

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

Before completing this EqIA please ensure you have read the EqIA Guidance Notes

Title	Restructure of the Planning Service		
Date assessment started:	6/01/20	Version No:	V2
		Date of completion:	21 February 2020

Type of Strategy, Policy, Project or Service:

Is this Equality Impact Assessment (please put a cross in the relevant box)

Existing:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Changing, update or revision:	<input type="checkbox"/>
New or proposed:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other (please explain):	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is this Equality Impact Assessment (please put a cross in the relevant box)

Internal:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	External:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Both:	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Step 1: Aims

<p>What are the aims of your strategy, policy, project or service?</p> <p>The unitary authority of Dorset Council service a population of about 375,000, compared to 396,000 in the neighbouring Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council. Although slightly smaller in population than its urban neighbour, Dorset Council has a substantially larger and more physically varied geographical area. The area is largely rural with the population principally contained in main settlements such as Weymouth and Dorchester, as well as other strategically placed market towns and villages. The size and environmental diversity of Dorset is a great asset but also a challenging place to plan for.</p> <p>Moving forward, the Planning service needs to overcome some pressing systemic barriers to its ability to provide an exemplar service. Before identifying these barriers, it is helpful to set out the higher-level aspiration for the service in terms of how it relates to Dorset Council's Plan for 2020-2024, which contains four guiding principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer of Choice • Customer Focused • Sustainable Organisation • Effective and Modern <p>What does this mean for Planning?</p> <p>The transformation of the planning service needs to ensure that we are achieving these principles and are performing as one council. This means:</p>

- Providing a positive working environment for staff with opportunities for progression and personal development, where the good reputation of the service and the ability to focus on achieving better outcomes adds to job satisfaction. This will need to consider workloads, responsibilities, management support and technical/administrative resources.
- Achieving high and consistent standards of performance, meeting performance targets and delivering a service that is responsive to the needs of all our customers, with capacity to respond effectively to queries, develop good working relationships with applicants and developers, win the trust of communities and develop partnerships with parish councils, consultees and other organisations.
- Showing community leadership by delivering a local plan that places sustainable development at its core and creates the policy framework to ensure new development is meeting the challenges of the climate emergency, while also leading by example through the way we work Economy and Social/housing.
- Maximising the efficiency of systems, working practices and technology to operate as a single planning authority, build capacity of staff to focus on quality, instil a culture of continuous improvement, and enable customers to get a seamless service. This will require having resilience in terms of management structures, attraction and retention of skilled staff, and transformational systems development with state-of-the-art digital interactions.

What is Being Proposed?

The proposed structure retains the three primary service areas as managed by current service managers (Development Management and Enforcement, Spatial Planning, and Conservation) as well as the Place Support services which provide some of the key planning application validation and support functions for planning.

In **development management and enforcement**, the proposal is to create a structure that reflects the geographies of the three area committees, with managers and officers aligned to support the committees and dealing with planning applications within those areas. This includes sufficient management resilience, with a lead area manager to oversee planning matters, including the running of the relevant area committees, together with 'fast track' casework managers, thereby ensuring the number of management reports is acceptable. Enforcement will follow similar area-based arrangements so that there is effective and consistent decision making across the new council geography. A lead enforcement manager will oversee enforcement but will be supported by area-based seniors who will take on much of the technical support role for more junior enforcement staff.

We are also proposing some lead officers to deal with strategic applications to ensure there are adequate resources to deal with complex cases, as well as a post to lead on corporate (the council's own) development. There will be an associated increase in the number of case officer posts, as well as business support roles, to deliver an effective planning service.

The **spatial planning** function will be organised around 'specialist' teams that cover the entire council area (and hence do not need to follow committee area boundaries), each with manager to oversee the work. The teams will cover minerals and waste, definitive map/rights of way, local plans, neighbourhood plans and infrastructure/implementation.

The **conservation service** has fewer staff so will be organised around the trees function and conservation function, each with two teams (four in total) to provide the necessary management resilience within the service.

