

Argyll and Bute Council: Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment

Section 1: About the proposal

Title of Proposal	
Review of the Administration of Council Tax and Housing Benefit, Scottish Welfare Fund, Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty	
Intended outcome of proposal	
To reduce the council costs	
Description of proposal	
<p>Redesign staffing structure to reduce costs but ensure that we can continue to offer a level of service that meets statutory requirements in the current climate. Centralise the service to three main offices in Helensburgh, Lochgilphead and Campbeltown (Kintyre House) and introduce an element of generic working between Housing Benefit (HB) administration and Scottish Welfare Fund processing and HB administration and Council Tax administration.</p> <p>Current locations for offices also include Oban (4FTE), Islay (1.8FTE) Rothesay (2FTE), Dunoon (1.5 FTE) Campbeltown Burnett Building (6FTE).</p> <p>The team is predominantly female so negative impacts for gender have been identified for service deliverers. Negative impacts have also been identified for island populations as staffing is being centralised for future.</p>	
Business Outcome(s) / Corporate Outcome(s) to which the proposal contributes	
BO115 We are efficient and cost effective; and BO102 We provide support, prevention and opportunities to help people make better lifestyle choices	
Lead officer details:	
Name of lead officer	Fergus Walker
Job title	Revenue and Benefit Manager
Department	Customer Services
Appropriate officer details:	
Name of appropriate officer	Judy Orr
Job title	Head of Customer and Support Services
Department	Customer Services
Sign off of EqSEIA	
Date of sign off	
Who will deliver the proposal?	
Revenue and Benefit Manager	

Section 2: Evidence used in the course of carrying out EqSEIA

Consultation / engagement

Staff engagement workshops were delivered on 31 October and 1 November. Further informal consultation was held with potentially affected employees between Monday 19 November and Wednesday 21 November by way of face-to-face meetings and video conferencing with the Revenue and Benefit Manager. Plans have been amended following the consultation and number of staff savings required reduced through alternative savings from increased income and savings in software maintenance and swipe card usage.

Data

CIPFA Director of Finance statistics, Housing Benefit caseload, outstanding Council Tax and NDR debt. Staff profiles, relevant, age, gender and general health were used to inform proposals. Data was taken from staff workshops and plans amended to fit the output.

Other information

The scale of changes in the UK government welfare reform agenda has increased significantly since the introduction of Universal Credit Full Service in Argyll and Bute Job Centres on 19 September 2018. The Housing Benefit caseload is reducing by 25 to 30 claims per week on average and we anticipate losing around 15% of our total caseload over the next 6 months. CIPFA director of Finance statistics show that the Council are the 4th most expensive in Scotland in administering Housing Benefit. This is the driver for change.

Despite the planned reduction in predominantly benefits staffing we anticipate continuing to have the capacity to deliver decision making in a reasonable timescale to the remaining claimant population primarily made up of pension age claimants and those in temporary and/or supported accommodation.

Processing of decisions for each of these benefits will be maintained as the reduction in staff levels matches a reduction in caseload as a result of the impact of Full Service universal Credit in Argyll and Bute. Any potential impact is further mitigated as there is no planned reduction in Benefit Assessor numbers in year 1 other than losing 1 FTE vacancy. In year 2 a further 2 FTE will be removed from the structure but I do not anticipate significant knock on impacts as the reduction in staffing is in line with falling benefit caseloads due to the impact of Universal Credit.

Gaps in evidence

Not known

Section 3: Impact of proposal

Impact on service users:

	Negative	No impact	Positive	Don't know
Protected characteristics:				
Age		x		
Disability		x		
Ethnicity		x		
Gender		x		
Gender reassignment		x		

	Negative	No impact	Positive	Don't know
Marriage and Civil Partnership		X		
Pregnancy and Maternity		X		
Religion		X		
Sexual Orientation		X		
Fairer Scotland Duty:				
Mainland rural population		X		
Island populations		X		
Low income		X		
Low wealth		X		
Material deprivation		X		
Area deprivation		X		
Socio-economic background		X		
Communities of place?		X		
Communities of interest?		X		

Impact on service deliverers (including employees, volunteers etc):

	Negative	No impact	Positive	Don't know
Protected characteristics:				
Age		X		
Disability		X		
Ethnicity		X		
Gender	X			
Gender reassignment		X		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		X		
Pregnancy and Maternity		X		
Religion		X		
Sexual Orientation		X		
Fairer Scotland Duty:				
Mainland rural population		X		
Island populations	X			
Low income		X		
Low wealth		X		
Material deprivation		X		
Area deprivation		X		
Socio-economic background		X		
Communities of place?		X		
Communities of interest?		X		

If any 'don't know's have been identified, at what point will impacts on these groups become identifiable?

There are no "don't knows"

How has 'due regard' been given to any negative impacts that have been identified?

Yes.

On the proposed action to centralise staffing by moving to only 3 offices instead of the current 8 offices, the plan is to allow staff in these areas to continue to work in the offices but when a vacancy arises we will only recruit to the 3 identified centralised locations. This will lessen the impact on existing staff members in these areas. Existing staff with knowledge and experience can also work from home.

Of a total headcount of 57 staff, 6 are male and 51 (89%) are female therefore female employees are most likely to be affected when delivering the changes. 17 members of staff are at threat of redundancy, 14 (82%) of these are female and 3 are male. The proportion of staff at risk of redundancy in the staff group is similar to the gender profile of the staff. I don't intend to change the proposal because of this.

Section 4: Interdependencies

Is this proposal likely to have any knock-on effects for any other activities carried out by or on behalf of the council?
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No

Details of knock-on effects identified

No knock-on impacts have been identified.

Section 5: Monitoring and review

How will you monitor and evaluate the equality impacts of your proposal?

The impact of the proposal on the gender issues identified the majority of staff are female so it is likely that the majority of redundancies will also be female. There is nothing we can do to mitigate that risk but we will monitor it as we go through the redundancy and redeployment process, and assist wherever possible to find a suitable alternative to redundancy for them.
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