

Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Screening



As a public authority we need to ensure that all our strategies, policies, service and functions, both current and proposed have given proper consideration to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration.

A **screening** process can help judge relevance and provides a record of both the **process** and **decision**. Screening should be a short, sharp exercise that determines relevance for all new and revised strategies, policies, services and functions.

Completed at the earliest opportunity it will help to determine:

- the relevance of proposals and decisions to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration.
- whether or not equality, diversity, cohesion and integration is being/has already been considered, and
- whether or not it is necessary to carry out an impact assessment.

Directorate: Planning, Policy & Improvement	Service area: Business Transformation (leading on EIA) and Customer Services – providing a function for the Revenue and Benefits Service
Lead person: James Richardson	Contact number: 07891276718

1. Title: Interactive Voice Response – Housing and Council Tax Benefits		
Is this a:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Strategy / Policy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Function	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
If other, please specify		

2. Please provide a brief description of what you are screening

Leeds City Council Benefits Service administers the following for eligible people in the local authority area:

- [Council Tax Benefits](#);
- [Housing Benefit](#);
- [School Clothing Allowance](#);
- [Free School Meals](#).

To do this it communicates with customers through a number of channels. One key channel is the telephone, with the majority of calls dealt with at the Leeds City Council Contact Centre based at West Gate.

Interactive Voice Response (IVR) is a telephone system that automates calls (e.g. no need to speak to a customer service officer unless required). It does this 24 hours a day through:

- Taking a verbal or digit commands and responding back to the customer.

This project is looking to develop and implement an IVR to support the telephone channel for the aforementioned service.

The complexity of IVR's can be very varied, this one mainly relies on digit input, but also has a information capture form to record voice inputs from customers and a direction function to a customer service officer.

The Leeds City Council Corporate Contact Centre deals with around 83,931 calls on behalf of the Benefits Service each year. Proportionally, many of these calls have been identified as routine enquiries or requests for information that would lend themselves to an IVR application (e.g. change of address etc). Therefore a pilot was set-up to manage the call through an IVR on a rented Inform Communications platform. This pilot showed that IVR could handle up to 55% of all incoming Revenue calls.

The rented Inform Communications solution was decommissioned due to cost issues. This project looks to develop a new IVR within Leeds City Council's own technology.

With regards to customer feedback the previous solution had some initial issues with regards to the scripts. During the pilot these were altered to reflect customer issues and by the end had been significantly improved, resulting in reduced complaint levels and improved performance of the IVR. The finalised scripts are being rolled into the new solution that are reflective of the 'live' work that was undertaken through the Inform Communications Pilot.

3. Relevance to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration

All the council's strategies/policies, services/functions affect service users, employees or the wider community – city wide or more local. These will also have a greater/lesser relevance to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration.

The following questions will help you to identify how relevant your proposals are.

When considering these questions think about age, carers, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and any other relevant characteristics (for example socio-economic status, social class, income, unemployment, residential location or family background and education or skills levels).

Questions	Yes	No
Is there an existing or likely differential impact for the different equality characteristics?	√	
Have there been or likely to be any public concerns about the policy or proposal?		√
Could the proposal affect how our services, commissioning or procurement activities are organised, provided, located and by whom?		√
Could the proposal affect our workforce or employment practices?		√ No, the proposal is designed to maximise the impact of current resource.
Does the proposal involve or will it have an impact on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminating unlawful discrimination, victimisation and harassment • Advancing equality of opportunity • Fostering good relations 		√ √ √

If you have answered **no** to the questions above please complete **sections 6 and 7**

If you have answered **yes** to any of the above and;

- Believe you have already considered the impact on equality, diversity, cohesion and integration within your proposal please go to **section 4**.
- Are not already considering the impact on equality, diversity, cohesion and integration within your proposal please go to **section 5**.

4. Considering the impact on equality, diversity, cohesion and integration

If you can demonstrate you have considered how your proposals impact on equality, diversity, cohesion and integration you have carried out an impact assessment.

Please provide specific details for all three areas below (use the prompts for guidance).

- **How have you considered equality, diversity, cohesion and integration?**

(think about the scope of the proposal, who is likely to be affected, equality related information, gaps in information and plans to address, consultation and engagement activities (taken place or planned) with those likely to be affected)

The overall breakdown of customers using the Leeds City Council Benefits Service is profiled in the table below, this indicatively shows 79,452 benefit cases (2009 – 2010), this is distinct to enquiries. Siebel CRM indicates there were 87,049 enquiries recorded during 2010 – 11. Most of these enquiries were face-to-face visits to the Leeds City Council One Stop Shops:

Profile of Our Customers

Ethnicity

	Census 2001		Residents Survey 2009		Benefit Caseload 2009	
White British	637872	89.16%	3,039	87.00%	56,756	71.43%
White Irish	8578	1.20%	25	0.72%	550	0.69%
White Other	10632	1.49%	48	1.37%	460	0.58%
Mixed White Black Caribbean	4601	0.64%	16	0.46%	470	0.59%
Mixed White Black African	888	0.12%	13	0.37%	161	0.20%
Mixed White Asian	2517	0.35%	10	0.29%	112	0.14%
Mixed other	1736	0.24%	3	0.09%	1	0.00%
Indian	12303	1.72%	53	1.52%	439	0.55%
Pakistani	15064	2.11%	86	2.46%	1,251	1.57%
Bangladeshi	2537	0.35%	14	0.40%	339	0.43%
Other Asian	2387	0.33%	32	0.92%	786	0.99%
Black Caribbean	6720	0.94%	29	0.83%	1,050	1.32%
Black African	5437	0.76%	39	1.12%	1,336	1.68%
Other Black	1167	0.16%	6	0.17%	232	0.29%
Chinese	3447	0.48%	47	1.35%	173	0.22%
Other ethnic group	2528	0.35%	31	0.89%	1,132	1.42%
Not declared			2	0.06%	14,204	17.88%

Age

Children	143,091	20.00%				
Working Age	462,753	64.69%	2,760	79.08%	44,970	56.60%
Older Age	109,548	15.31%	730	20.92%	34,482	43.40%

The Leeds City Council Corporate Contact Centre received 83,931 telephone calls during 2010 – 2011. Some of these calls are then translated into face-to-face service delivery at the Leeds City Council One Stop Shops / Joint Service Centres and eligibility is based upon income and disability, or a combination of the two. Therefore it is likely both disabled and people living in deprived areas, or on a low income will form a significant proportion of the customer base (or once again a combination of the 2). Additionally, it is important to note that 43.30% of the case load is from older people.

It is not the intention to use IVR to over-complicate the call-handling process by introducing an unreasonable number of options, nor to try and automate a call enquiry type that would be better resolved by a customer services officer. To the contrary, its purpose will be to:

- increase access to Leeds City Council services – IVR will enable customers to interact outside of normal opening hours;
- handle high volume / low complexity enquiries without the need for customers to be held in a queue;
- increase the call-handling capacity of the call centre;
- release customer services officers to focus on calls from customers with more complicated enquiries and needs.

This project sits within the Customer Access Programme Phase 1. The strategic intent for this programme has been created by the Customer Access Strategy 2011 – 2015. In terms of this strategy an over-arching equality impact assessment was undertaken in order to understand the potential impact of the strategic intent. Additionally, it also set out a process to ensure the implementation of the strategy doesn't create any further barriers to customer access for groups that Leeds City Council has been less successful in reaching. This process is also designed to ensure that when opportunities to improve equality, diversity and cohesion outcomes present themselves they are taken. It basically embeds the EIA process into the delivery of strategy and programme.

In terms of barriers the Customer Access Strategy 2011 – 2015 Equality Impact Assessment identified the following relevant to legally protected and groups that the council has been less successful in reaching:

Group	Key Barriers to Customer Access
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In terms of telephone contact age isn't deemed as an issue. Although, due to being more complicated IVR systems can sometimes confuse less technology literate people. This can't really be specifically attributed to an age group without specific customer segmentation work to understand the nature of the customers using the service.
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disability is deemed to be of high relevance as telephone contact is a popular method and residents with a range of impairments are likely to contact the council in this way. Additionally, movement of services to the telephone and to more complicated processes such as IVR systems could create barriers for some disabled customers.
Gender Reassignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There shouldn't be issues with telephone access.
Pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There shouldn't be issues with telephone access.
Maternity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There shouldn't be issues with telephone access.
Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some research indicates that BME groups prefer face-to-face contact. Generally, the issues of language and culture need to be considered. In terms of telephone contact the above will be relevant again.
Religion or Belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shouldn't be relevant to IVR and telephone access.
Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is unlikely this will have significant impact upon access across any channels.
Sexual Orientation	Same as above.
Cohesion	Not relevant to this EIA.

Although this is a change to the way a service function is delivered, it doesn't remove other channels for service delivery. Therefore, its potential to create further barriers to access is minimal. Additionally, through the IVR customers will be able to still contact a customer services officer if they require additional support. Another key feature to note is that when no selections are made the IVR will automatically move the call to a customer service officer.

Although a profile of service customers has been provided above, this hasn't 'drilled down' into all the legally protected groups or to some groups that Leeds City Council has been less successful in reaching. Therefore, there is a information gap with regards to customer breakdown. This could be solved by extracting information from Siebel CRM and the Academy system, however, this isn't deemed as necessary as this project isn't removing any customer channels, it is adding an out-of-hours option and an additional channel.

- **Key findings**

(think about any potential positive and negative impact on different equality characteristics, potential to promote strong and positive relationships between groups, potential to bring groups/communities into increased contact with each other, perception that the proposal could benefit one group at the expense of another)

The previous section has identified that key consideration needs to be given to:

- Age, disability and race – additionally, that many of the customers will be from more deprived areas, or be on a low income (or a combination of disability, low income and in a deprived area).