Planning support will see additional staff (based upon achieving a workable ratio of planning applications to staff) to ensure a quick turnaround on the validation of planning applications and administrative support to planning officers, This is designed to front-load the planning application process to avoid downstream delays, and to minimise work pressures on individuals.

Overall there is an increase in staff numbers, and it is not expected that there will be a need for any redundancies.

What is the background or context to the proposal?

The Planning Service sits within Economy, Growth and Infrastructure. It carries out the statutory land use planning functions on behalf of Dorset Council under the provisions of the various town and country planning acts (and associated legislation). The planning leadership comprises a head of planning and three service managers covering: development management and enforcement; spatial planning; and conservation. Also as part of this team is the Business Development Manager for Place, whose service is responsible for key business support functions for planning (principally validation and technical support for planning applications). For this reason, the change management arrangements (set out in the change management document) include those for the business support service where they relate to planning. This is summarised above in the aims.

The costs of the planning service (approximately £6.5 million) is principally staff costs, with 83% of the entire budget being dedicated to salaries and 'on-costs'. Non-discretionary income from statutory planning application fees (which are set nationally), together with discretionary income (principally from pre-application fees and service level agreements) is around £3 million which would recoup approximately 47% of the total budget (about 55% of staff costs), leaving a remaining share of about 53% to be met by the service budget (£3.5 million).

The total service is comprised of 124 posts (excluding head of service, service managers and agency/contracted staff) organised in three service areas, together with 23 dedicated planning support staff based in Place Services, making a total of 147 posts.

Spatial Planning

Spatial Planning is the lead service for statutory development plans and other policy-related work such as implementation and monitoring, preparation of planning guidance, and supporting the development of neighbourhood plans. A key priority for the team is to deliver a new local plan for Dorset by 2023.

The service also includes the minerals and waste planning team which comprises both development management and policy functions. Minerals and waste applications are all classed as major development in planning law and, in the case of mineral sites, permitted applications can generate significant on-going work for decades to follow in relation to extraction rates, restoration programmes and active monitoring of progress. The team also has to carry out complex reviews of old mineral permission (ROMPs) to bring them up to modern standards, sometimes requiring significant compensation claims if permissions are revoked on environmental grounds. Dorset is home to one of the most diverse and valuable reserves of mineral deposits in the country, many of which sit within highly sensitive habitats.

The minerals and waste team provides specialist minerals and waste service for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council which for this financial year would secure about £89,000 via a service level agreement. This is subject to review but should the arrangement continue, it will go some way to covering staff costs within the team.

Spatial Planning is home to the definitive map team which manages the definitive map of rights of way for Dorset. The team also deals with applications for town and village greens and registration of commons land.

Development Management and Enforcement

The development management service deals with approximately 5,000 planning applications per annum (based upon a 4-year average). In broad terms numbers per officer sit within a range of about 105-135 on an annual basis (depending on casework levels carried by team leaders), which is within the range of comparable authorities. However, Casework numbers currently vary across the geographical area of legacy authorities. It should be noted that this does not include other significant work demands which can arise from a number of sources, including appeals, pre-application consultations, or discharge of conditions. The work demands are also challenging in complexity given the significant geographical extent, landscape and townscape variety and high degree environmental protection across Dorset. Officers also have to liaise with a high number of different parish councils, while the complexity of the local plan policy basis requires significant staff time and expertise to negotiate.

Whilst there is no statutory duty to enforce against breaches of planning, it is an essential mechanism for ensuring development takes place in accordance with adopted policies. A failure to take appropriate action can have significant reputational impacts and may expose the authority to action from the Local Government Ombudsman.

Conservation

The service provides a vital role in the development management process by providing specialist advice on planning applications. Alongside this the team is responsible for numerous conservation areas and listed buildings across Dorset. The team also deals with tree preservation order (designations) and applications for tree work. The smallest of the three services, Conservation has to cover significant geographical area and casework with limited staff resources.

Place – Planning Support

The Business Development Manager for Place is responsible for staff providing technical and administrative support for Planning Services. This include validation and registration of planning applications (with the exception of minerals and waste applications, which are currently validated by technical officers in Spatial Planning).

