



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

Equality Impact Analysis

Title of policy, function or service	Customer Experience Strategy
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Person completing the EIA	Danielle Negrello
Type of policy, function or service:	Existing (reviewed) <input type="checkbox"/> New/Proposed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Version & Date	Version 0.4 20/05/2022

1. Background

The Customer Experience Strategy sets out the ambitions of the Council for how it will deliver services to our customers in the future. The Council Plan 2022 – 2026 forms the foundation for the Customer Experience Strategy, providing the Council with clarity on the future state of customer experience that supports achieving the ambition for Watford to be an outstanding place for everyone: residents, business owners and visitors alike. The Strategy has a focus on designing services where customers are empowered to help themselves. It sets out how the Council will enable new, innovative and efficient ways of interacting with customers, whilst at the same time recognising some customers will still need to use telephone and have access to face to face meetings to interact with the Council, especially in more complex matters. It reflects the reality that some customers will not be able to access our services digitally either by choice, or lack of funds, and they will require that services are delivered in other ways, or that they have access to the right support get online.

2. Focus of the Equality Impact Analysis

This EIA, therefore, considers the potential equality related impacts, both positive and negative of the Customer Experience Strategy on people in the groups or with the characteristics protected in the Equalities Act 2010.

These are:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender Reassignment
4. Pregnancy and maternity
5. Race
6. Religion or belief
7. Sex (gender)
8. Sexual Orientation
9. Marriage and Civil Partnership.

3. Engagement and consultation

The strategy has been developed on extensive analysis of customer data from a range of systems. We have analysed our contact data to understand why, when and how customers contact us, so we can identify the key areas where we should focus on improvement. We've also examined customer feedback (such as complaints information, satisfaction surveys and feedback about our website) helping us to understand what we currently do well and identify those areas where we need to improve.

A key part of the strategy is to ongoing process of engagement with key stakeholders and customers to develop and continuously improve key council services and ensure that the Strategy and associated Delivery Plan remains relevant to delivering excellent customer experiences.

Further engagement and consultation has taken place with key customer groups (Disability Watford, Dementia Watford, and Pensioners Forum) and partners (CAB, One YMCA and New Hope, Veolia, SLM) to understand their contact preferences and the alignment of the proposals outlined in the Strategy with their expectations and priorities.

Subject to Member approval, the Strategy sets out that there is an ongoing process of engagement with key stakeholders and customers to develop and continuously improve key council services and ensure that the strategy and delivery plan remains relevant to delivering excellent customer experiences.

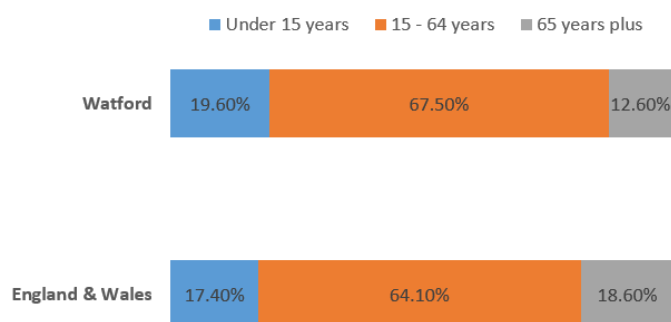
4. What we know about the Watford population

The current population of Watford is 102,300 (Census 2021).

Watford's population is currently projected to increase to 105,000 by 2025 and 110,300 by 2035, although these projections might be revised following Census 2021 figures. This growth will be a challenge for Watford, given our tight borough boundaries and is recognised within the Council Plan, shaping a number of our commitments and areas for action in the Delivery Plan. Watford has a very diverse population, more so than the rest of Hertfordshire; it is one of the strengths of our town and what makes us such a vibrant and diverse town.

