

# STRATEGIC EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## Budget report 2012/13

Date: 13 February 2012  
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### Executive Summary

#### **Background and context**

Bolton Council continues to operate in a very challenging context, as a result of the impact which the global economic recession continues to have on the national and local economic position.

To respond to this financial context and the associated reductions in the council's grant settlement from central government, the council has identified budget savings in the region of £60m for the 2011/12 and 2012/13 period. To allow time for the council to make the right decisions for the long-term, and to avoid the need to make quick and potentially unsustainable decisions, the savings for 2011/12 and 2012/13 have been treated as a two year programme.

Executive Members have considered and approved their response to the budget position and associated budget guidance, and have subsequently approved their overall budgets. The detailed options have been set out in a series of reports and accompanying Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) to individual Executive Members. In addition, our assessment of the overall impact of the budget (focused on savings coming forward in 2011/12) has been set out in Strategic EIAs of 22 November 2010 and 14 February 2011.

This report of 13 February 2012 puts forward the proposed budget for 2012/13. This accompanying strategic EIA draws on the detailed assessments of individual budget options in order to set out our analysis of the collective impact of the £60m savings across the 2011/12 and 2012/13 period.

#### **Philosophy**

As set out in previous Strategic EIAs, the council's work to deliver its budget savings has been guided by a clear philosophy and approach. This was set out by the Executive on 22 November 2010:

- Minimise the impact on our ability to achieve our main aims of ensuring greater economic prosperity for all and narrowing the gap in outcomes, particularly those in our most deprived communities.
- Ensure we meet our statutory obligations in particular around safeguarding the welfare of vulnerable children and adults.

- Ensure that wider issues around vulnerability, disadvantage and poverty are at the heart of our decisions and that any negative impact is minimised.
- Ensure that within this very difficult context we maintain our focus on local political priorities such as the subsidised school meals initiative and free access to leisure for the over 60s.
- Ensure that we listen to, understand and where possible respond to the views of local people and stakeholders.
- In view of the need to set a balanced budget on the 1 April each year, ensure we have a pragmatic and practical approach that achieves a sensible and achievable way forward.

At a very practical level, these priorities have informed our strategy and proposals:

- Protect front-line services as much as possible by driving efficiencies from services and the 'back office' in the first instance.
- Ensure in-house services are fundamentally challenged and reviewed to make the savings required before considering any wider options.
- Examine where service quality can be sensibly reduced (e.g. from excellent to good) to make savings without having a disproportionate impact on service users.
- To ensure that this enduring philosophy underpins our approach over the long term which will result in different levels of savings across council services and activities, in line with the delivery of the council's priorities.
- Ensure that whilst our primary focus is on the people of Bolton, we do all we can to support staff through this difficult period and minimise the number of job losses and compulsory redundancies.

### **The approach to managing and mitigating service impact:**

Achieving the unprecedented level of savings – even as a two year programme – has been a significant challenge. Delivering this scale of change within a relatively short timeframe has, by the nature of this work, had some impact on service delivery. For example, there have been sizeable reductions in preventative activity which has been affected by a significant reduction in grant funding, and the need to target resources to services supporting people with the greatest needs. In addition, there have been significant reductions in back office activity, which may have a longer term impact on the organisation's capacity to deliver.

In these very difficult circumstances we have continued to do our very best to take a considered approach to making the savings, and have taken several steps to mitigate the worst impacts by:

- Ensuring that as far as possible we are protecting front line services by taking a greater proportion of the savings from corporate departments. Table 1 shows that the council's front line service departments have been asked to make savings of between 17% and 25%, while the corporate centre is making savings of 32%