Area Committee Arrangements

Dorset Council operates three Area Planning Committees Southern and Western, Northern; and Eastern. Meetings for the Northern Area Committee are held in Sturminster Newton. The Eastern Area Committee meets at Wimborne, while the Southern and Western Area Committee is hosted at South Walks House. From an operational perspective planning officers in the Development Management service have been broadly aligned with the geographical areas that represent the area committee boundaries. Applying the numbers of applications that have been received over the past four years, the eastern area deals with 37% of applications, the northern area has 33%, and the western and southern area handles 30%.

Current Office Accommodation Arrangements

Staff within the service are based principally in three main locations in four offices as follows:

- Christchurch Civic Centre: these offices are now part of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council but Dorset Council officers previously employed by Christchurch and East Dorset are currently based here. The arrangement with BCP comes to an end on 31 March 2020 so a permanent home is needed for any of our staff using this office.
- County Hall, Dorchester: this is home to former Dorset County Council staff, comprising the minerals and waste teams (development management and policy), the definitive maps team and the planning obligations manager.
- South Walks House, Dorchester: this is the current centre of duty for the largest number of staff from across the service that were previously employed by Dorset Councils Partnership (North Dorset, West Dorset, and Weymouth and Portland).
- Westport House, Wareham: this is the centre of duty for policy, development management and business support colleagues formerly employed by Purbeck District Council.

Wimborne also has a flexible working hub at Allenview House, while other hubs (including one at Blandford) are used by some staff. However, whilst these offer some flexibility in terms of working locations, they do not perform the role of main centres of duty.

The service contains some functions which are principally office-based, and others which to varying degrees involve a need to travel. This will need to be reflected in the review.

Step 2: Intelligence and Communication

What data, information, evidence and research was used in this EqIA and how has it been used to inform the decision-making process?

Planning Services Change Management Arrangements.

06 January 2020 Personal data from DES and Resource Link (local authority Employee Information Systems)

Once the above paper was issued, communications commenced with the affected staffing group via consultation meetings.

What data do you already have about your service users, or the people your proposal will have an impact on?

Data included in Step 3: Assessment is taken from personal data in DES and Resource Link. These figures have been included within the Equality Impact Assessment itself, wherever possible. However, percentages have been used where there is a risk that employees can be identified.

It should also be noted that the information in DES and Resource Link is reliant on employees populating these fields themselves and as this is not mandatory; there are some instances where no information has been recorded, or the individual has chosen not to provide such information or Dorset Council does not ask for this data..

There will be an opportunity to gather further details during the consultation period about those with protected characteristics, for example if they have any additional requirements or are in a caring role.

What engagement or consultation has taken place as part of this EqIA?
Employees have been invited to attend a formal consultation meeting with Management, HR and Trade Unions on 6 th January 2020, marking the start of the formal consultation process. It is anticipated that there will be 45 days consultation period which will close on 19 th February 2020. It is anticipated that the new staffing structure will be in place by 1 st April 2020.
Is further information needed to help inform this proposal?
No
How will the outcome of consultation be fed back to those who you consulted with?
The outcomes will be fed back formally and in writing by the Head of Planning.

Step 3: Assessment

Who does the service, strategy, policy, project or change impact?

- If your strategy, policy, project or service contains options you may wish to consider providing an assessment for each option. Please cut and paste the template accordingly.

For each protected characteristic please choose from the following options:

- Please note in some cases more than one impact may apply – in this case please state all relevant options and explain in the ‘Please provide details’ box.

Positive Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impact on a large proportion of protected characteristic groups • Significant positive impact on a small proportion of protect characteristics group
Negative Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disproportionate impact on a large proportion of protected characteristic groups • Significant disproportionate impact on a small proportion of protected characteristic groups.
Neutral Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change/ no assessed significant impact of protected characteristic groups
Unclear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough data/evidence has been collected to make an informed decision.

Age:	Neutral Impact	
What age bracket does this affect?	Age Groups	Number of employees
	16-24	6
	25-39	43
	50-59	36
	40-49	40
	60-64	15
	65+	7
Please provide details:	All staff will be treated equally regardless of age.	

