



# DARLINGTON

Borough Council

## Equality Impact Assessment Record Form

This form is to be used for recording the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of Council activities. It should be used in conjunction with the guidance on carrying out EIA in **Annex 2** of the Equality Scheme. The activities that may be subject to EIA are set out in the guidance.

EIA is particularly important in supporting the Council to make fair decisions. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

Using this form will help Council officers to carry out EIA in an effective and transparent way and provide decision-makers with full information on the potential impact of their decisions. EIAs are public documents, accompany reports going to Councillors for decisions and are published with committee papers on our website and are available in hard copy at the relevant meeting.

<b>Title of activity:</b>	Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30	
<b>Name of Directorate and Service Area:</b>	Resources and Governance. Strategy, Performance and Communications.	
<b>Lead Officer and contact details</b>	Neil Bowerbank Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications	
<b>Assistant Director accountable for this EIA</b>	Neil Bowerbank Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications	
<b>Who else will be involved in carrying out the EIA:</b>	Eleanor Swan Inclusion, Engagement and Performance Manager	

<b>When did the EIA process start?</b>	2 December 2024	
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## Section 2 – The Activity and Supporting Information

<b>Details of the activity</b> ( describe briefly - including the main purpose and aims) (e.g. are you starting a new service, changing how you do something, stopping doing something?)
The Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 sets out the council’s vision, priorities and key actions for the application of customer facing and back office technology for the next 5 year. A key theme within the strategy focuses on digital exclusion.
<b>Why is this being proposed? What are the aims? What does the Council hope to achieve by it?</b> (e.g. to save money, meet increased demand, do things more efficiently)
<p>There are several reasons for the introduction of this strategy. Many of the actions within it are already being progressed, and the strategy is pulling them together. The main aims of the strategy are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide 24/7 access to as many council services as possible</li> <li>- Maximise the benefits of the existing ICT infrastructure the council has already invested in</li> <li>- Help to increase efficiency and productivity within the council</li> <li>- Establish a structured approach to analysis and adoption of new and emerging technology</li> </ul>
<b>What will change? What will be different for service users/ customers and/ or staff?</b>
<p>More services will be provided online, and people will be encouraged to use online channels if they are capable of doing so, freeing up resource to support those who cannot.</p> <p>More staff will make use of existing and new technology to help them be more productive and enabling increase efficiency in service delivery.</p>
<b>What data, research and other evidence or information is available which is relevant to the EIA?</b>
<p>A key theme of the strategy is to understand the local impacts of digital exclusion and the people affected by it. There is an ongoing process of gathering the available information to help inform decisions. This will include looking at national and local data, and working with service areas that work directly with people to better understand digital exclusion and the impacts. Support and signposting to help people access online services and develop the skills to do so is part of the strategy too.</p> <p>Advancements in technology are monitored by staff who are responsible for managing our corporate ICT systems. As opportunities emerge and are considered, decisions on whether to adopt them are taken by the Systems and Information Governance Group.</p> <p>The application of artificial intelligence (AI) is considered as part of this strategy. Testing this technology , understanding the potential benefits it could bring, establishing clear governance, and developing staff skills are actions that will be progressed throughout the life of the strategy.</p>
<b>Engagement and consultation</b> (What engagement and consultation has been done regarding the proposal and what are the results? What consultation will be needed and how will it be done?)
The draft strategy was open to public consultation between 2 December 2024 and 12 January 2025. The consultation was promoted via the One Darlington magazine, the corporate website, social media, and all

councillors were asked to raise awareness of it via their own channels. The consultation documents were available online and in printed format via the customer services centre. Information in alternative formats was available upon request. Information about the draft strategy and consultation was circulated to local voluntary sector organisations via the strategy Voluntary and Community Sector group.

There was minimal response to the consultation, with most response being from people over 65. A small number of comments were received, one endorsing the strategy and suggesting we explore apprenticeships to help with skills development, and the other two highlighting skills deficiencies that some people have for accessing online services.