- Seeking to make savings through efficiencies in the first instance, in order to limit the direct impact on service levels. However, the extent of the savings required has made this increasingly difficult. One third of the savings across the two year programme will come from efficiencies; but it is anticipated that around 60% will have an indirect or direct impact on services or customers/clients. This analysis is set out in table 2
- We have sought to mitigate the impact of the withdrawal/ending of grant funding for neighbourhood renewal activity by mainstreaming some resources to allow for the continuation of some key projects. In 2011/12, £2.75m was mainstreamed to support priorities such as community safety (including supporting victims of anti-social behaviour and domestic violence), reducing crime, cohesion and economic prosperity. This funding has been protected in the 2012/13 budget
- A full review of activity within the Children's Services department has been undertaken, in response to the reduction in the children's services grant. This has allowed us to take a considered approach to the future delivery of council and commissioned activity so we can develop a new approach that protects priority services and activities as much as possible; and ensures that resources are reprioritised, and are targeted towards the most vulnerable children and young people
- We continue to work closely with voluntary, community and faith sector ('voluntary sector') partners to manage the reduction of funding in the round, and to ensure that remaining resources are targeted towards Bolton's priorities. For example, a £1.4m corporate fund was established in 2011/12 in order to support voluntary sector organisations to deliver against Bolton's priorities. In addition, a £160,000 small grants fund has been established to support community and grass roots groups. The corporate funding for the voluntary sector has been protected in the 2012/13 budget
- We have a clear strategy for minimising compulsory redundancies by maximising vacancy management, promoting voluntary early retirement (VER) and voluntary severance (VS), and by proactively redeploying displaced staff into other parts of the council. Up to 31 December 2011, 858 members of staff took VER or VS
- In overall terms, over the two years 2011/12 and 2012/13, a total of 833 posts have been deleted, the vast majority of which has been achieved through voluntary leavers or the deletion of vacant posts. Where vacant posts have not been deleted, they have been used to support the redeployment of displaced staff
- We are continuing to work closely with the Trades Unions to maintain good industrial relations and to support and consult with staff appropriately

<b>Table 1: savings from service and corporate departments</b>	
<b>Department</b>	<b>% savings 2011/12 and 2012/13</b>
Adult and Community Services	17%
Children's Services	25%
Environment	22%
Central Departments (Chief Executive's, Corporate Resources and Development and Regeneration)	32%

<b>Table 2: type of savings made across 2011/12 and 2012/13</b>	
<b>Type of saving</b>	<b>%</b>
Efficiencies: administrative/ management changes	28.3%
Efficiencies: buying arrangements	5.2%
Efficiencies with some impact on customers/clients	16.8%
Additional income	4%
Service impact	45.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

The remainder of this strategic EIA responds directly to the council's standard EIA questions.

### **Equality Impact Assessment questions**

#### **1. Describe in summary the aims, objectives and purpose of the proposal, including desired outcomes**

As set out above, the council continues to face a very challenging financial context. In 2011/12, there was a sizeable reduction in the council's main Revenue Support Grant. The council has not received any Revenue Support Grant for 2012/13 and is now making a contribution back to central government from its share of National Business rates. In addition, many grants provided to Children's Services have been reduced or stopped; and the Working Neighbourhoods Fund has been removed.

These combined impacts have required the council to identify savings in the region of £60m across 2011/12 and 2012/13, in order to set a balanced budget by 1 April 2012. To allow time for the council to make a considered response, these savings have been treated as a two year programme, covering the 2011/12 and 2012/13 period.

As set out in previous strategic EIAs, delivering savings on this unprecedented scale has meant that this work will have some impact on service delivery, and have some effect on a range of stakeholders. Around 60% of the savings will have some indirect or direct impact on service delivery or customers. However, this work continues to be led by a clear philosophy which seeks to minimise the impact on front line services and protect the most vulnerable people in the borough.

## 2. Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the proposal?

As set out in previous strategic EIAs, the very nature of the services which the council provides, and the scale of the savings required, make it almost inevitable that a range of stakeholders will be affected by changes to council activity in some way over the coming years (e.g. staff, service users, Elected Members, Trades Unions, local public sector partners, local businesses).

When looking at the impact of the £60m savings across 2011/12 and 2012/13, the following stakeholders in particular are likely to be affected:

- **Staff** – given the scale of the savings it is inevitable that there will be an impact on staff, whether through loss of employment or associated restructuring and change. The council's workforce has reduced by 833 posts as a result of the two year programme the vast majority of which has been achieved through voluntary leavers or the deletion of vacant posts
- **Service users/their carers** – service users, both now and in the future, may find that some aspects of service provision change. Some services have changed fundamentally and are being delivered in a very different way; some services have reduced or stopped; and some customers' eligibility to access services has changed.
- **Organisations working with or supported by the council** – the reducing level of resources available has had an effect on the extent to which the council can provide financial support for the work of partner organisations. Equally, whilst difficult to quantify, the reduction in services provided by the council may also have an effect on the demands for the services provided by these partners.
- **Schools** – the fundamental review of our Children's Services department and the activity it delivers is particularly important for schools, since the way in which some services are provided to schools has changed.
- **Members of the general public** – are likely to be affected by changes to universal services such as highways, neighbourhood services, and libraries.