Disability:	Neutral Impact
Does this affect a specific disability group?	No
Please provide details:	<p>1.35% employees in scope of this review have declared a disability, as this number is low, we do not want to risk identifying employees and as such a percentage has been used.</p> <p>All staff will be treated equally regardless of their disability status however, if someone should declare a disability during the consultation - reasonable adjustments will be made to enable them to fully participate in the process.</p>

Gender Reassignment & Gender Identity:	Unclear
Please provide details:	No information has been declared as Dorset Council does not ask for this data, as such we are not able to analyse as to whether there would be impact at this present time. However, all staff will be treated equally regardless of gender.

Pregnancy and maternity:	Neutral Impact
Please provide details:	<p>All staff will be treated equally. There will be 4 members of staff on maternity leave either now or before the structure is confirmed.</p> <p>All affected employees have been kept up to date with the service review proposals and will continue to be engaged on terms that suit them. Post preferencing will be operated in a manner that does not infringe the rights of any employee on maternity leave or any employee who may be on paternity or adoption leave.</p>

Race and Ethnicity:	Unclear
Please provide details:	We have less than 1% of staff who are recorded as Black and Minority Ethnicity (BME). A further 16 staff have not declared their ethnicity. However, all staff will be treated equally regardless of race or ethnicity.

Religion or belief:	Unclear
Please provide details:	We have insufficient data at this present time to analyse this, however, all staff will be treated equally regardless of religion or belief.

Sexual orientation:	Unclear
Please provide details:	We have insufficient data at this present time to analyse this, however, all staff will be treated equally regardless of sexual orientation.

Sex:	Neutral Impact
Please provide details:	About 65% of staff are female and 35% are male. All staff will be treated equally regardless of sex.

Marriage or civil partnership:	Neutral Impact
Please provide details:	No impacts have been identified.
Carers:	Neutral Impact
Please provide details:	No impacts have been identified. Being a carer may be an issue for some employees, but the Council offers flexible working conditions and opportunities for part time hours or personalised working patterns. All employees have the right to request such arrangements and this has been communicated to staff.
Rural isolation:	Neutral Impact
Please provide details:	No impacts have been identified.
Single parent families:	Neutral Impact
Please provide details:	No impacts have been identified. Childcare may be an issue for employees but the Council offers flexible working conditions and opportunities for part time hours or personalised working patterns. All employees have the right to request such arrangements and this has been communicated to staff.
Poverty (social & economic deprivation):	Unclear Impact
Please provide details:	There is a risk that some staff will see a lower salary or grade depending upon the posts that are secured. However, pay protection will apply to anyone adversely affected, and any existing pay protection rights will remain unaffected.
Military families/veterans:	Neutral Impact
Please provide details:	No impacts have been identified.

Step 4: Action Plan

Provide actions for **positive**, **negative** and **unclear** impacts.

If you have identified any **negative** or **unclear** impacts, describe what adjustments will be made to remove or reduce the impacts, or if this is not possible provide justification for continuing with the proposal.

Issue	Action	Person(s) responsible	Deadline	How will it be monitored?
Post preferencing	A draft form has been added to the consultation page to give an indication of the requirements. The planning leadership team will meet with HR colleagues after the end of the consultation to finalise the post preferencing arrangements and will provide guidance	Head of Service	28/02/2020	Log of actions/consultation responses
Communicating with staff on maternity leave	Individual communication with affected staff on their terms	Service Managers	On-going	Weekly management meetings
Well-being services	Provide information to staff about support/well-being services	Service managers/HR	19 February 2020	n/a
Implementation of structure	Take account of all responses in finalising structure	Head of Service	1 April 2020	Log of actions/consultation responses

Step 5: EqlA Sign Off

Officer completing this EqlA:	Mike Garrity, Head of Planning	Date:	21 January 2020
Equality Lead:	Susan Ward-Rice	Date:	09/03/2020
Equality & Diversity Action Group Chair:	Rick Perry	Date:	09/03/2020