

**EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

<b>Name of Policy/Service/Function</b>	Community Engagement – Improving Community Councils
<b>Directorate</b>	Environment and Regeneration
<b>Head of Service</b>	Claire Witney
<b>Names and Roles of the people carrying out the EIA</b>	Claire Witney Dawn Polis Bettina Aruoture Penny Allier
<b>Why is the Equality Impact Assessment being done?</b>	Increase to Community Councils delegated budgets.

**1. Introduction and Background**

1.1 The recent review of Community Councils was part of a wider review of community engagement undertaken in response to the Local Government White Paper, “ Strong & Prosperous Communities”. This set out the government’s agenda to increase local people’s involvement and participation in local decision-making. Community Councils are a key engagement mechanism and increased delegated budgets will provide more opportunity for local people to influence decisions that affect their local area.

1.2 The increase in funding to deliver projects in local areas meets the Council’s objectives to increase local participation in decision making. It will operate alongside and complement the Working Neighbourhoods budget that focuses upon addressing the quality of life issues for disadvantaged communities. This will be achieved by allocating resources to:

- improve the quality of life for residents in local areas according to local priorities
- encourage volunteering and community involvement

- encourage the sustainability of local groups and organizations
- encourage networking and local partnerships

1.3 The increase in funding will impact on all equality groups.

## **2. Profile of groups affected as customers and/or staff**

### 2.1.1 Age Equality

All residents and service users over the age of 19.

### 2.1.2 Disability equality

All residents and service users

### 2.1.3 Gender equality

All residents and service users

### 2.1.4 Race equality

All residents and service users

### 2.1.5 Religion/Beliefs

All residents and service users

### 2.1.6 Sexual Orientation

All residents and service users

## **3. Questions this assessment addresses**

### 3.1 What kind of equality impact may there be?

Community Councils are an 'open' as opposed to targeted form of community engagement activity. This makes it more difficult to ensure that they are representative of people from different backgrounds, faiths, nationalities and cultures than targeted engagement. However

in order to maximise their effectiveness it is important that steps are taken to maximise the 'representation' of people attending.

Open engagement mechanisms are an effective method for accessing disadvantaged communities and engagement with these groups is achieved through more targeted approaches such as those employed by the Better Neighbourhoods Initiative.

The focus of Community Councils is to engage with a wide range of residents on issues that are relevant close to where they live or work in the borough. The process of engagement needs to address equalities considerations in order to maximise the opportunities for all equality groups to raise issues and for their views to be considered. It is essential to ensure that any improvement to Community Councils has a positive impact on 'reach' amongst equality groups.

Rather than relying on the views of attendees at meetings that may not be fully representative of all of the equality groups within a community, an analysis of community engagement findings and other information that can provide an evidence base for priorities will be prepared for each ward. This will identify any particular concerns or priorities for equality groups that may need to be reflected in the selection of projects and allocation of grant and will ensure that a wide range of views reflecting the diversity of local areas, informs the selection of projects by Community Councils.

The governance criteria for allocating Community Council spend will ensure that decisions to allocate spend are in line with the Council's equality policies and do not adversely impact upon any particular diversity group. The evidence based approach should enable a positive impact where appropriate.

### 3.2 How significant is it in terms of its nature and the number of people likely to be affected?

Community Councils operate across the borough and are a universal service. One of their main objectives is to identify and tackle a range of issues that are important to local people and which are relevant to very local geographical areas of the borough. It is important to residents as issues arise, as well as the Council in its efforts to improve services.

Although the proposed changes will be significant for equality groups they are less significant in terms of the number of people affected.

### 3.3 Is the impact positive or negative (or is there a potential for both)?

Community Councils potentially have both a positive and negative impact on equalities. Although it is recognised that only active or 'interested' citizens will regularly engage with local area working mechanisms it is important that wide attendance is actively encouraged to representation amongst the six broad equality groups that reflect local area profiles. By ensuring the engagement of a spectrum of groups and individuals informs the priorities for the spending of delegated budgets the Council can be confident that it is gathering and acting on a broad range of views in local areas. If this is not achieved there is a risk that issues and concerns of particular groups about local are being ignored.

Another potential positive impact is that increased delegation of resources to Community Councils will provide a greater opportunity to strengthen community cohesion. The Community Councils will be required to consider the views of a wider group of local residents as well as those of frontline councillors and meeting attendees when making decisions on spend. This will also provide an opportunity for areas of concern particular to certain equality groups to be shared and addressed by the whole community.