Age

Comparison of age structures: Watford / England & Wales - Census 2021



The largest populations by age band in Watford are (Census 2021):

- 30-39 (17,800)
- 40-49 (15,600)
- 0-9 (13,300)

The numbers in each successive age-band fall progressively from 40-49 until there are estimated to be 6,000 who are 75+. We know that around 74,000 residents are of voting age in Watford and with an average age of 36, Watford has a relatively young population compared with other towns in England and Wales. Residents of this age typically feel more comfortable transacting with organisations online and, for many, this is their preferred method of contact, with the 24/7 availability of services attractive to those with busy lifestyles. Currently where services are available online 70% – 80% of customers self-serve via this channel to access services.

Population density

The population density for Watford is circa 4,774 people per square kilometre (Census 2021). This makes it the most densely populated district area in Hertfordshire and in the country. This is a reflection that we are an urban district with no open space 'hinterland', with many characteristics of a metropolitan borough. In comparison with many metropolitan boroughs, particularly those in and around the outskirts of London, our density is relatively low

Ethnicity

Watford has a very diverse population, more so than the rest of Hertfordshire.

For Watford, the Census 2011 shows the following main breakdown in terms of ethnicity: White British (61.9%), White other (7.7%), Pakistani (6.7%), British Indian (5.5%), British other Asian (4.4%) and African (3.5%), White Irish (2.3%) and Caribbean (1.7%).

In 2016, the ONS published population estimates by ethnicity. This did not report ethnicities to the level of granularity of the Census. The estimates for 2016 were: White British (59% - 57,000 residents), Asian / Asian British (19% - 19,000 residents), All Other White (12% - 12,000 residents), Black / African / Caribbean / Black British (4% - 4,000 residents), Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Group (4% - 4,000 residents) and Other Ethnic Group (1% - 1,000 residents).

Language spoken at home: Other data sources, including school language survey on the languages spoken by Watford school children at home, endorse the National Insurance findings that Watford remains a town with a diverse community with English still the predominant language (at around 60%) followed by (in order of self-selection by Watford families): Urdu, Polish, Tamil, Romanian, Gujarati, Punjabi, Gujarati and Hindi. The most selected African language spoken is Arabic (113 families – although not spoken exclusively in Africa) and Akan/Twi-Fante (78 families).

Births and origin of parents: In 2020, 64% of children born to Watford based parents, had one or both parents born outside of the UK, with 47% having both parents born outside of the UK. 58% of new mothers in Watford were born outside of the UK (1305 births in total, with 545 to mothers born in the UK and 760 born outside of the UK. Of these 230 mothers were born in the 'new' EU countries – those that had joined since 2004), 304 to EU countries and 277 in the Middle East and Asia. 105 mothers were born in Africa.

EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) quarterly statistics (28 August 2018 to 31 March 2022) –

experimental data: The Government has issued data on the number of applications made to the EUSS from 28 August 2018 to 31 March 2022, and applications concluded during the same time period. This shows that up to March 2022, 20, people in Watford had applied for EUSS. Of these the following were the highest number of nationalities who had applied: Romanian (6,470), Polish (3,130), Portuguese (1,600), Italian (1,170), Bulgarian (920) and Spanish (840).

Disability / Health Around 85% of the population of Watford state that they have 'good health' and just under 14% recorded a disability (from Census 2011). We do not have details as to what these disabilities are but they will include a wide range of physical and mental health disabilities or impairment.

The 2019 NHS Health Profile's summary conclusion is that the health of people in Watford is 'varied' compared with the England average.

About 11% (2,305) of children live in low income families. Life expectancy for both men and women is similar to the England average. Life expectancy is 6.1 years lower for men and 2.9 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Watford than in the least deprived areas. Harwoods is located to some of the more deprived areas – see deprivation section below.

In Year 6, 19.4% (236) of children are classified as obese.

Religion / belief

The religious breakdown in the Census 2011 of the main religions in Watford was: Christian (54.1%), Muslim (9.8%), Hindu (4.8%), with no religion stated at 21.4%.

Sexual orientation

Watford has no specific data on sexual orientation. This was a new question for the Census 2021 so we will be able to benchmark in future.

Education and skills

A skilled workforce supports the economic development and employment aspirations for Watford.

