

Bristol City Council Equality Impact Assessment Form

(Please refer to the Equality Impact Assessment guidance when completing this form)



Name of proposal	Extending Advice Funding Agreements for one year (October 31st 2016 - Oct 31 st 2017)
Directorate and Service Area	Neighbourhoods
Name of Lead Officer	Hywel Caddy

Step 1: What is the proposal?

Please explain your proposal in Plain English, avoiding acronyms and jargon. This section should explain how the proposal will impact service users, staff and/or the wider community.

1.1 What is the proposal?

To extend existing advice grant agreements to the VCS advice agencies from 31st October 2016 until 31st October 2017 to give the council the opportunity to consider holistically all council investment in advice services to find the optimum funding and delivery model for advice services for the future.

Step 2: What information do we have?

Decisions must be evidence-based, and involve people with protected characteristics that could be affected. Please use this section to demonstrate understanding of who could be affected by the proposal.

2.1 What data or evidence is there which tells us who is, or could be affected?

Service user monitoring for the seven VCS funded advice agencies in 2015-16 shows that:

- 54% of service users were women (slightly higher than the Bristol population figure of 50.2%;
- 45% were BME (significantly higher than the 16% recorded in the Census 2011 for Bristol),
- 43% were disabled people (again, significantly higher than the 17%

recorded for those people in Bristol whose day to day activities are limited)

- 9% were older people (slightly below the Bristol population of 13%, however, 3 of the smaller services had higher levels of older people as their service users),
- 6% were younger people aged 16-25 (well below the overall level in Bristol), and
- 17% were recorded as people of faith. This is far lower than the census level in Bristol of 54.5% but this is largely because this has only recently started to be collected;
- 3% identified as bisexual, gay or lesbian with 25% of those responding preferring not to say;
- Only 13 people or 0% responded yes to be asked if their gender identity was different to that assigned to you at birth with 12% of those responding preferring not to say.

2.2 Who is missing? Are there any gaps in the data?

There is currently poor information and response rates recorded across the some of the providers for sexual orientation of service users and scant monitoring for transgender service users. Prior to 2014-15 this information was not asked for but organisations have collected this information during 2014-15.

There are still some improvements to be made particularly in working with providers to improve overall responses regarding information on faith, sexual orientation and gender identity.

2.3 How have we involved, or will we involve, communities and groups that could be affected?

There was significant involvement with equalities groups during the initial consultation on the needs analysis and the recommendations for the Commissioning Plan and the delivery of advice services in 2010.

There were specific consultation events in January and February for:

Refugee community groups and service users

Disabled led groups and service users

Women led groups and service users

Young People

Women-led groups and service users

LGB & Transgender groups and service users

Faith groups

Step 3: Who might the proposal impact?

Analysis of impacts on people with protected characteristics must be rigorous. Please demonstrate your analysis of any impacts in this section, referring to all of the equalities groups as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

3.1 Does the proposal have any potentially adverse impacts on people with protected characteristics?

The proposal is seeking to continue funding to provide advice services that are accessible to and very well used by equalities groups and the most vulnerable citizens in the city. If this proposal is rejected this will impact negatively on women, people from BME communities, and older people in some of the smaller local services.

3.2 Can these impacts be mitigated or justified? If so, how?

If the proposal is rejected this would severely limit the availability of face to face and accessible advice through the city and may lead to some of the organisations becoming unviable in their present form and potentially closing.

In the current climate with the on-going impact of recession, Welfare reform, demographic pressures and the loss in 2013-14 of over £500,000 of advice delivery in the city as a result of the Legal Aid Reforms, it would not be possible to mitigate or justify a decision to reject the recommendation of this Cabinet report.

3.3 Does the proposal create any benefits for people with protected characteristics?

The commissioning process was very much focussed on improving access to services for people with protected characteristics.

