

## **Assessing how a proposed new policy/strategy/function will ensure equality of access and promote diversity**

### **Why might I need to do this short assessment?**

Any new policy, strategy or function we develop needs to promote equality and diversity to ensure that the services we provide are accessible to all our residents and/or employees. In particular, it is essential that we think about the impact it may have on the following six groups (referred to as the 'equality groups'):

- Disabled people
- Women
- People from ethnic minority communities
- Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people
- Older and young people
- People from different religions/beliefs

We need to specifically consider how a new policy/strategy/function will meet their needs because they are more likely to face barriers when trying to access services and employment opportunities.

This short assessment provides officers with a framework to help them work through these considerations, ensuring that we are meeting our legal duties with regards to equality and diversity.

The assessment must be completed when a proposed policy, strategy or function is being developed/drafted (prior to any formal approval process) – the earlier the assessment is carried out, the easier it is to make any necessary amendments to the policy/strategy/function.

We have a statutory duty to carry out these assessments and they contribute towards our corporate priority to 'improve and modernise access to services'.

## How will I know if I need to do this assessment?

Before starting this assessment, please contact Katharine Doherty (Equalities Officer) on ex. 407 to check whether it is necessary for you to complete this paperwork. If the proposed policy/strategy relates to a service which is provided to the Vale public (based on an allocation decision or as a universal service for all), it is highly likely you will need to carry out the assessment below. This is the same if the new function you're proposing will be provided to the Vale public.

## Your assessment paperwork

### Assessment progress log

- Assessment completed by Katharine Doherty [10/10/08]
- Assessment emailed to Equalities Officer – n/a
- Feedback received from Equalities Officer – n/a
- Committee report refers to the completion of the assessment
- Council/Executive Committee approves Policy

### Name of proposed policy/strategy/function:

#### Accessible information policy

#### Existing service it relates to:

It is a corporate policy so covers all Council services.

#### What are the aims of the proposed policy/strategy/function?

This policy aims to ensure that service users, staff and councillors are provided with clear information about the Council (written, and oral) which meets their needs in terms of:

- formats
- languages
- over-all readability

It also aims to achieve a level of consistency across the Council regarding the provision of accessible information.

#### Who will benefit and how will they benefit?

If Council service information is easier to understand, all service users, staff and councillors will benefit. Having information in plain English, using a clear text font and size and a straight forward lay-out will benefit everyone in the District.

In addition, this policy focuses on providing information in alternative languages. This will benefit people who have a limited understanding of spoken or written English (some people from ethnic minorities may not have English as their first language, for example).

This policy also focuses on alternative formats which will better meet the needs of some older and/or disabled people (e.g. people with visual impairments)

**Do these aims promote equality and diversity/inclusive service provision?**

Yes – if this policy is adopted by the Council, it means that everybody will be able to access the Council information they need. We will also take a more pro-active approach in some service areas to promote the availability of information in alternative languages and formats. It does aim to be proportionate, taking into account the local population and recent Government guidance.

**1. In preparation for completing this assessment, you will need to gather evidence to inform and support your answers. Please list below what has helped shape your policy:**

- The policy will support the current communications strategy.
- Census data provides information about local demographics (13.1% of the local population are disabled, 2.4% of people in the Vale are from a non white ethnic minority). The Council also has anecdotal evidence about the alternative language needs of the local community (e.g. via the Embrace research in 2006, feedback from services). Finally, the Equalities Officer has carried out research to look at how people from the Accession 8 countries have settled in the district. All this background data gives us an idea of the alternative language needs in the district.
- Whilst preparing the draft policy, the Equalities Officer looked at how other Councils were addressing the subject of providing accessible information. In particular, she looked at:
  - Cumbria County Council's Accessible Information Policy and Guidance
  - Norfolk County Council's guidelines on making information accessible
  - Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's policy on translation, language and communication

The Vale’s draft policy is in line with these Councils’ approaches, indicating that it is not going to have a negative impact on any of the six equality groups.

- Positive feedback from Organisational Change Manager, Head of Communications and all Deputy Directors about the policy and the need for a clear, proportionate and consistent approach.
- The Department for Communities and Local Government has produced a guidance note about providing information in alternative languages and the Vale’s draft policy is in line with this.

**2. Looking at the evidence you’ve considered, is your proposed policy/strategy/function likely to have a significant and negative impact on any of the target groups?**

**NO**

**a) Please explain:**

The draft accessible information policy is not likely to have a significant, negative impact on anybody in the Vale because of their race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, age or religion or belief. In fact, it aims to help improve information for everybody, with particular focus on the information needs of people from ethnic minorities and older/disabled people.

**b) Please list the evidence which supports your answer:**

Please see above (Section 1) for my answers.

**3. In addition, please consider how the new policy/strategy/function will actively ensure equality of access for people from the six equality groups regarding the following key factors:**

<p><b>Access to information and advice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The policy will improve access to all service information the Council provides to the public. Written and verbal.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Accessibility of meetings between members of the public and officers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information provided for and at meetings will be more accessible</li> <li>• The policy covers the need for the Council to provide interpreters/signers/lip speakers if needed, to convey Council information verbally</li> </ul>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Access to public events</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information provided for and at public events will be more accessible</li> <li>• The policy covers the need for the Council to provide interpreters/signers/lip speakers if needed, to convey Council information verbally</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Access to consultation opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All consultation information for the public will be in plain English, using a clear font and text size.</li> <li>• In addition, the policy states that services dealing with vulnerable people and/or a higher proportion of disabled/older people will proactively offer their consultation information (e.g. surveys) in alternative formats. Translations will then be made available upon request.</li> <li>• Also, the policy states that services which deal with vulnerable people and/or a higher proportion of people from ethnic minorities will proactively offer their consultation information (e.g. surveys) in alternative languages. Translations will then be made available upon request.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The images/language we use</b></p> <p>n/a</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Monitoring service use with regards to ethnicity, disability and gender</b></p> <p>We will be monitoring the take-up of information in alternative languages/formats to ensure we continue to meet the information needs of our service users, staff and councillors.</p> <p>Communications team will monitor service information for the public to check it follows the policy.</p>
<p>Other factors:</p>	

**4. Have you already carried out consultation to inform your proposed policy/strategy/function?**

**YES**

a) **As part of your consultation, did you seek the views of people from the six equality groups?**

Yes – we carried out a four week public consultation on the draft policy. We had an online survey, posters in the Council's LSPs, informed representative groups and organisations via the Council's e-bulletin, informed the Vale Disability Access Group, informed staff and councillors.

b) **If 'yes', please briefly outline any issues they flagged up with regards to equality of access:**

The over-all feedback was that the Council's draft policy was putting forward the right approach to providing accessible service information.

Once completed, you will need to email this assessment to the Equalities Officer (Katharine Doherty), along with a copy of the draft policy/strategy (if appropriate). She will review the assessment and feed back to you, before your policy goes through the approval process.