Positive Impact 1

The Leeds City Council Corporate Contact Centre currently takes calls between the hours of 8.00a.m and 6.00p.m, Monday to Friday. These opening hours will remain unchanged and the IVR will still allow customers, the option of speaking to a customer services officer during these hours. However, the IVR also enables the council to provide an alternative, '24/7' service that will be accessed via the same, existing, telephone number, thereby offering the customer a further choice of how to access information and services, at a time to suit them.

From a council perspective, this enables the Leeds City Council Corporate Contact Centre to increase its overall call handling capacity as well as allowing the customer services officer to concentrate on handling those that find it harder to negotiate the process ,i.e. such as, providing more intense support to customers that are struggling with the process, those that need language support, or have another specific requirement that requires more intensive support.

Negative Impact 1

IVR will only be successful if it offers a realistic, quality alternative to people being supported through the process by a customer services officer. Poorly structured IVR applications will result in customers not using it, lengthen the time it takes for the customer to get an answer to their enquiry and, potentially, lead to complaints.

It is imperative that the applications are designed intelligently to ensure the customer is routed to the information they require as soon as possible so that both the length and cost of the call are kept to a minimum. This issue has been particularly prevalent in the customer feedback obtained during the pilot exercise and so must be addressed by this project. It is particularly important to customers on a low income and/or use 'pay as you go' mobile phones (due to the fact they pay for the call and if length increases so does their cost). Indeed, a well-designed IVR can help shorten call times as it can remove the need for customers to be put on hold pending a Customer Services Officer becoming available. This would help reduce cost for people on 'pay as you go' mobile phones.'

Negative Impact 2 – IVR not appropriate / technology averse

It is recognised that some enquiries are not suitable for IVR. In addition, some customers will not want to use an IVR and will always opt to talk to a customer service officer.

Negative Impact 3 – Language difficulties

There will be some customers for whom English is not their first, or preferred, language and, therefore, would have difficulty in navigating an IVR.

Negative Impact 4 – Hearing difficulties / impairment

Customers with hearing difficulties / impairment will not be able to use IVR.

- **Actions**

(think about how you will promote positive impact and remove/ reduce negative impact)

Positive Impact Action 1

Publicity will be required to raise awareness, and encourage the use, of the new IVR applications. In addition, the IVR must be of a high quality and user-friendly so as to encourage its take-up and on-going usage. This will be undertaken as part of the project.

Negative Impact Action 1

The scripts and structure of the IVR will be designed through consultation with the back-office businesses. Guidance will also be provided by a specialist, professional, IVR supplier. Lessons learned from the pilot exercise will also be incorporated into the new scripts and structure. In addition, the project manager has previous IVR experience and will be able to offer advice in this area. Finally, the wording used in the IVR scripts will be checked from a 'Plain English' aspect by a specialist communications officer.

During the development of IVR – Revenues and Waste Phase 2 a number of staff were trained as trainers to up-skill staff in the usage of IVR's. These staff will be again used during the development of the new IVR to up-skill staff and ensure that if any alterations are required to the flows they are implemented. These members of staff were used as trainers on the previous Inform Communications Benefits Pilot. This will ensure that if any particular group has consistent issues with any aspect of the IVR mitigating action will be taken.

Negative Impact Action 2

The IVR will be designed to identify callers with the most common enquiries quickly and route them appropriately. This, in turn, means the remaining calls, i.e. the more complex calls, are quickly routed to a customer services officer. There will also be the option to speak to a CSO at various stages through the various IVR menus. This design helps ensure that, where necessary, customers are put through to a customer services officer (during daytime hours) at the earliest opportunity, rather than having to navigate an excessive number of menus.

Negative Impact Action 3

Analysis undertaken as part of the pilot showed that less than 1% of all calls to Revenues and Benefits Service telephone lines required an interpreter. Therefore, it is not practical, nor necessary, to provide a multi-linguistic IVR. However, it is recognised that, irrespective of volumes, these calls can only be handled by a customer services officer. Therefore, a process will be built in to the IVR so that, if a customer doesn't respond to specific IVR prompts, their call is automatically directed to a customer services officer.

Negative Impact Action 4

The Leeds City Council Contact Centre already publicises a separate telephone number for customers with minicomms. This number will continue to be offered as their main contact for any enquiries for the deaf and hard of hearing.

5. If you are **not already considering the impact on equality, diversity, cohesion and integration you **will need to carry out an impact assessment.****

Date to scope and plan your impact assessment:	
Date to complete your impact assessment	
Lead person for your impact assessment (Include name and job title)	

6. Governance, ownership and approval

Please state here who has approved the actions and outcomes of the screening

Name	Job title	Date
Barry Ibbetson (in conjunction with the IVR Phase 3 Project Board)	Head of the Contact Centre	8 th September 2011

7. Publishing

This screening document will act as evidence that due regard to equality and diversity has been given. If you are not carrying out an independent impact assessment the screening document will need to be published.

Please send a copy to the Equality Team for publishing

Date screening completed	2 nd September 2011
Date sent to Equality Team	8 th September 2011
Date published	16 th September 2011