## 3. In summary, what are the anticipated (positive or negative) impacts of the proposal?

As set out in section 2, it is clear that the scale of the savings required to set a legal and balanced budget will affect a range of stakeholders across the borough, in a variety of ways. Due to the scale and pace of change required, the council's options for mitigating adverse impacts are much more limited than they have been in the past. Some degree of adverse impact is therefore difficult to avoid.

To deliver the £60m savings, there have been in excess of 100 reviews of varying scales and impacts taking place across the council's services and policies. Many of these reviews have reduced or removed capacity within back office services, as part of the council's strategy to mitigate the impact on front line delivery. However, it is too early to tell what the long term impact of these changes may have on wider organisational delivery. In addition, the council has had to make some difficult

decisions about how it prioritises its resources. For example, reductions have been made to many of the council's preventative and 'value added' services, which have been affected by a significant reduction in grant funding, and by the need to target resources to services supporting people with the greatest needs.

Our analysis of the impact of the range of reviews on the diversity groups is set out in section 4 of this EIA, and can be summarised as follows:

- We do not anticipate that the reviews as a collective have had a disproportionate impact in relation to: race, religion, gender, gender reassignment, sexuality, pregnancy and maternity, or marriage and civil partnership
- The scale of change within Adult Services and Children's Services will, by its nature, have an impact on the borough's children and young people and older residents. For example, some services have changed; some have reduced or stopped; and eligibility for some services has changed. Steps taken to mitigate service impacts are described in section 4
- The changes within Adult Services and Children's Services have also affected some services which support people who have disabilities. We have sought to minimise the front line impact of these reviews as far as possible within the circumstances. The needs of service users remain central to the provision of care
- There may be some impacts for people who care for friends or family members, particularly if the person they care for is affected by the changes to service delivery within Adult Services and Children's Services
- The significant loss of grant funding which was previously used to target activity towards Bolton's socio-economically disadvantaged communities has had an effect on the council's capacity to deliver such work. Resources have been reprioritised in line with the council's philosophy, which seeks to protect the most vulnerable people but it must be stressed that resources for this work are more limited than in previous years
- We recognise that the council's decisions can have an effect on our partners. We have worked closely with our partners to shape our decisions, to reprioritise activity in line with Bolton's priorities, and to offer a degree of protection to essential activity where appropriate
- The council's workforce has been affected in various ways, for example in relation to the reduction of posts and capacity; changes in roles and responsibilities; and changes in the profile of the workforce. The council continues to do what it can to support staff through this difficult time
- Analysis of the changing profile of the workforce is set out in section four, and does not presently raise any significant concerns about disproportionate impact on particular groups

It is important to reiterate that the £60m savings have been delivered on the basis of a clear philosophy, which seeks to minimise the impact of the budget reductions on the borough's most vulnerable people. This is set out in the Executive Summary of this EIA, along with examples of key mitigating actions.

Throughout this work, we have sought to deliver the savings in a manner which protects the vulnerable; maintains good relations in our communities; and ensures that decisions do not unlawfully discriminate against any particular group. This is in line with the council's duty to have due regard to the following under the Equality Act 2010:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advancing equality of opportunity between different groups of people
- Fostering good relations between different groups of people

4. **Is there any potential for (positive or negative) differential impact or adverse impact with regard to the identified stakeholders and the diversity groups (race, religion, disability, gender, gender reassignment, age, sexuality, caring status, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, socio-economic)? Can this be justified/what mitigating actions will be taken?**

As set out in section three, while the council has made every effort to minimise the impact of the budget reductions, the scale of savings required does mean that there will be some impact for some stakeholders. Our analysis of the impact for service users, our partners and our workforce is set out below.

### **Service users**

We do not anticipate that the reviews as a collective have had a disproportionate impact in relation to: race, religion, gender, gender reassignment, sexuality, pregnancy and maternity, or marriage and civil partnership

### *Age*

All of the council's departments have been asked to find significant savings as part of the two year budget programme. We have sought to offer a degree of protection to front-line departments by asking them to find proportionately smaller savings than the corporate centre but we recognise that, due to the nature of these services, there may be some impact for the borough's young people and older residents.