Changes to Community Councils should have a positive impact on equalities as they have been developed to be more equalities friendly.

#### Race

The BME profile of communities in Waltham Forest is relatively young. Evidence from the monitoring of attendance at Community Councils suggests that attendance at meetings by BME groups tends to reflect the overall age profile of meetings, which is much older. This means that BME residents tend to be underrepresented at meetings. Research during the review suggests that commitments to work and looking after children are a barrier to active participation as is the case with similar age groups. The use of engagement findings

to inform the selection of projects should ensure that their views and priorities are considered.

### Disability

Attendance by disabled people at Community Council meetings has been above the profile for each area with the exception of North Chingford. The increased budget will enable disabled people to actively be involved in decision making in their local area.

### Gender

Women are currently well represented at meetings even though the offer of crèche and home sitting services is not taken up on a regular basis. Men and women are currently evenly represented at Community Council meetings.

### Age

Community Councils are well attended by people aged 40+. This reflects the issues raised in the research undertaken during the review of Community Councils which has identified a number of barriers to active participation in meetings by younger age groups. Commitments of work and career as well as rearing young children act as a barrier to this form of engagement activity. The use of engagement findings to inform the selection of projects should ensure that their views and priorities are considered.

It is recognised that school children aged 11-19 are unlikely to want or be able to attend evening meetings. Engagement on local area issues is addressed by working directly with school councils in the Community Council area. As young people make up a large proportion of the borough's population engagement activity with children and young people is being developed across all council services. This will be used to inform the priorities for spend although this must not conflict with or duplicate activity in local areas resulting from the increased spend by the Council's Youth Service.

### 3.4 On what aspects of the Equality Duties will this impact be?

Improving Community Councils by delegating budgets to improve local areas will help the council meet its equality duties by:

- Promoting equality of opportunity
- Promoting good race relations
- Encouraging participation by disabled persons in public life
- Promoting equality of opportunity between men and women

It will contribute to Community Cohesion by enabling local people to share issues of common interest across all equality groups, encourage greater social interaction, networking and partnerships.

3.5 Could the impact constitute unlawful discrimination?

No

3.6 What further information is required to gauge the probability and extent of the impact?

New systems of monitoring and evaluating the equalities impact of the increased budgets are needed. These will include measures to help monitor the impact on equality groups and ensure that there is no unlawful discrimination in the delivery of projects.

3.7 Where and how can that information be obtained?

This information will be obtained through the application and monitoring forms that will form part of the commissioning and project management process.

**4. Action Planning Questions**

4.1 What action do we need to take to reduce negative impact?

No negative impacts.

4.2 If the action proposed will not fully mitigate adverse consequences for equality, or if the decision is to take no action, why is this, and can we justify it?

4.3 Can anything further action be taken to promote equality of opportunity in relation to any of the equality strands?

It is proposed that ward councillors will have a more active role in community engagement activity. Further training and support will be required to improve upon existing inclusive engagement skills.

Publicity will be focused to ensure that a range of voluntary groups and organisations are aware of the funding available from Community Councils.

4.4 Do we need to undertake any further consultation or research?

**4. Conclusions and Next Steps**

4.1 The key areas, which were improved as a result of this assessment, were:

- The need for the views of a wider range of residents to inform the priorities for the selection of projects.
- The need to ensure that equalities is a consideration from the development of objectives for spend through to the monitoring and evaluation of delivered projects.
- An analysis of the benefits to different equality groups should be undertaken as part of the annual evaluation.

**5. Action Plan**

<b>Action required</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>	<b>Time Scale</b>	<b>Comments/Outcomes</b>
Consideration of any equality issues when developing the evidence base for the priorities for spend	Claire Witney/ CC Team	June 2008	Outcome specifications that reflect any significant issues for equality groups in local areas
Development and application of governance criteria that	Claire Witney/	June 2008	Proposals submitted for funding identify

ensures equality issues are considered and opportunities to promote community cohesion are maximised	CC Team		the impact if any on particular equality groups
New systems of monitoring and evaluating the impact of the increased budgets are needed.	Claire Witney/ CC Team	June 2008	New systems of monitoring and evaluating the impact of the increased budgets are needed.