

Integrated Impact Assessment

The purpose of Aberdeen City Council is to protect the people and the place of Aberdeen from harm, enabling them to prosper and supporting them in the event of harm happening.

The purpose of an Integrated Impact Assessment is to evidence that Aberdeen City Council are making decisions in an informed way, and that the impact of decisions made is understood and accepted. The legislation that is considered within this assessment are:

- Section 2 [Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics](#)
- Section 3 [Socio-Economic](#)
- Section 4 [Human Rights](#)
- Section 5 [Children and Young People’s Rights](#)

The term ‘policy’ is used throughout this document and applies to policies, proposals, strategies, provision, criteria, functions, practice, budget savings and activities that includes delivery of our services.

1. About the Policy

1.1 Title

Reduce central team and devolve handling of complaints to services

1.2 What does this policy seek to achieve?

A review of statutory Customer Feedback service and implementation of a decentralised approach which means that there would be no corporate team to receive, manage, allocate and oversee the handling of complaints. Instead, complaints would be recorded and handled end to end by the relevant service, including all contact with the complainant. Should a complaint be misdirected then the service in receipt of the complaint would need to determine which service is the most appropriate to respond and to redirect accordingly.

Quality assurance would cease and there would be no centralised support around best practice and compliance with the statutory complaints handling procedure, including the specific procedure relating to children.

A statutory ‘Scottish Public Services Ombudsman’ (SPSO) liaison officer would need to be identified within the organisation to liaise with the SPSO around escalated complaints and provide them with annual complaints data for the organisation.

1.3 Is this a new or existing policy?

New

1.4 Is this report going to a committee?

Yes

1.5 Committee name and date:

Budget Meeting, Council, 6 March 2024

1.6 Report no and / or Budget proposal number and / or Business Case reference number:

CE16

Impacts

This section demonstrates the considerations that have been made in relation to the policy - and that the impact of proposals made is understood and accepted.

2: Equality Act 2010 - Protected Characteristics

Aberdeen City Council wants to ensure everyone is treated fairly. This section identifies the [protected characteristics](#) that the policy potentially affects and records the impact and mitigating steps.

2.1 What impact could this policy have on any of the below groups?

| Protected Characteristic | What is the impact? | | | Neutral | Positive |
|--|---------------------|--------|-----|---------|----------|
| | High | Medium | Low | | |
| Age | | | X | | |
| Disability | | | X | | |
| Gender Reassignment | | | X | | |
| Marriage and Civil Partnership | | | | X | |
| Pregnancy and Maternity | | | | X | |
| Race | | | X | | |
| Religion or Belief | | | X | | |
| Sex | | | X | | |
| Sexual Orientation | | | X | | |

2.2 In what way will the policy impact people with these protected characteristics?

The Council receives complaints in relation to a wide range of matters including concerns relating to equalities and discrimination. The Customer Feedback Team provide independent oversight to the complaints handling process to ensure that an impartial approach is taken to complaints handling across the organisation. This proposal will mean that citizens must liaise directly with the service to which the complaint relates.

The proposal to decentralise the Customer Feedback service may:

- Result in non-compliance with the statutory complaints handling procedure
- Result in longer response times
- Reduce the quality of responses
- Increase in citizen dissatisfaction and a rise in escalated complaints
- Give rise to indirect discrimination.

This policy would negatively impact people with protected characteristics by reducing opportunities to submit complaints and feedback to the Customer Feedback team to oversee. In particular, the following protected characteristics would be negatively impacted:

There would be risk of underlying discrimination and bias around several protected characteristics. The entire organisation and whether those who are handling complaints are completely impartial and unbiased when responding to complaints would need to be considered. The independent oversight currently provided by the Customer Feedback Team would be lost. For this reason, whereby impartial oversight may be key to ensure no potential bias from employees towards individuals they have liaised with previously, age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion/belief, sex and sexual orientation have been assessed as being impacted.

The protected characteristic of age has been categorised as medium impact as citizens would be required to navigate the Council and determine which service their complaint is for and may find this much more challenging than contacting the Customer Feedback Team directly, as they do currently. Complaints can be submitted online, by telephone, in writing or in person. Providing these options separately for each service would greatly reduce the ways in which this group can submit their feedback. Those in the older age groups may not feel confident travelling further. Older age groups are also potentially not as digitally literate or have access to take advantage of the online submission methods. This group has been assessed as low impact. Equality monitoring data is not collected, and this assessment is based on experience within the team of interacting with citizens accessing the service.