### *Children and young people*

Children's services have been affected by the loss of a significant amount of grant funding. Rather than simply stopping services which have been delivered with grant funding, we have undertaken a full review of services for the borough's children and young people, in line with the following priorities:

- Protect the most vulnerable
- Target those most in need
- Target in deprived areas
- Keep children and the organisation safe

This means that, going forwards, our more limited resources will be targeted towards supporting those children, young people and families who are most vulnerable or disadvantaged. This philosophy has guided reviews of the activity which the council

delivers directly and of the activities/services which it commissions from other providers.

However, while this focus is right for the department going forwards, delivering the required savings has affected our ability to deliver some preventative and value added services. For example, our capacity to deliver activities through our sport, health, inclusion, play and youth services has been affected; and the way in which our outdoor education service is delivered has changed. In addition, the eligibility of children, young people and their families to access some services is changing, as we seek to prioritise support in line with needs.

Where possible, we have taken advantage of alternative models of service delivery in order to preserve some degree of service, for example, by moving to a traded model of delivery through a newly established Education Exchange which supports schools to source the services they need to support their pupils.

### *Older people*

As in Children's Services, major transformation is taking place within Adult Services. This seeks to deliver sustainable services which support the independence, choice and control of service users, thereby promoting equality of opportunity and supporting people to participate in daily life. The budget savings are set within this wider context, and have been informed by a major public consultation on the future of adult social care, which was completed in the summer of 2010.

However, as set out above, the scale of the savings required means that changes to service delivery are taking place across Adult Services. Due to the nature of the services provided, particularly around adult social care, older people and their families may be affected by the changes. This may be as a result of changes to charging arrangements; changes to the criteria for eligible care; or as a result of changes to how and where services are delivered.

It must be stressed that the needs of our service users remain at the heart of decisions about care. Needs assessments and care reviews continue to be essential in ensuring that we understand and are able to respond appropriately to people's needs. This focuses on supporting independence as far as possible, for example through reablement services, personal budgets and self-directed support; while also ensuring that services for those with higher level needs, such as supported housing or residential care, are appropriate for future needs and provide value for money.

We are mindful of the fact that changes to social care provision can create anxiety for service users and their families or carers. This can relate both to actual changes in provision, and the anticipation of potential changes. Effective communication with service users and their families has therefore been an important part of this work, in order to provide information, support and reassurance.

### *Disability*

Due to the type of services provided across Adult Services, the changes which are taking place are likely to have some impact for people who have a disability and/or complex care needs. As described above, this work is being delivered in the context

of supporting independence, choice and control; and targeting resources towards the most vulnerable people, but the scale of savings being made does mean that service delivery is changing in many areas.

It is important to explain that changes to charging and eligibility criteria for social care services have sought to ensure that the council is able to target its more limited resources to those with the greatest level of need. Other reviews, such as the review of day care services and supported housing, have sought to ensure that services are cost effective and appropriate for service users' needs. For example, day care services are now delivered from better equipped accommodation; and night time care needs in supported housing will be met in a different way in the future.

Similarly, the review of children's services has touched upon services for children and young people who have disabilities or special educational needs. As far as possible, we have sought to limit the front-line impact of these reviews, and to create opportunities for our young people. For example, the review of Bolton's Pupil Referral Units, which is currently being consulted upon, seeks to create a single service to maximise the educational opportunities for children and young people whose behaviour or medical needs place them outside of mainstream schooling.

In addition, we continue to work with schools to understand the professional services which they need to support their pupils. The Education Exchange will provide access to resources, such as educational psychologists, which can be bought in as required. However, we do recognise that the scale of change which is taking place means that our young people may experience some impact, for example through the reduction of budgets for equipment and out of borough placements.

### *Caring status*

We recognise that parents/guardians and those who care for friends or relatives may be affected by the changes taking place, particularly within Children's and Adults Services. This may be as a result of changes to the type, level or location of service provision for the people that they care for.

We understand that changes – or the anticipation of changes – to provision can cause anxiety for service users and their carers, and that this could have an effect on the amount of practical or emotional support which carers are giving. Effective consultation and communication with service users and their carers has therefore been an important element of many reviews, to ensure that carers are well informed about and supported through any changes in provision.

