

# NORTHUMBERLAND

## Northumberland County Council

In the Corporate Resources directorate the key services are as follows:

**Corporate Services** which is made up of:

- Business Support
- Corporate Performance
- Democratic Services
- Information Services
- Legal Services
- Shared Arrangements – Internal Audit,
- Strategic Human Resources
- Strategic Financial Management
- Registrars and Coroners

**Financial and Customer Services** which is made up of:

- Revenues and Benefits
- Customer Services (Face to face and Contact Centre)
- Employee Services
- Pensions Administration
- Income Management
- Insurance
- Accounts Payable
- Accounts Receivable
- Systems Administration

### **Corporate Services**

The vast majority of this service provides internal support and expertise to the Council and as such will not have a direct interface with the public. Democratic Services run local and national elections directly with the local electorate. Internal services include customers with protected characteristics and their needs are considered in the corporate equality analysis report.

### **Financial and Customer Services**

Financial and Customer Services provide services for both internal and external customers depending upon the particular service. For context the service covers:

- The billing and collection of Council Tax for 150.29 thousand domestic properties in Northumberland;
- The billing and collection of non-domestic rates billing for 12.5 thousand business premises in Northumberland;
- The assessment of entitlement to housing and council tax benefit and its payment for 29.47 thousand claimants;

- The administration of eligibility for 18,000 blue badges
- The assessment of eligibility for 6,500 free school meals
- The billing and collection of non-domestic rates billing for 12.5 thousand business premises in Northumberland;
- The assessment of entitlement to housing and council tax benefit and its payment for 29.47 thousand claimants;
- The administration of eligibility for 18,000 blue badges
- The assessment of eligibility for 6,500 free school meals
- The assessment to assistance for 4,000 applications for the Northumberland Emergency Transition support (NETS) scheme
- The prevention and detection of corporate fraud;
- Face to Face Customer Services at the Council's Customer Service Centres for 182,000 customer visits
- Telephone Service at the Cramlington Contact Centre for 320,000 calls
- Transactional HR administration from advertisement to appointment and the payment of salaries to 14 thousand staff this includes: 7890 staff employed by schools and employees of Active Northumberland.;
- Payment of 315 thousand supplier invoices and processing 125 thousand housing benefit payments per year;
- Administration of the council's pension schemes including the LGPS and Firefighters' Pension Scheme, and payments to over 7 thousand pensioners. The fund is administered by the Council but regulated nationally;
- Investment of the £914 million Northumberland Pension Fund;
- The control of £76.5 million sundry debt on behalf of the County Council per annum;
- Provision of an income management service so that the 1.7 million transactions received by the council each year are properly allocated;
- The provision of VAT advice to the council.
- Registrars and Coroners services

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Corporate Resources has a mixture of internal and external customers depending upon the particular service. For example: The Revenues and Benefits service in Financial Services is governed by national legislation and administered by the service who can have no influence on the equality impacts of the legislation. Where there is discretion local policies have their own equality impact assessment in place. For customer facing services there is a focus on actual access to the service. There are processes in place to remove barriers for people with protected characteristics but the majority of access to the service comes initially via Customer Services by face to face contact or via telephone into the contact centre. The Pensions Service administers the Council's pension scheme but the fund is regulated nationally.

What information does the group or service area have about people for each of the protected characteristics

### Age

Information with regard to the use of the services by age is not gathered as source data with the exception of the benefit service who have different schemes for working age claimants and claimants who are pensioners. For Corporate Services its customers are mainly internal stakeholders. For Financial and Customer Services their customers are predominantly external of the council. Based on the equality profile data available from the 2011 census:

- 64.1% of the population in Northumberland are aged between 15 and 64
- 21.8% of the population in Northumberland are aged 65 and over
- Users of the benefit service are classified as either working age (18 to 64) or pensioners (aged 65 and over) a breakdown of the benefit caseload shows that:
  - 44% of benefit customers are over 65 years of age
  - 56% of benefit customer are between 18 and 64 years of age

The age profile of staff employed in the service is as follows:

Age Range	Percentage
Under 18	0.15%
18 to 24 years	5.42%
25 to 44 years	35.65%
45 to 64 years	56.60%
65 years plus	2.18%

The service ensures that statutory and mandatory training is undertaken via Learning Together to ensure that staff are trained in Equality and Diversity requirements

### Disability

In Northumberland, 20.5% of the population considers themselves to have a disability or a long-term limiting illness, compared to 20.4% of the national population. From the information available for staff 92.58% of those who completed the equality monitoring data have no disability. Information with regard to the use of

the services by disabled people is not gathered as source data. For Corporate Services customers are mainly internal stakeholders. For Financial and Customer Services their customers are predominantly external to the council. Based on the equality profile data available disabled people with a range of access needs are likely to be using the council tax and benefit services:

The key impacts for disabled people are with regard to access to some of the services provided. In relation to council tax, there are some specific reductions that can apply to disabled people. The reduction can take the form of a discount, exemption or reduction in property band and are dependent upon mandatory qualifying criteria.