As a result of the findings from the needs analysis and the feedback from the consultation, the grant funded applications were required to reflect recommendations for improved access to services for the following groups across the advice network:

- BME communities & New Communities
- The delivery of asylum and immigration advice
- Young people

- Older people
- LGB & Transgender service users
- Disabled people

Service monitoring data shows that advice services are extremely well used by a number of equalities groups (See Section 2 above). The advice services provide free advice targeted at the most vulnerable people in the city in the following areas:

- Welfare Benefits
- Community Care
- Debt
- Housing
- Employment
- Immigration

Access to free face to face advice services helps mitigate against the impact of recession and welfare benefit reforms, likely to impact in the following areas:

- Reduced household income and increasing risk of debt;
- Increased need for money and debt advice, if individuals whose benefits are reduced do not enter employment;
- An increase in homelessness and a growing need for social housing;
- Lack of preparation for the changes by some individuals who may not understand what is happening and how they will be affected resulting in crisis situations developing (homelessness, bankruptcy);
- The potential increase in poverty could result in social and community cohesion issues (particularly in the light of the European Referendum and the increase in recorded hate Crime);
- The potential increase in poverty could result in increased family breakdown and greater need for social services intervention.

The proposal to extend grant funding to the existing advice agencies for a further year would create a number of benefits for people with protected characteristics, allowing them to continue to access high quality free advice services at a time when central government funding from legal aid has been reduced in the city by over £500,000 pa in 2013-14.

The impact of the advice network in the city is has been strengthened by the money awarded by government through the Advice Services Transition Fund

that focussed on improving service delivery, improving the infrastructure and efficiency of the network and lever in additional funding and resources to advice provision in the city.

Longer term, it is hoped that the proposal to build on the digital Information, Advice and Guidance repository and self-assessment search tool that is currently being developed to ensure that BCC complies with the Care Act, and extend this approach to all advice provision. It is anticipated that development of the repository and triage system could improve uptake and access to advice due to the ability to access information on-line.

3.4 Can they be maximised? If so, how?

Reviewing access to services for protected characteristics will be taken forward by ACFA, an umbrella body that supports the development of the advice services.

There needs to be a particular focus on access to services from young people. Although there has been some delivery of services to young people from venues where they are comfortable accessing services in the city (such as the Station), take up of services compared to the Census 2011 profile for young people in the city is relatively low. Some further analysis and consultation with young people is needed to address this as young people are disproportionately affected by the impact of recession and welfare reform.

All organisations also need to ensure they record information on people of faith accessing services as this is not recorded but from the profile of people taking up services it is not likely that many people of faith access services but this information is still not asked for of all clients.

Step 4: So what?

The Equality Impact Assessment must be able to influence the proposal and decision. This section asks how your understanding of impacts on people with protected characteristics has influenced your proposal, and how the findings of your Equality Impact Assessment can be measured going forward.

4.1 How has the equality impact assessment informed or changed the proposal?

The information from the EQIA will be highlighted in the Cabinet report to demonstrate the impact on access to advice services to people with protected characteristics if the proposal is rejected.

4.2 What actions have been identified going forward?

1. Continue to improve monitoring by all organisations around LGB, transgender service users and people of faith.
2. Review and consult on access to services for young people during the needs analysis and commissioning process.
3. Measuring increase in demand for advice as a result of the impact of Welfare reform.

4.3 How will the impact of your proposal and actions be measured moving forward?

There will feedback to the organisations around the need to improve responses to the equalities monitoring framework to ensure that all people with protected characteristics access the funded advice services will be recorded.

Providers will be asked to provide training to staff to ensure that they understand why they are asking clients for this information and how improved responses and information in relation to communities of interest can be used to improve access to services and service provision.

The advice network will be encouraged to undertake a joint equality impact assessment on an annual basis in order to improve recording of equalities data and access to services as a result of the analysis of this data.

Service Director Sign-Off: Di Robinson	Equalities Officer Sign Off: Wanda Knight
Date: 2/8/16	Date: 27/7/16