### *Socio-economic disadvantage*

The council has previously received grant funding to tackle deprivation and disadvantage in the borough. However, the ending of the council's Area Based Grant, coupled with the withdrawal of resources from the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, has meant that the council's capacity to deliver targeted activity in our most deprived communities has been much reduced.

In order to continue our work to achieve economic prosperity and narrow the gap, the council has sought to target resources to our most vulnerable people and our most disadvantaged communities. For example, in 2011/12, the council identified £2.75m of mainstream funding to continue some key narrowing the gap projects in our deprived areas. Priorities included neighbourhood management; economic development, skills and worklessness; and targeted litter and recycling education and enforcement.

In addition, the council has devolved £842,000 to neighbourhood management and area working, in order to drive improvements in our communities. 75% of this resource was targeted based on relative deprivation across the borough, with the remainder being allocated at a flat rate. The 2012/13 budget report subsequently also proposes the additional allocation of £10,000 per ward from the Airport Dividend, further to support the work of Bolton's area fora in tackling the issues which matter within our communities.

### *Universal services*

In order to ensure that resources can be directed towards protecting Bolton's most vulnerable people, reviews of a number of the council's universal services have taken place. These services are available to everyone in the borough, and it is therefore likely that the changes will be felt by people from across Bolton. It therefore feels appropriate to discuss these here.

For example, changes to the delivery of our neighbourhood services and highways services will have an effect on the type and frequency of works such as grass cutting, street cleansing, and road repairs across the borough.

In addition, major reconfiguration of the library network is taking place in order to secure the long-term sustainability of the network, while also delivering our duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient service. This has been informed by extensive public consultation and involves the retention of Central Library at the hub of the network, with tiered access across our communities. This will see the closure of five library branches, and the establishment of neighbourhood collection points in each of the five affected areas, in order to mitigate the impact of these closures, in particular around access for older people, younger people, and those who are not able to travel significant distances (for example people with disabilities or those on low incomes).

As discussed above, while the changes to these universal services will affect people from across the borough, this is an important part of our strategy to ensure that our more limited resources can be targeted towards services for those most in need.

### **Partners**

We have worked very closely with our partners to respond to the challenges of the financial context and to mitigate the impact on our partnership activity, where possible. Within this, we recognise that the voluntary sector and the borough's schools have experienced a particularly significant change. This is therefore described below.

### *The voluntary sector*

The council has a long history of working successfully with the voluntary sector to deliver positive outcomes for the borough. This commitment to partnership working has become even more important in the context of reducing resources, and leaders from across the borough's public, private and voluntary sector have worked together to shape Bolton's strategic response to the changed context.

The financial context has provided the council with some difficult decisions about the funding which it provides to its voluntary sector partners, and it has been necessary to reduce or cease funding in many instances. However, we have sought to offer a degree of protection to activity which supports Bolton's priorities. For example, a corporate fund of £1.4m has been established to support the work of the sector, and a small grants fund of £160,000 has been established and is being administered by Bolton CVS. To date, around £100,000 has been awarded to grass roots and community groups.

In addition, a review of the voluntary sector provision which is funded by the council's Adults and Children's Services has taken place. This has been delivered in line with clear priorities, and has been shaped by our ongoing engagement with the sector. While the available resources have reduced as a result of the financial position, the departments continue to make a significant investment in the work of the sector - £332,000 and £1.5m respectively.

### *Schools*

The council's relationship with schools is presently subject to significant change as a result of changes to national policy as well as the reductions in grant funding for children's services. As a result, services which are not within the statutory requirements for Local Authorities are changing – through being delivered differently, by reducing, or by stopping.

The council has engaged extensively with schools throughout this process, to ensure that we understand the support and professional services which schools need to support their pupils. To ensure that appropriate provision remains available, we have created an Education Exchange, through which schools can 'buy in' specialist support services such as educational psychologists. We recognise that schools, too, are facing difficult budgetary decisions, and that a traded model of service delivery may increase the pressure on school budgets. However, we are confident that the Education Exchange will provide a mechanism through which schools will have greater choice and flexibility over the external support and activities they choose for their pupils.

### **Staff**

Due to the scale of the savings which need to be made, there has been an effect on the council's workforce both in relation to job losses, and associated restructuring and change. The council's workforce has reduced by 833 posts as a result of the two year budget programme.

