

Mobile library service – mobile route planning criteria

Equality and rural assessment – findings and recommendations

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This assessment helps you to consider the impact of service changes on people with protected characteristics and in rural areas. The assessment can be updated at any time to inform service planning and commissioning.

For more information please contact Equality & Diversity team, email: equality@norfolk.gov.uk or tel: 01603 222611.

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The purpose of equality and rural assessments

1. The purpose of equality and rural assessments is to enable elected members to consider the potential impact of decisions on different people and communities prior to decisions being taken. Mitigating actions can be developed if detrimental impact is identified.
2. It is not always possible to adopt the course of action that will best promote the needs of people with protected characteristics or people in rural areas. However, assessments enable informed decisions to be made, that take into account every opportunity to minimise disadvantage.

The Legal context

3. Public authorities have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to consider the implications of proposals on people with protected characteristics. The Act states that public bodies must pay due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act¹;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic² and people who do not share it³;
 - Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it⁴.
4. The full Act is available [here](#).

The assessment process

5. This assessment comprises three phases:
 - **Phase 1** – evidence is gathered on the proposal, to examine who might be affected and how. This includes reviewing the findings of related assessments, contextual information about local populations and other relevant data.
 - **Phase 2** – the results are analysed. The assessments are drafted, making sure that any potential impacts are fully assessed. If the evidence indicates that a proposal may have a detrimental impact on people with protected characteristics or in rural communities, mitigating actions are considered.
 - **Phase 3** – the findings are reported to decision-makers, to enable any impacts to be taken into account before a decision is made.

The proposal

6. This equality impact assessment considers whether people with protected characteristics might be disadvantaged by proposed new mobile library route planning criteria, defined as the basis on which the routes, and stops, can be planned.

7. Communities Committee defined these criteria in July 2018: -
1. The location is two miles or more from a library building
 2. There will only be one stop to serve the needs of a rural community (currently there could be 2 stops in close proximity).
 3. Stops will be assessed as to their accessibility and predicted demand patterns
 4. Each stop will last for at least 20 minutes allowing time for information and advice provision and/or social interaction
 5. The stop will address the highest need and impact on the population
 6. Stops will be set at predictable, regular time intervals to allow residents to plan
 7. There are no other “stops” or immediate local service provision
8. A desk-top review of criteria 1, 2, 6 and 7 against the current route/stop schedule has been carried out. Basing the routes strictly around these criteria would mean: -
- Ceasing 155 of the current stops because they are within two miles of a library building
 - Consolidating stops in rural areas so that there is just one stop in each rural community would mean consolidating 192 stops
 - Harmonising the frequency of stops so that they are all four weekly would mean changing 29 routes from 2 to four weekly, this is an impact on 286 stops.

Who is affected?

9. The proposal will affect residents, visitors and businesses in Norfolk, including people with protected characteristics and in rural areas, and our staff:

People of all ages	YES
Disability (all disabilities and long-term health conditions, including but not limited to people with, for example, reduced mobility; Blind and visually impaired people; Deaf and hearing-impaired people; people with mental health issues; people on the Autism spectrum; people with learning difficulties and people with dementia).	YES
Gender reassignment (e.g. people who identify as transgender)	YES
Marriage/civil partnerships	YES
Pregnancy & Maternity	YES
Race (different ethnic groups, including Gypsies and Travellers)	YES
Religion/belief (different faiths, including people with no religion or belief)	YES
Sex (i.e. men/women/intersex)	YES
Sexual orientation (e.g. lesbian, gay and bisexual people)	YES

About mobile library services in Norfolk

10. During 2017/18, the mobile library service was used by 7,525 individuals with 58% of these using only the mobile library i.e. individuals who are also not accessing services through attending branch/building based libraries.
11. Feedback from a survey of mobile library users in 2017 identified: -
 - 97% use mobile libraries for borrowing books
 - 16% use the service to find out information
 - 11% use the service to meet friends
 - 78% said they make positive connections with other people when the mobile library visited
 - 75% said they felt less isolated because of their mobile library use
12. The majority of mobile library stops are in rural communities, and are over two miles away from a branch/building based library. Typically, a mobile library visit lasts for 10-20 minutes, with only 22 stops lasting more than an hour. The average number of visitors per stop is 4.46.