Information with regard to some services is available at customer points and through the website and also leaflets. We can make information available in alternative formats on request and we do have access to telephone and face to face interpreters where this is needed. We provide different means of contacting our services for example advertising Text Relay contact information to for people with hearing loss or speech impairments.

According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2010) one in two adults with debts have mental health problems. Policies are in place to govern procedures and within relevant policies there is some protection for 'vulnerable' people (LHA Policy and Corporate Debt Policy). Disabled people will receive protection under the 'vulnerable' category where this is relevant.

With regard to access to services the following are in place:

- All Customer Information Points are designed to meet a wide variety of access needs and have hearing loops available if required.
- The Contact Centre can be contacted by a text relay service for customers with hearing or speech difficulties
- Registrars offices are designed to meet a variety of access needs and provide facilities for disabled guests attending ceremonies
- In relation to council tax there are some specific reductions that can apply to disabled people. The reduction can take the form of a discount, exemption or reduction in property band and are dependant upon mandatory qualifying criteria
- Home visits can be provided for some services where disability/mobility issues prevent customers accessing our offices.
- Leaflets with information on services can be produced in Braille or other formats
- British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation can be provided on request
- Policies are in place to govern procedures and within relevant policies there is some protection for 'vulnerable' people (LHA Policy and Corporate Debt Policy). Disabled people will receive protection under the 'vulnerable' category where this is relevant
- Statutory duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 with regard to access to buildings
- Relationship with Adult Services to check to see if potentially vulnerable debtors are known to them and require additional support.

- Equality and Diversity E Learning training course provided to all staff
- Equality Impact Assessments of all policies and policy changes

The Council has a Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for national and local elections. The law requires that the returning officer designates polling stations which are accessible to electors by meeting criteria set by the Electoral Commission.

This is achieved by the election staff inspecting a premises before it is designated as a polling place and:

- Carrying out a formal review of polling places every five years in consultation with disability groups
- Polling inspectors and polling staff checking accessibility at each election and report any issues to the Election Office
- Training new polling staff so that they are conversant with accessibility issues and how they can assist electors
- Providing refreshers for existing polling staff at briefings before each election
- Making the following equipment available at each station: Polling booth(s) for wheelchair users; Large print ballot papers; Templates for blind and partially sighted electors; and Ramps (if necessary)

The Election Office can also supply elector information in Braille or audio on request. Election staff will also visit disabled electors in their homes if they need assistance completing postal votes.

### **What else do we need to do?**

- Continue to monitor processes and procedures to ensure that disabled people have necessary adjustments made to enable them to access services.
- Continue to monitor complaints to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged and are able to access services.
- Encourage staff to complete equality monitoring data to improve the information we have on the equalities profile and diversity of our workforce
- Ensure managers are aware of the 'Guide to supporting Disabled staff' and actively support involvement in the staff Disability group.
- Promote the Equalities allies programme within our service areas and ensure skills and competences staff develop through involvement in the allies programme or staff groups is recognised through the appraisal process.

A programme of briefing and training for both frontline and managerial staff to raise awareness of equality and diversity issues is being put in place to ensure that we are able to consider and meet the needs of all the protected groups effectively. Due to the size of Northumberland and its largely rural nature the Returning Officer is forced to use some premises which are not fully accessible because there are no alternatives. This can include using portacabins. The Election Office reviews these locations to see if alternatives do become available over time.

### **Gender identity**

Information with regard to the use of the services by gender is not gathered as source data. For Corporate Services its customers are mainly internal stakeholders. For Financial and Customer Services their customers are predominantly external of the council. Based on the equality profile data available 1% of the population could be transgender or gender variant

## **What are the key impacts on trans\* people?**

Confidentiality around someone's transgender status is extremely important and there are procedures in place to respect confidentiality while meeting legal obligations in terms of respecting people's rights and establishing a person's identity. There are procedures in place regarding employment matters such as making adjustments for people during the reassignment process or when conducting Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks where this is necessary for a particular job. A policy has been developed to support people who are going through transition, to treat gender identity with respect and to provide information to staff on issues of confidentiality. This is particularly relevant when calculating entitlement to pension benefits. Customer facing staff and those responsible for developing procedures will need to be aware of this policy in dealing with customer's and staff.

