

## **Equality Impact Report: Budget 2021/22**

Implementation date      1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022  
EIR completed by:        Rebecca Taylor Tel: 033 022 26878

### **1      Decide whether this report is needed and, if so, describe how you have assessed the impact of the proposal.**

- 1.1. One of the County Council's most significant strategic decisions is the budget and the service plans and commitments which it is designed to deliver. In setting the budget the County Council must be aware of and consider a range of statutory and other legal responsibilities. These responsibilities must inform the decision to set the budget and the Council must explain how it undertakes that process of consideration. The public sector equality duty is an important element of this process for delivering a rational and lawful budget.
- 1.2. The public sector equality duty is the duty to have regard to the impact of proposals on persons and groups with protected characteristics. The Council discharges the public sector equality duty through several measures, particularly by applying detailed consideration of such impacts arising from the planning and implementation of service changes, especially where those changes reduce current service levels or reduce the funds available to deliver them. The public sector equality duty impact is best understood and assessed using detailed service and customer information held or secured by those leading, planning and implementing service change. The information is used to support the decisions which generate service plans. The County Council takes the budget decision on the basis that this arrangement for discharging the public sector equality duty is in place.
- 1.3. Where statutory or some other customer or public consultation is required to help the impact assessment work, this is included as part of change planning and implementation. Where specific service user data is required to better understand the potential impact on those with protected characteristics, this is secured. Different levels of assessment or different forms of data gathering are used dependent upon the needs of the particular service plan under consideration. The overall budget proposal explains how these different approaches apply in relation to the body of service plans.
- 1.4. The background to the budget for 2021/22 is continued demand pressure for acute and essential services on which many of our more vulnerable residents rely and that these demand increases will outstrip any Government funding changes. As such, a programme of well-considered and planned savings is essential to ensure the Council achieves its legal duty to approve a realistic and balanced budget, with the minimum adverse impact for residents.

- 1.5 The savings planned for 2021/22 are £18.5m and need to be viewed in the context of a draft overall net revenue budget of around £625m. The savings measures included in the budget report to balance the budget contain further information on how the equality impact work will be addressed as part of each proposed saving (Annex 1, Appendix 3)
- 1.6 The Cabinet's decision of November 2020 included a list of strategic savings proposals which were agreed to be progressed. Some are no longer being pursued at this time but, where required to inform the future decision on these proposals the Council follows a clear process of consultation, including the range of legal responsibilities to be met. All the proposals for further Cabinet or Cabinet Member decision will be available for pre-scrutiny by the relevant Scrutiny Committee, including consideration of the information from consultations and impact assessments and how these have been taken into account.
- 1.7 The emphasis in budget planning continues to be on delivering efficiencies, cost reductions and income generation with a view to protecting core services along with the Reset Plan priorities. The Council's over-arching aim has been to avoid arbitrary or across the board budget reductions, as these would not reflect the Council's priorities and would be more difficult to assess in terms of impact on the broad range of responsibilities, including the public sector equality duty. Instead the Council has focused on specific measures to both understand impacts and address any adverse impacts for services or support. In all cases, unless stated otherwise, each service prepares an impact assessment to inform the eventual decision based on the Council's approach to its public sector equality duty so that the decision making has full regard to such assessment

## **2 Describe any negative impact for customers or residents.**

- 2.1. Efforts have been made when compiling the savings programme to minimise the impact on residents generally and on those with a protected characteristic where any is identified.
- 2.2. The total £18.5m savings planned for 2021/22 are split between Strategic Decisions (where the relevant Cabinet Member will be making a key decision) amounting to £2.4m and business as usual or operational decisions which make up the remaining £16.1m.
- 2.3. Every effort has been made to indicate the nature of these decisions at an early point in planning for 2021/22, to provide for consultation and maximise consideration of measures to mitigate any adverse effects of the proposals.
- 2.4. The Council has made efforts to continue to provide residents with services to meet needs and identified priorities, even in areas where a reduction to a discretionary activity has needed to be considered. Work will be done on equality impacts and how to mitigate any potentially adverse impact within the individual case for decisions to be taken and their implementation.

### **3 Describe any positive effects which may offset any negative impact.**

- 3.1. A balanced budget has been developed on the basis of a primary aim of meeting all statutory duties to provide services supporting the priority needs and interests of West Sussex residents and which should result in a positive impact for residents including those with a protected characteristic. Available information on potential impact has informed the process of prioritisation.
- 3.2. As well as the revenue budget, the County Council will be asked to approve an updated capital programme for 2021/22 to 2025/26. The capital programme sets out how the County Council proposes to invest in assets to deliver the Council's vision for and its commitment to West Sussex as set out in the Capital Strategy in Annex 2 (a). It too will be implemented through decision-making arrangements which address the need to take account of the public sector equality duty.

### **4 Describe whether and how the proposal helps to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation.**

- 4.1. One of the key aims of developing specific savings proposals, rather than simply assume across the board budget cuts, is to plan savings that balance the budget on the basis of protecting core or critical services and delivering West Sussex plan priorities.
- 4.2. In preparing the savings outlined, it is believed that no individual group whether it be by age, sex, race, disability, gender reassignment (including transgender), sexual orientation, religion or belief or any other identifiable group will suffer from discrimination, harassment or victimisation as a direct consequence. The focus on opportunities to eliminate discrimination will be addressed in service plans and implementation.

### **5 Describe whether and how the proposal helps to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.**

- 5.1. The savings identified by services will be expected to maintain equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. This is part of the work that will take place ahead of the individual equality impact work on each saving proposal and service plan area.

### **6 Describe whether and how the proposal helps to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.**

- 6.1. The savings identified by services will be expected, where possible, to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

6.2. This is part of the work that will take place ahead of the individual equality impact work on each service area.

**7 What changes were made to the proposal as a result? If none, explain why.**

7.1. Changes to proposals will be addressed in the evaluation of consultation and representations and recorded in specific decision reports or identified for clarification in service plan implementation.

**8 Explain how the impact will be monitored to make sure it continues to meet the equality duty owed to customers and say who will be responsible for this.**

8.1. Monitoring will be through equality impact work at individual service level and also business planning and performance framework planning processes. Hence each Directorate will be responsible for monitoring the impact on their own services

**To be signed by a Director or Head of Service to confirm that they have read and approved the content.**

**Signed by:** Katharine Eberhart

**Date:** 12 January 2021

**Your position:** Director of Finance and Support Services