider impacts on staff as well as communities and customers.

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**b) Consider whether the above people are likely to have different needs, or be affected in different ways by what you are doing/proposing. e.g.**

- People may need, or benefit from, information provided in a particular format, like large print or easyread.
- A queuing system which relies on people standing for long periods will make it very difficult for some people to use the service.
- Charging more for a service is likely to affect people from several of the groups in the shaded area above, as on average they have a lower income.
- Targeting an area of high poverty could leave people experiencing poverty outside the area even worse off in comparison

**c) Consider the General Equality Duty requirements to pay due regard to the need to:**

- eliminate discrimination, victimization, harassment or other local conduct that is prohibited under the Equality Act 2010 in relation to the characteristics listed in shaded area at the top of this page (except poverty)
- advance equality of opportunity between and foster good relations between people who share a characteristic in the shaded area and those who do not (except marriage and civil partnership and poverty)

**7i. Note any positive impacts on the above equalities groups**

With a fully remote or hybrid approach (combined remote and in person approach) we address inclusiveness both on the grounds of:

- Giving wider options for citizens to attend council meetings in a way which suits them, their work and or other life commitments which otherwise may not allow them to take the time to come to Council buildings
- Giving flexibility to Councillors in carrying out their democratic duties whatever their personal circumstances may be
- Giving those without strong technical skills or the means to afford an electronic device with internet connect access to the democratic process
- Providing an avenue to attend meetings remotely for those whose personal health or disabilities hamper their ability to attend in person meetings
- Supporting effective and sustainable access to participate, view live or attend meetings during pregnancy or whilst caring for a baby or young child with remote or hybrid options reducing the need to travel, reducing the time set aside compared to attending

physical meetings or indeed the need for physical attendance itself.

- Also supporting access to participate for those with other caring responsibilities.

**7ii. Note any negative impacts on equalities groups**

Whilst full Council papers are available to those attending online, those attending in person may not necessarily have access to all of those papers depending on their personal circumstances

The option of a return to fully in person meetings is expected to present a range of barriers to equality groups which may prohibit or limit attendance, whether through the requirement to travel, the cost of travel and the time required for physical attendance versus remote, the impact of being away from home or a more local location, less flexibility for options to provide sensory or hearing supports.

Meetings only held or accessible by physical attendance would have no means to record and publish a voice or video recording of the meeting. In contrast virtual attendance would require attendees to have access to a digital device and internet access.

**7iii. How significant would this negative impact be, and what kind of numbers would be affected?**

The impact is difficult to gauge in respect of public attendance given numbers vary and the protected characteristics of attendees is not collected.

In terms of elected members being unable to attend and participate in meetings because of any of the negative impacts would significantly impact on their ability to fulfil their democratically elected role.

#### 7iv. Note any opportunities for making a positive impact on equalities groups.

The assessment of impacts points to a greater ability to attend or participate in meetings if remote or hybrid options are pursued which can only have a positive impact on the equalities groups. Whilst this approach may present difficulties for those who do not have access to the necessary technology the opportunity exists to use the digital facilities available in community Libraries free of charge.

If hybrid is the preferred option then at the design stage the opportunity will be taken to ensure that the implementation considers the needs of all equalities groups and a more detailed EQIA will form part of the approval process for the proposed implementation.

### **Section D: Actions and Outcomes**

Questions 8 and 9 below ask about actions which have been taken, or will be taken **as a result** of this Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA). Any pre-existing actions should be included in earlier sections.

#### **8. Note any actions you will be taking as a result of this EQIA:**

Think about what you can do to:

- minimise or remove any negative impacts, and
- maximise the opportunities for positive impacts

Democratic services will take appropriate measures to ensure that those attending in person have access to the same resources as those attending remotely (access to papers etc) but there will be limitations in terms of those with sensory or visual impairments.

Promote the ability to access hybrid or remote meetings via Council Digital facilities in Libraries

**9. Please note any actions you have already taken as a result of this EQIA here.**

All Council papers are published online, and given the Council zero carbon commitment we would encourage those attending in person to access online papers rather than be provided with hard copy. The online service also provides adaptable access for those that require it. These papers can also be accessed free of charge via digital facilities in libraries.

**10. How will you track/monitor that the actions you mentioned in 8. have been achieved?**

e.g. by adding them to a work plan, service plan etc.

These will be managed as part of line of business services

**11. If you have decided not to take any action please note why this is, and any justification, here.**

A significant negative impact, even if it affects only a small number of people, should be addressed.

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**12. Is a more detailed assessment recommended?**

Yes at the detailed design phase if hybrid is adopted