## **What do we have in place?**

- Statutory legislation and policies that govern service provision
- Equality and Diversity training for staff
- Advice, support and some training on this issue have been provided by the LGBT staff group.
- Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out for all policies and subsequent policy changes

## **What else do we need to do?**

- Continue to monitor processes and procedures to ensure trans\* customers continue to have the same level of access to services.
- Continue to monitor complaints to ensure that transgender customers continue to have the same level of access to services.
- Ensure staff are aware of the Transgender policy and that those recruiting to jobs which require Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are aware of the need to use the sensitive caseworker process for staff who have changed their gender. There is also a need to be sensitive to confidentiality when dealing with previous qualifications during application processes
- Ensure that services and data collection systems are sensitive to the needs of people who have changed gender or are in the process of changing gender and respect gender identity
- Ensure that staff are trained in Equality and Diversity requirements

Pregnancy and maternity (which includes breastfeeding)

Information with regard to the use of the services by those pregnant and on maternity is not gathered as source data. Services are provided to customers and

customer contact centres support women who wish to express milk or breastfeed on the premises. For Corporate Services its customers are mainly internal stakeholders. Policies are in place to support woman who wish to express milk or breastfeed. Other policies help staff to maintain a work life balance including flexible working and are open to all eligible staff. Policies are in place to support employees with return to work or other employment matters.

## **What else do we need to do?**

- Continue to monitor processes and procedures to ensure customers who are pregnant and on maternity continue to have the same level of access to services.
- Continue to monitor complaints to ensure that customers who are pregnant and on maternity continue to have the same level of access to services.
- Ensure that staff are trained in Equality and Diversity requirements

## **Race**

Information with regard to the use of the services by race is not gathered as source data. Services are provided to all customers. For Corporate Services its customers are mainly internal stakeholders. For Financial and Customer Services their customers are predominantly external to the council. Based on the equality profile data available for Northumberland:

- 98.4% of the service users are described as white

Due to the very small numbers and diverse range of ethnic groups in Northumberland there can be problems of isolation and a lack of support networks for ethnic minority groups. Minority groups in Northumberland include the gypsy/roma or traveller (GRT) communities these groups can experience particular difficulties in accessing written information and barriers to accessing services. We work with the voluntary and community sector and the Council GRT Liaison officer to promote services and awareness of the needs of these groups, a GRT training programme for front line staff is being developed. Access to services where there is a language barrier or where English is not the first language can impact on people from different racial groups.

Information on the services is provided on the council website and for some services in customer information points. All information is in English, however, there is provision on the website for leaflets to be translated and hard copies are available in 11 languages upon request. Staff can access a telephone translation service if needed to communicate with customers in other languages. For customers with literacy difficulties assistance can be provided in customer information centres or by other means such as by telephone.

## **What do we have in place?**



Information on services is provided on the website and for some services in customer information points. All information is in English, however, there is provision on the website for leaflets to be translated into a wide range of languages including:

- Arabic
- Bengali
- Chinese
- Gujarati
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Punjabi
- Somali
- Urdu
- Vietnamese
- Welsh

A hard copy of leaflets in the above languages is also available. In addition there is a telephone language line facility which provides access to an interpreter which can be used where there is a language barrier. We provide mandatory equality and diversity training for staff and Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out for all policies and subsequent policy changes

### **What else do we need to do?**

- Continue to monitor processes and procedures to ensure customers who have needs on the grounds of race continue to have access to services.
- Continue to monitor complaints to ensure that customers who have needs on the grounds of race continue to be able to access services.
- Continue to ensure that an interpreter service is available when required and ensure that staff are trained in using this service
- When sufficient data is available from the corporate customer satisfaction survey, usage and satisfaction will be analysed by protected characteristics. This will improve the level of information we have in relation to protected groups and enable us to plan services accordingly.
- Ensure that staff are trained in Equality and Diversity requirements

### **Religion or belief**

- Information with regard to the use of the services by religion or belief is not currently gathered as source data. For Corporate Services its customers are mainly internal stakeholders. For Financial and Customer Services their customers are predominantly external of the council. Based on the equality profile data available from the 2011 census:
- 68.8% of the population in Northumberland are Christian, 1% are from other faiths and 24% declared themselves as having no religion
- 63.3% of staff in Corporate Resources are Christian 28.9% declared themselves as having no religion

## **What are the key impacts on people with different religions or beliefs?**

For customers with certain religious beliefs specific days or times of day are considered sacred, therefore, services may need to take account of the opening/closing times and of religious practices when making appointments to ensure that they do not conflict with any religious requirements. The Registrars Service actively promotes Northumberland for the holding of civil ceremonies for those that do not want a religious wedding ceremony

## **What do we have in place?**

- Statutory legislation and policies that govern service provision
- Equality and Diversity training for staff
- Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out for all policies and subsequent policy changes
- A faith advisor is in the process of being appointed to offer support to staff with religious beliefs, secular support systems are already in place including a helpline for advice and staff groups.