**What impact will this activity have on the Council's budget?** (e.g. cost neutral, increased costs or reduced costs? If so, by how much? Explain briefly why this is the case)

Most of the actions aligned with the strategy are already planned and resourced. Anything new, such as the purchase of new technology will be subjected to a business case and robust scrutiny with a requirement to achieve a sufficient return on investment.

## Section 3: Assessment

How will the activity affect people with protected characteristics?	No Impact	Positive impact	Negative impact	Why will it have this effect? (refer to evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information, etc)
Age		X	X	<p><b>Positive impact</b> For many people, accessing services online is the default and preferred method of engagement on the grounds of convenience, time and cost (less travel).</p> <p><b>Negative impact</b> Statistics show a higher proportion of people over the age of 65 experience digital exclusion when compared to other age groups. There can be a lack of confidence in technology with older people which can lead to people preferring not to engage online. If there are fewer options for people to contact the council offline this may create a barrier.</p>
<b>Disability</b> <b>(Mobility Impairment, Visual impairment, Hearing impairment, Learning Disability, Mental Health, Long Term Limiting Illness, Multiple Impairments, Other – Specify)</b>		X	X	<p><b>Positive impact</b> For those capable of using online services, they provide ease of access and convenience, for example avoiding the need to travel.</p> <p><b>Negative impact</b> Some disabilities can make it difficult for people to access online services. Where possible, online services provided by the council are designed with access in mind and aim to meet various accessibility standards (e.g. being compatible with screen readers and being written in plain English).</p> <p>People with certain disabilities are more likely to be digitally excluded.</p>
Sex	N/A	N/A	N/A	

<b>Race</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<p><b>Positive impact</b> Online services provide the opportunity for people to access services in their own time, in their preferred location, and at their own pace. This could be particularly beneficial to people who cannot read or speak English, and may need assistance from others.</p> <p><b>Negative impact</b> By default, information on the Council’s website is provided in English, although content is designed to be machine read and could therefore benefit from automated translation services. While automated translation services are available and improving, they are not perfect.</p> <p>People who are new to the country are also more likely to be digitally excluded.</p>
<b>Gender Reassignment</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	
<b>Religion or belief</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	
<b>Pregnancy or maternity</b>		<b>X</b>		<p><b>Positive impact</b> For those capable of using online services, they provide ease of access and convenience, for example avoiding the need to travel.</p>
<b>Marriage or civil partnership</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	
<b>How will the activity affect people who:</b>	<b>No impact</b>	<b>Positive Impact</b>	<b>Negative Impact</b>	<b>Why will it have this effect?</b> (Refer to evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information, etc)

<p><b>Live in a rural location?</b></p>		<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p><b>Positive impact</b> For those capable of using online services, they provide ease of access and convenience, for example avoiding the need to travel.</p> <p><b>Negative impact</b> Some rural locations do not have strong Internet connections, meaning that residents may struggle to access online services.</p>
<p><b>Are carers?</b></p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	
<p><b>Are on a low income? (consider child poverty)</b></p>		<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p><b>Positive impact</b> For those capable of using online services, they provide ease of access and convenience, for example avoiding the need to travel and the associated costs.</p> <p>People on low income may be in need of more support from council services when compared to people on higher incomes. Online services could make it more convenient for people to access all the support they need in one place.</p> <p><b>Negative impact</b> People on low income may struggle to pay for Internet access, or the required equipment.</p>
<p><b>Are care experienced?</b></p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	

#### Section 4: Cumulative Impacts

**Cumulative Impacts – will the activity affect anyone more because of a combination of protected characteristics?** (e.g. older women or young gay men – state what you think the effect might be and why, providing evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information, etc)

**Are there any other activities of which you are aware which might also impact on the same protected characteristics?**

Based on the information gathered so far, people on low income and over the age 65 or with certain disabilities may be negatively affected more than others. People on low income may require more support from council services, and those over 65 are more likely to be digitally excluded.