Potential impact

13. There is evidence that strictly applying the proposed new criteria for mobile library route planning could have a disproportionate and detrimental impact on people with protected characteristics, particularly disabled and older people; parents with young children and younger people with no access to a car. It would also impact on people in rural areas.
14. This is because the removal of stops in their entirety may mean that people from these groups may no longer be able to access the library service. They may be unable to access library services in a different way e.g. they may not be able to easily travel to branch/building based libraries if their local mobile library service stop was ceased.
15. Disabled and older people in rural areas may be the most affected, as disabled and older people in rural areas are more likely to have complex transport needs than people living in urban areas. They are likely to need to travel further or pay more to get to access alternative services than those living in urban areas. They may have limited alternative public transport options.
16. There would also be an impact in terms of social isolation. It is clear from the survey carried out that the service is seen as a way to socialise, and that users feel less isolated because of it.
17. The harmonisation of the frequency of stops alone would have a lesser impact because individuals would continue to be able to access the service, albeit on a slightly less frequent basis.
18. In view of this, work has taken place to consider ways to optimise routes within the available budget, in particular any route optimisation that would remove the need for

any stops to cease in their entirety and enable individuals who may be isolated to continue to access the service in some way.

19. This work has been completed, and as a result, it has been possible to identify a mitigating action to address the disadvantage described above. This is proposed below.

Accessibility considerations

20. Accessibility is a priority for Norfolk County Council. Norfolk has a higher than average number of disabled and older residents compared to other areas of the UK, and a growing number of disabled young people.
21. Mobile libraries are design to enhance accessibility for users, enabling people who might find it difficult to travel to branch/building based libraries to access library service s in Norfolk.

Human rights implications

22. Public authorities in the UK are required to act compatibly with the Human Rights Act 1998. There are no human rights issues arising from the proposals.

Recommended actions

	Action	Lead	Date
1.	Consider how alternative models of service provision can mitigate the impacts for example pop-up libraries in rural areas.	Assistant Director CIL	Ongoing
2.	Consider an alternative proposal that would see all current stops and routes retained, but with frequency harmonised so that all stops would be visited every four weeks (meaning two weeks stops would cease).	Assistant Director CIL	Complete

Evidence used to inform this assessment

- Equality Act 2010
- Public Sector Equality Duty
- Business intelligence and management data, as quoted in this report.
- Relevant service specific Codes of Practice and national guidance

Further information

23. For further information about this equality impact assessment please contact Jo Richardson, Equality & Diversity Manager, Email jo.richardson@norfolk.gov.uk

If you need this document in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact Jo Richardson on 0344 800 8020.

¹ Prohibited conduct:

Direct discrimination occurs when someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic they have or are thought to have, or because they associate with someone who has a protected characteristic.

Indirect discrimination occurs when a condition, rule, policy or practice in your organisation that applies to everyone disadvantages people who share a protected characteristic.

Harassment is “unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual”.

Victimisation occurs when an employee is treated badly because they have made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act; or because they are suspected of doing so. An employee is not protected from victimisation if they have maliciously made or supported an untrue complaint.

2 The protected characteristics are:

Age – e.g. a person belonging to a particular age or a range of ages (for example 18 to 30 year olds).

Disability - a person has a disability if she or he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Gender reassignment - the process of transitioning from one gender to another.

Marriage and civil partnership

Pregnancy and maternity

Race - refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.

Religion and belief - has the meaning usually given to it but belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (such as Atheism).

Sex - a man or a woman.

Sexual orientation - whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.

3 The Act specifies that having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity might mean:

- Removing or minimizing disadvantages suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of others;
- Encouraging people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such people is disproportionately low.

4 Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between people and communities involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to (a) tackle prejudice, and (b) promote understanding.