Those with a protected characteristic of disability may also face these same challenges, specifically with finding the relevant service to direct their request and the impact has again been categorised as low. Some neurodivergent service users or those with visual impairment may prefer not to use online systems and would require the support of a person. Not everyone is supported by a carer / friend / family member. By providing one central team for citizens to direct their request to in the format that is preferable for them makes the process easier for the citizen. This group has been assessed as low impact however, data is not collected for this characteristic and this assessment is based on the potential impact to this group. Again, equalities monitoring data is not collected and therefore the assessment is again based on knowledge within the team.

Currently, Customer Feedback handle all feedback and progress to the relevant service for response. Individuals where English is not their first language could be impacted if they are required to navigate the layout of the Council to direct their feedback to without assistance. The impact has been determined as low.

The Customer Feedback team review a portion of responses before they are sent to citizens. This process ensures responses can be easily understood, are sensitive in nature to the feedback received and answers the citizens' concerns as far as possible. Without responses being monitored by the Customer Feedback team, the needs of individuals in groups with protected characteristics may not be considered full by the service. This links to a comment that was received from one of the consultations which mentioned that there will be occasions where a response to a citizen query has to be set out in a specific way or is of a sensitive nature. They said that on these occasions, competent assistance will be necessary.

Another comment advised that it is vital for the Council to deal with citizen enquiries effectively and efficiently to maintain public trust and transparency. The appropriate information and communication resources are important to enable people with sensory impairments to raise enquiries and receive responses in accessible formats. Reducing this would exclude people with a sensory impairment from enquiring with the Council directly and put the onus on NESS (North East Sensory Service) to support people to make contact. This would also reduce the level of their independence.

A further comment in the consultation mentioned that the right of the citizens will be denied and as a woman, her voice would no longer count. It was stated that she would not be able to express dissatisfaction over unfair treatment received. Acknowledging this impact, sex has been assessed as low impact.

2.3 What considerations have been made in reaching the above assessment?

What internal or external data has been considered? What does this data tell us?

The annual complaints data demonstrates the volume of demand for the service. In 2022/23, the total number of complaints received was 1,348. There is no data available to identify the volume of complaints from customer

The statutory timescales for complaints to be responded to are 5 working days for Stage 1 complaints and 20 working days for Stage 2 complaints. The number of complaints that the Council responded to within timescale in 22/23 was 60.7%. The average number of days taken to respond to Stage 1 complaints was 6.8 days and the average number of days taken to respond to Stage 2 complaints was 27 days. Should this service be removed then performance would likely decrease significantly which would have an impact on the complainant, including those with protected characteristics.

There is no equality monitoring data relating to Customer Feedback service users. The impact assessments have been made based on the experience and knowledge from within the team regarding service users and potential impact.

What consultation and engagement and has been undertaken with officers and partner organisations?

Discussion with colleagues in Equalities, Legal and People and Organisational Development about potential impacts. The proposal has been shared within the extended Corporate Management Team and with Customer Services. This proposal and potential impact was described in Phase 2 of the Budget Consultation, and links to the consultation were shared directly with many external partner organisations.

What consultation and engagement and has been undertaken with people who may be impacted by this policy (e.g. citizens, community groups, or other people/groups)?

Aberdeen City Council launched a three-part public consultation around the 2024/25 Budget and future spending plans from July 2023 to January 2024. In part 1, which ran throughout July 2023, people were asked to award points across different service areas to indicate where they thought the council's spending priorities should be. In part 2, the public could either increase, decrease or not change the level of expenditure in areas listed. In part 3, which took place throughout January 2024, there were two face to face sessions for the public to attend and an online consultation.

There were 3,192 responses to part 1 and 2,654 responses to part 2. Part 3 was undertaken online and face-to-face where 126 people with protected characteristics took part and 377 comments were received. Included in all parts of the consultation was a specific question regarding the decentralisation of the Access to Information team.

From part 3 of the consultation, there were comments regarding citizen enquiries which is relevant to the Customer Feedback team. The feedback has been incorporated into Section 2.2. above.

2.4 What mitigations can be put in place?

What mitigations are there against any negative impacts (if applicable)?