## **What else do we need to do?**

- Continue to monitor processes and procedures to ensure customers of any religious belief or other beliefs continue to have the same level of access to services.
- Continue to monitor complaints to ensure that customers of any religious belief or those who hold other beliefs such as vegetarianism or humanism have their needs considered and continue to have the same level of access to services.
- Ensure that staff are trained in Equality and Diversity requirements

## **Sex**

Information with regard to the use of the services by sex is not gathered as source data with the exception of the benefit service. For Corporate Services its customers are mainly internal stakeholders. For Financial and Customer Services their customers are predominantly external of the council. Based on the equality profile data available from the 2011 Census the gender profile of the population of Northumberland is:

- Gender ratio – in Northumberland 49% of the population are male and 51% female
- Employment – in Northumberland 73% of economically active males are employed and 65% of economically active females are employed
- In corporate resources female staff account for 69.4% of the staff with 30.6% being male

## **What are the key impacts on men and women?**

In general, services are provided in line with policies and statutory legislation and aim not to discriminate between different genders. We have corporate policies for our staff including flexible working and a carer's policy to support staff. We also have a range of staff groups including an LGBT, Disability, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority staff group and an Autism Spectrum disorder group who provide advice and information to staff and managers.

## **What do we have in place?**

Service policies and statutory legislation are applicable to both men and women. Service outcomes aim to be equitable for both men and women regardless of their sex or gender status.

- If customers who are seen at customer points request a person of the same gender this will be accommodated where possible.
- Managers within the services are both male and female.
- Making buildings accessible has benefits for all sections of society and is also particularly helpful for mothers and carers where facilities can cater for young children, pushchairs and buggies.
- The council has policies in place to support and provide equitable treatment for employees in the process of gender reassignment or who have transitioned. The registrar's service can provide advice to people undergoing gender reassignment on acquiring gender recognition certificates and changing official documentation
- Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out for all policies and subsequent policy changes

## **What else do we need to do?**

- Continue to monitor processes and procedures to ensure that both male and female customers continue to have the same level of access to services.
- Continue to monitor complaints to ensure that both male and female customers receive equitable treatment and are able to access services.
- A corporate customer satisfaction survey needs to be completed which will monitor the use and satisfaction broken down by the protected characteristics. This will improve the level of information available in relation to protected groups and enable us to plan services accordingly.
- A programme of briefing and training for both frontline and managerial staff to raise awareness of equality and diversity issues is being put in place to ensure that we are able to consider and meet the needs of all the protected groups effectively.

## **Sexual orientation**

Information with regard to the use of the services by sexual orientation is not currently gathered as source data for all services. For Corporate Services their customers are mainly internal stakeholders. For Financial and Customer Services their customers are predominantly external to the council. Based on the equality profile data available it is likely that at least 6% of people accessing our services are

likely to be bisexual, gay or lesbian so we must ensure we are inclusive and do not make assumptions about the sexual orientation of service users or employees.

## **What are the key impacts on people of different sexual orientations?**

The services provided are governed by council policy and/or statutory legislation. The Council needs to ensure that financial benefits and information uses inclusive language and images and meets the needs of all staff and service users including staff in Civil Partnerships or same sex relationships or those who are bisexual. We also need to ensure that inclusive and appropriate services and information are provided for our staff

## **What do we have in place?**

The Registrars Service actively promotes Northumberland for the holding of civil partnership and same sex wedding ceremonies – this includes the production of civil partnership/wedding brochures, attendance at wedding fairs and attendance at the annual Pride event in Newcastle. This has resulted in an increase in the number of ceremonies held in Northumberland. In 2014/15 4 Civil Partnerships and 43 Same Sex Marriages were conducted while so far in this financial year 2 Civil Partnerships and 75 Same Sex marriages have taken place in Northumberland. We also undertake:

- Equality and Diversity training for staff
- Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out for all policies and subsequent policy changes
- Engage with Stonewall and other LGBT organisations to make sure services are inclusive.
- A corporate LGBT Action plan has been developed
- A Managers guide has been produced to support LGBT staff and to raise awareness of barriers LGBT staff can face
- A joint council/trust LGBT staff group has been established which acts as a source of advice and support to LGBT staff and managers.