A Diversity Impact Assessment is a way of examining whether different communities or groups are adversely affected by a current or proposed service, policy or project. It may not always be obvious how services or policies may impact on certain groups. These notes should help to explain what you need to consider when doing an Impact Assessment and why you need to consider it. Remember that not all services or policies etc will be relevant to all equality groups – if an issue or question is genuinely not applicable to what you are assessing don’t be afraid to say so.

1. Adverse impact

Where one or more group or groups of people are put at a disadvantage by the way a particular policy or procedure is carried out. For example, disabled, elderly or people living in very isolated rural areas may struggle to use wheelie bins as easily as other people.

2. Direct discrimination

Where an individual or group is treated less favourably than others because of their personal characteristics i.e. failure to treat a compliant seriously because the complainant is elderly or a deliberate decision to exclude a group from the provision of a service because they are Muslim.

3. Indirect discrimination

This is often less obvious than direct discrimination. It means the effect that a service or policy has on a group of individuals, where the effect is to adversely impact on that group i.e. where a requirement for a qualification is too advanced in relation to the level of the job or where unnecessary restrictions are placed on hours of work.

Even if the effect of the service or policy is unintentional it can still be indirect discrimination and is therefore illegal.

4. Justification

There are possible justifications to discrimination but these are restricted and generally the need to discriminate must be necessary. Classic examples include the employment of a male actor to portray a male character and insisting on people wearing certain items of clothing on health and safety grounds.
5. The Equality Groups

Race and minority ethnic groups - Ethnic minority groups include Jewish people, Gypsies and travellers and Sikhs. In Wychavon we are aware of the Gypsy and Traveller community and Migrant Workers and therefore it cannot be assumed that because we are not a metropolitan authority that this is not an issue for us.

Disability - This includes a wide range of physical and mental impairment but does not legally include such conditions as alcohol or drug addiction.

Gender - Men/boys & Women/girls - We have split the category into genders to help you to consider the issues that may arise. Although the protected characteristic is “sex” any adverse impact will normally be greater on one gender than the other.

Gender reassignment (transsexual) - Not everyone will necessarily be that easy to categorise in the gender category and Gender reassignment will be a protected characteristic – currently under Section 7 of the Equality Bill

Marital status (marriage and civil partnership) - This may not often seem like an obvious characteristic to consider. However it again will be a protected characteristic – currently under Section 8 of the Equality Bill. Marital status can also be a useful indicator of indirect discrimination – think of single mothers and the statistical likelihood that married couples may have children. Try not to think too personally this isn’t saying that being married or having a civil partner is better than being single and visa versa.

Sexual orientation - Again this will be a protected characteristic – currently under Section 12 of the Equality Bill. This is not just about gay/lesbian/bisexual or transgender issues, it will be illegal to discriminate against a person on the ground of their sexual orientation regardless of what that is.

Religion and/or belief - Is it likely that a particular religious group or person with that belief will be affected? Here issues such as time and clothing are often contentious, as religious practices are at issue. However this does include belief and therefore schools of thought such as atheism and humanism are also included.

Age - Remember to consider all age groups and not just the young and elderly people – break a life-span into decades if this helps you consider issues which may arise for people.

Income - The Equality Bill (section 1(1)) introduced a new duty on the public sector to reduce the inequalities that arise from socio-economic disadvantage. This will be very relevant to rural areas where issues like access to transport etc will be strongly influenced by a persons income.

People living in rural or urban areas - The way a service or policy is implemented maybe very different for people who live in rural areas than for those who live in towns. For example access to the Contact Centres will be considerably easier for those living in Droitwich, Evesham and Pershore.