Training tools are available to members of staff who are responding to complaints. This includes guidance around accessibility to the complaint process, timely responses and ensuring impartiality. Despite this guidance, officers regularly require support from the Customer Feedback Team and therefore the training tools will need to be promoted. It should be noted that if the Customer Feedback Team no longer exists then alternative resource to ensure complaints guidance (internal and external) would need to be sourced to ensure it is up to date and accurate. This would need to be identified from elsewhere in the organisation and there may not be capacity to fulfil this requirement.

Alternative ways to submit requests to services directly would need to be offered to citizens, including telephoning the service directly as there is a statutory requirement to accept complaints via all channels. This is only an option if a telephone channel is offered for a service. There are telephones available at Marischal College and community hubs across the city for citizens that may wish to do this but do not have access to a phone.

Support to citizens can be provided at their local library and they may be able to help citizens navigate our website to find the service they wish to submit their request to. Library staff would need to be trained and may not have the capacity to offer assistance alongside other duties. Libraries may be a more convenient location for citizens rather than travelling to Marischal College. There are digital support groups operating in the City we can signpost citizens to who would like to get online and increase their digital literacy.

Our website has accessibility tools in place to support citizens with disabilities, situational challenges and language support with translation tool, a screen reader and customisable options to support neurodivergent citizens. We could consider more videos with British Sign Language and subtitles so people can get step by step guidance to support them through our digital processes.

A complaints/feedback champion for each service could be identified to provide the support and guidance required when responding to citizens, although capacity would be extremely limited and it would impact the delivery of other services as the member of staff would be unlikely to be able to carry out all of their current duties, along with being the point of contact for handling complaints.

With mitigations in place, what is the new overall rating of the negative impact(s)?

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| High | |
| Medium | |
| Low | X |
| Negative Impact Removed | |

3: Socio-Economic Impacts

This section is used to consider the impact of the policy on people who might be **unemployed, single parents, people with lower education or literacy, looked after children**, those with **protected characteristics** as examples.

Use this guide to understand more on socio-economic inequalities: [The Fairer Scotland Duty: Guidance for Public Bodies \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

3.1 What impact could this policy have on any of the below groups?

| Group | Negative | | | Neutral | Positive |
|---|----------|--------|-----|---------|----------|
| | High | Medium | Low | | |
| Low income / income poverty – those who cannot afford regular bills, food, clothing payments. | | | X | | |
| Low and/or no wealth – those who can meet basic living costs but have no savings for unexpected spend or provision for the future | | | X | | |
| Material deprivation – those who cannot access basic goods and services, unable to repair/replace broken electrical goods, heat their homes or access to leisure or hobbies | | | X | | |
| Area deprivation – consider where people live and where they work (accessibility and cost of transport) | | | X | | |
| Socio-economic background – social class, parents' education, employment, income. | | | X | | |

3.2 In what way will the policy impact people in these groups?

A reduction in services via online options could be considered a barrier to those who do not have access to a telephone or cannot attend a Council office in person to use the telephones there.

Finding the correct service by calling potentially several services may lead to a higher phone bill or the citizen may not have enough credit on their phone or money to use a telephone box. The citizen may also not have money to attend a Council office via public transport.

The Customer Feedback team have the expertise and knowledge regarding the complaints process and provide this information in a way that is easy to understand and sensitive to an individual's situation. Services would need to take this into account when communicating with citizens.

Particular attention also needs to be paid to ensure that complaint responses do not agitate citizens further, especially if a citizen has disclosed a personal situation that is affected by a socio-economic inequality.

3.3 What considerations have been made in reaching the above assessment?

What internal or external data has been considered? What does this data tell us?

There is no data relating to this matter. The impact assessments have been made based on the experience and knowledge from within the team regarding service users and potential impact.

What consultation and engagement and has been undertaken with officers and partner organisations?

Discussion with colleagues in Equalities, Legal and People and Organisational Development about potential impacts. The proposal has been shared within the extended Corporate Management Team and with Customer Services. This proposal and potential impact was described in Phase 2 of the Budget

Consultation, and links to the consultation were shared directly with many external partner organisations.

What consultation and engagement and has been undertaken with people who may be impacted by this policy? citizens, community groups, or other people/groups impacted by this policy?

Aberdeen City Council launched a three-part public consultation around the 2024/25 Budget and future spending plans from July 2023 to January 2024.

In part 1, which ran throughout July 2023, people were asked to award points across different service areas to indicate where they thought the council's spending priorities should be. In part 2, the public could either increase, decrease or not change the level of expenditure in areas listed. In part 3, which took place throughout January 2024, there were two face to face sessions for the public to attend and an online consultation.