It should be stressed, however, that the council has made a significant effort to minimise compulsory redundancies through careful vacancy management, VER, VS and voluntary redundancy, and council wide redeployment. The majority of change has therefore been achieved through voluntary leavers or the deletion of vacant posts

Changes in the council's workforce can have an impact on workforce diversity. It is therefore important to look at the changing shape of the workforce as part of this EIA. The analysis below compares the profile of those who have left the authority since the first corporate promotion of VS and VER began on 1 July 2010 with the profile of the workforce on 30 June 2010. In this way, it is possible to see whether the profile of leavers differs to the workforce as a whole.

It should be stressed that this data covers all leavers – not just those who have been affected by a service review, or who have taken VER or VS. However, as set out above, the shape of the workforce has been significantly influenced by people leaving the employment of the council through voluntary means. This means that, while the council remains committed to having a workforce which is broadly representative of the local population in the long-term, it has very little influence over the composition of its workforce at present.

Looking at the profile of those who have left the workforce, the changes appear to be largely in proportion with the profile of the workforce as a whole. At this stage, the council does not have any significant concerns about disproportionate impact, particularly given the high volume of people leaving through voluntary means:

- A lower proportion of leavers were female than in the workforce as a whole (74% compared to 76%). 26% of leavers were male, compared with 24% in the workforce.
- A lower proportion of leavers had caring responsibilities than in the workforce as a whole (39% compared to 46%). However, a higher proportion of leavers worked part-time, (55% compared to 48% in the workforce). Amongst those who left through VER/VS, 45% worked part-time
- The proportion of leavers from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups was the same as in the workforce as a whole (7%). This was also the position for those leavers who followed faiths other than Christianity (7%)
- 1% of leavers described themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual – around the same proportion as in the workforce as a whole
- The proportion of leavers who considered themselves to have a disability was around the same as in the workforce as a whole (2.6% compared to 2.2%). However, this rose to 4% amongst those leaving through VER/VS
- A higher than average proportion of leavers were aged 30 and below, and 51 and above. In addition, a higher proportion of leavers had ten years or more service than in the council as a whole (27% compared to 25%). This rose to 43% amongst those who left through VER/VS). This is likely to reflect the attractive package available to those with a long period of service under VS, and the option of early retirement for those of eligible age

- Leavers have come from across the range of pay grades. A higher proportion came from grades earning £36,000-48,000 (9% of leavers compared to 4% in the workforce as a whole). A lower proportion of leavers earned £24,000 to 36,000 (24% compared to 29%)
- We are aware that pregnancy and maternity is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. In line with our existing policies, women undertaking maternity leave have been provided with appropriate and timely information and support regarding service reviews and the corporate promotion of VER/VS
- Data on the marital status of our staff is not routinely collected

**5. Are there any gaps in your evidence or conclusions which make it difficult to quantify the potential adverse impact? If so, please explain how you will explore the proposal in greater depth.**

No, this strategic analysis of impact has been informed by the detail of individual reviews and EIAs, which have been brought forward to Executive Members since June 2010. These have been informed by extensive consultation, as appropriate for each of the reviews. This has included, for example, consultation with staff, service users, partners, members of the public, and other interest groups and stakeholder organisations.

**Please confirm the outcome of this EIA:**

No major impact identified, therefore no major changes required – proceed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adjustments to remove barriers / promote equality (mitigate impact) have been identified – proceed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Continue despite having identified potential for adverse impact/missed opportunities for promoting equality – this requires a strong justification	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Stop and rethink - the EIA identifies actual or potential unlawful discrimination	<input type="checkbox"/>

The financial situation which the council is facing continues to be very challenging, and this strategic EIA recognises that achieving the required savings within the required timescale, has had an effect on service delivery and, therefore, has impacted on some groups. This is particularly relevant to preventative and 'value added' activity; and to back office services, which may have an impact on wider organisational delivery in the future.

Every effort has been made to take appropriate steps to mitigate adverse impacts, and to respond appropriately to our duties under the Equality Act. This has been guided by the council's philosophy, which seeks to minimise the impact of the budget reductions on the borough's most vulnerable people. However, it is important to acknowledge that, in targeting our more limited financial resources for future service delivery, the council has had to make some difficult decisions about priority activity.