#### Section 5: Analysis

**a) How will the activity help to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation?**

N/A

**b) How will the activity help to advance equality of opportunity?**

N/A

**c) How will the activity help to foster good relations?**

Making the online experience better and easier to access will foster good relations between people using council services and the council.

**During the engagement/ consultation process were there any suggestions on how to avoid, minimise or mitigate any negative impacts? If so, please give details.**

Work will continue to understand digital exclusion and those affected by it. While people will be encouraged to use online services, those who are unable to do so will be able to access services through other methods. A workstream in the strategy focuses on helping people identify ways of overcoming digital exclusion to ensure any negative impacts of services being online are mitigated.

Section 6 - Sign-off when assessment is completed

<b>Officer Completing the Form:</b>		
<b>Signed</b>	<b>Name:</b>	Neil Bowerbank
	<b>Date:</b>	31 January 2025
	<b>Job Title:</b>	Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications
<b>Assistant Director:</b>		
<b>Signed</b>	<b>Name:</b>	Neil Bowerbank
	<b>Date:</b>	31 January 2025
	<b>Service:</b>	Strategy, Performance and Communications

Section 7 – Reporting of Findings and Recommendations to Decision Makers

<p><b>Next Steps to address the anticipated impact</b> (Select one of the following options and explain why this has been chosen – remember we have a duty to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled people can access services and work for us)</p>
<p><b>Positive and Negative impacts identified – recommend continuing with the activity</b></p>
<p><b>Explanation of why the option above has been chosen</b> (Including any advice given by legal services)</p>
<p>This EIA identifies more positive than negative impacts of the strategy. The negative impacts are associated with factors linked to digital exclusion, but there are dedicated work streams within the strategy that aim to help tackle this.</p>
<p><b>If the activity is to be implemented how will you find out how it is affecting people once it is in place?</b> (How will you monitor and review the changes?)</p>
<p>Feedback will be gathered in several ways. We will be monitoring usage of our online services via regular reports. We have a link to a feedback form on the majority of web pages through which people can provide feedback relating to the website. We will gather feedback from staff and partners who may receive comments from residents attempting to use our online services.</p>

Section 8 – Action Plan and Performance Management



List any actions you need to take which have been identified in this EIA, including post implementation reviews to find out how the outcomes have been achieved in practice and what impacts there have actually been on people with protected characteristics

<b>What is the negative impact?</b>	<b>Actions required to reduce/eliminate the negative impact (if applicable)</b>	<b>Who will lead on action</b>	<b>Target completion date</b>
<p>Statistics show a higher proportion of people over the age of 65 experience digital exclusion when compared to other age groups. There can be a lack of confidence in technology with older people which can lead to people preferring not to engage online. If there are fewer options for people to contact the council offline this may create a barrier.</p>	<p>The Council will always ensure people are able to access its services. It does have the expectation that those who can, will use online channels where available, freeing up time to enable staff to support those who cannot.</p>	<p>The Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications is responsible for the strategy and associated action plan.</p>	<p>Ongoing throughout the life of the strategy.</p>
<p>Some disabilities can make it difficult for people to access online services. Where possible, online services provided by the council are designed with access in mind and aim to meet various accessibility standards (e.g. being compatible with screen readers and being written in plain English).</p> <p>People with certain disabilities are more likely to be digitally excluded.</p>	<p>The strategy contains actions that aim to help people overcome the various barriers linked to digital exclusion.</p> <p>There are actions within the strategy that focus on making our online services easy to use, and these actions include compliance with accessibility standards.</p>		
<p>Some rural locations do not have strong Internet connections, meaning that residents may struggle to access online services.</p>			
<p>People on low income may struggle to pay for Internet access, or the required equipment.</p>			

<b>Performance Management</b>	
<b>Date of the next review of the EIA</b>	The next formal review will be when the strategy is refreshed, but the individual impacts will be subject to ongoing review as part of the action plan associated with the strategy.
<b>How often will the EIA action plan be reviewed?</b>	See above
<b>Who will carry out this review?</b>	Head of Strategy, Performance and Communications.