There were 3,192 responses to part 1 and 2,654 responses to part 2. Part 3 was undertaken online and face-to-face where 126 people with protected characteristics took part and 377 comments were received. The feedback has been incorporated into this assessment.

3.4 What mitigations can be put in place?

What mitigations are there against any negative impacts (if applicable)?

Alternative methods for submitting feedback will need to be clearly communicated.

Citizens that want to submit feedback in person can do so at various Council buildings across the city which is connected by public transport from all areas.

Free computer access to look up service contact details is available at Marischal College and all local libraries. There are also telephones available at council offices across the city.

| | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|
| With mitigations in place, what is the new overall rating of the negative impact(s)? | High | |
| | Medium | |
| | Low | X |
| | Negative Impact Removed | |

4: Human Rights Impacts

The Human Rights Act 1998 sets out the fundamental rights and freedoms that everyone in the UK is entitled to. It incorporates the rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into domestic British law. The Human Rights Act came into force in the UK in October 2000

The Act sets out our human rights in a series of 'Articles'. Each Article deals with a different right.

Use this guide to understand more about [Human Rights](#).

4.1 What impact could this policy have on Human Rights?

| Human Rights Article | Negative | Neutral | Positive |
|---|----------|---------|----------|
| Article 6: Right to a fair trial | | X | |
| Article 7: No punishment without law | | X | |
| Article 8: Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence | | X | |
| Article 9: Freedom of thought, belief and religion | | X | |
| Article 10: Freedom of expression | | X | |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| Article 11: Freedom of assembly and association | | X | |
| Article 12: Right to marry and start a family | | X | |
| Article 14: Protection from discrimination in respect of these rights and freedoms | | X | |
| Article 1 of Protocol 1: Right to peaceful enjoyment of your property | | X | |
| Article 2 of Protocol 1: Right to education | | X | |
| Article 3 of Protocol 1: Right to participate in free elections | | X | |

4.2 In what way will the policy impact Human Rights?

N/A

4.3 What mitigations can be put in place?

What mitigations are there against any negative impacts (if applicable)?

None

If mitigations are in place, does this remove the negative impact?

No – negative impact remains

Yes – negative impact reduced

Yes - negative impact removed

5: Children and Young People’s Rights Impacts

The United Nations Convention has 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child’s life and set out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all children everywhere are entitled to. It also explains how adults and governments must work together to make sure all children can enjoy all their rights.

Children’s rights apply to every child/young person under the age of 18 and to adults still eligible to receive a “children’s service” (e.g. care leavers aged 18 – 25 years old).

The Conventions are also known as the “General Principles” and they help to interpret all the other articles and play a fundamental role in realising all the rights in the Convention for all children. They are:

1. Non-discrimination (Article 2)
2. Best interest of the child (Article 3)
3. Right to life survival and development (Article 6)
4. Right to be heard (Article 12)

You can [read the full UN Convention \(pdf\)](#), or [just a summary \(pdf\)](#), to find out more about the rights that are included.

5.1 What impact could this policy have on the rights of Children and Young People?

| UNCRC and Optional Protocols | Negative | Neutral | Positive |
|---|----------|---------|----------|
| Article 1: definition of the child | | X | |
| Article 2: non-discrimination | | X | |
| Article 3: best interests of the child | | X | |
| Article 4: implementation of the convention | | X | |
| Article 5: parental guidance and a child's evolving capacities | X | | |
| Article 6: life, survival and development | | X | |
| Article 7: birth registration, name, nationality, care | | X | |
| Article 8: protection and preservation of identity | | X | |
| Article 9: separation from parents | | X | |
| Article 10: family reunification | | X | |
| Article 11: abduction and non-return of children | | X | |
| Article 12: respect for the views of the child | X | | |
| Article 13: freedom of expression | X | | |
| Article 14: freedom of thought, belief and religion | | X | |
| Article 15: freedom of association | | X | |
| Article 16: right to privacy | | X | |
| Article 17: access to information from the media | | X | |
| Article 18: parental responsibilities and state assistance | | X | |
| Article 19: protection from violence, abuse and neglect | | X | |
| Article 20: children unable to live with their family | | X | |
| Article 21: adoption | | X | |
| Article 22: refugee children | | X | |
| Article 23: children with a disability | X | | |
| Article 24: health and health services | | X | |
| Article 25: review of treatment in care | | X | |
| Article 26: social security | | X | |
| Article 27: adequate standard of living | | X | |
| Article 28: right to education | | X | |
| Article 29: goals of education | | X | |
| Article 30: children from minority or indigenous groups | | X | |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| Article 31: leisure, play and culture | | X | |
| Article 32: child labour | | X | |
| Article 33: drug abuse | | X | |
| Article 34: sexual exploitation | | X | |
| Article 35: abduction, sale and trafficking | | X | |
| Article 36: other forms of exploitation | | X | |
| Article 37: inhumane treatment and detention | | X | |
| Article 38: war and armed conflicts | | X | |
| Article 39: recovery from trauma and reintegration | | X | |
| Article 40: juvenile justice | | X | |
| Article 41: respect for higher national standards | | X | |
| Article 42: knowledge of rights | | X | |
| Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure | | | |

5.2 In what way will the policy impact the rights of Children and Young People?

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has created a Child Friendly Complaints Handling Procedure in line with the UNCRC. Local Authorities will be implementing this procedure in 2024 and expected to handle complaints from children and young people in line with this. The Customer Feedback team have been piloting the procedure since June 2023 and are in regular communication with the SPSO about how the procedure is working in practice. If this policy is approved, a liaison officer for Aberdeen City Council would need to be identified to continue communication with the SPSO however, a focus on actively trialling the procedure may cease. It should be noted that the Customer Feedback's work with the SPSO on this procedure has been greatly valued and Aberdeen City Council have been the only Local Authority to be part of the pilot since the beginning.

The removal of the centralised Customer Feedback team would mean that children and young people may not be supported to provide their feedback from services. The Child Friendly Complaints Procedure indicates that a trusted person within Aberdeen City Council should be identified by the child/young person to help them throughout their complaint journey. If they are not supported in the first instance, they may not want to continue with their complaint/feedback and feel that they have not had the chance to express their views fully.

Children and young people would be expected to find their own avenue to make a complaint. This would impact several groups and not align with the SPSO and UNCRC's aims for children and young people to be heard and have the right to express their views.

Panels of children and young people have advised the SPSO that they should be given different avenues to make their complaint i.e. telephone, email, online form and in person. This will allow the child/young person to decide how they best communicate and how the Local Authority should manage their responses to them. Without the online resources and central Customer Feedback team, the options for children and young people to provide feedback would be reduced.

Customer Feedback also provide an independent oversight to feedback. If feedback was solely managed by the service, children and young people may not feel their views have fully been taken into account and the service may be biased towards their own staff.

5.3 What mitigations can be put in place?

| What mitigations are there against any negative impacts (if applicable)? | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| <p>Online training tools available to officers responding to complaints which will include guidance around the complaint process for children and young people. Alternative resource required to ensure the Child Friendly Complaint Handling Process is being implemented and they are providing support where needed for children and young people to express their concerns.</p> <p>All services would need to be aware of the Child Friendly Complaints Handling Procedure which the Customer Feedback team currently manages. Current processes and systems would need updated and support may not be available to children and young people from the services directly. Advice may also be inconsistent. Child Liaison Officers could be identified across the council to provide dedicated support to children and young people who wish to provide feedback should capacity allow. Advice may also be inconsistent.</p> | | |
| If mitigations are in place, does this remove the negative impact? | No – negative impact remains | X |
| | Yes – negative impact reduced | |
| | Yes - negative impact removed | |

6: Sign Off

| Any further positive or negative impacts on individuals or groups that have been considered? |
|---|
| The Workforce Reduction, Restructure and Redesign IIA provides information around the potential impact on the workforce and the mitigations in place. |
| Overall summary of changes made as a result of impact assessment. |
| Consideration needs to be given to those who will need dedicated support to submit feedback. Services will also need to provide several channels for citizens to do submit feedback and actively manage this to comply with statutory timescales. |
| Outline of how impact of policy will be monitored. |
| Feedback will continue to be monitored to ensure a positive experience for citizens. Timescales for receiving responses to feedback will be monitored as part of the requirement to provide data to the SPSO annually. |
| If there are any remaining negative impacts after mitigation, what is the justification for why this policy should proceed. |
| The Council has a legal obligation to deliver a balanced budget and this proposal assists with this requirement. |

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|--------------------------|---------------|
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| Date | 06/02/2024 |
| Chief Officer | Lucy McKenzie |
| Date | 23/02/24 |