There has been a mostly increasing trend in educational attainment in Watford over the last few years. Watford's working age population has the fourth highest percentage (44.4%) in Hertfordshire of those with qualifications at NVQ 4 and above (Three Rivers is the highest with 63.5%, St Albans the second highest at 58.5% and East Herts third highest with 45.7%); this is close to the Hertfordshire average of 42% average but higher than the Great Britain average of 40.3%.

83.7% of Watford residents have achieved 5 A*-C or equivalent. This is the better than the England average of 75.6 (Jan – Dec 2019)

Homelessness

Whilst this is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, the council recognises that the particular circumstances of people without their own home might be a factor in their taking an active role in our community. We currently have 21 statutory homeless (March 2021) and 83 households in temporary accommodation (March 2021).

Deprivation

The English Indices of Deprivation (IoD) 2019 were published by the Government in September 2019, and updates the previous 2015 Indices, published in September 2015. The Indices of Deprivation measure relative levels of deprivation in 32,844 small areas or neighbourhoods, called Lower-layer Super Output Areas, in England

The IoD2019 is based on 39 separate indicators, organised across seven distinct domains of deprivation which are combined and weighted to calculate the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019

In the IMD 2019, Watford is ranked 195 out of 317 authorities, putting it in the 7th decile nationally. This means that, overall, Watford is less deprived than half the authorities in England.

Watford is the third most deprived authority in Hertfordshire. (Stevenage and Broxbourne are the most deprived.) However, three Hertfordshire authorities are among the 10% least deprived authorities in England (Three Rivers, East Herts and St Albans).

Overall, Watford is not an area with significant deprivation issues and the majority of the LSOAs within the town are in the bottom 50% of LSOAs nationally for deprivation; the borough's position has improved relative to that of 2015.

MOSAIC profile

Our MOSAIC profiling of the borough enhances our understanding of our population and provides valuable context for our decision-making as well as underpinning our communications and engagement. It confirms we are a young and diverse borough.

Type Code	Type Label	Type Description	2020 Households	2020 Watford %	Trend since 2017	2017 Rank
O61	Career Builders	Professional singles and couples in their 20s and 30s progressing in their field of work from commutabl	5257	13.3%	↑	1
G26	Cafés and Catchments	Affluent families with growing children living in upmarket housing in city environs	3660	9.2%	↑	3
N58	Culture & Comfort	Thriving families with good incomes in diverse suburbs	3575	9.0%	↓	2
O63	Flexible Workforce	Successful young renters ready to move to follow worthwhile incomes from service sector jobs	2927	7.4%	↑	6
I36	Solid Economy	Stable families with children, renting higher value homes from social landlords	2701	6.8%	↑	5
N57	Community Elders	Established older households owning city homes in diverse neighbourhoods	2574	6.5%	↑	9
H30	Primary Ambitions	Families with school-age children, who have bought the best house they can afford within popular neigh	2434	6.1%	↑	7
G27	Thriving Independence	Well-qualified older singles with incomes from successful professional careers in good quality housing	1949	4.9%	↓	4
N60	Ageing Access	Older residents owning small inner suburban properties with good access to amenities	1731	4.4%	↑	10
B05	Premium Fortunes	Asset-rich families with substantial income, established in distinctive, expansive homes in wealthy encl	1448	3.6%	↓	8
Total (Top 10)			28256			
Total Households in Watford			39675			

Table 1: Watford's MOSAIC profile (2019)

5. How will the council ensure equality is promoted through the delivery of the Customer Experience Strategy?

Under the Equality Act 2010, three areas need to be considered when analysing the equality impact of the naming of new streets and blocks in the borough:

1. **eliminate** discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act
2. **advance** equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it
3. **foster** good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not

A. Positive impacts

The potential positive effects of the new policy are:

- Whilst 'digital by design' is the council's vision for a range of services where it would be appropriate to provide them as such, it is acknowledged that this would not work for all residents and there needed to be on-going support for those who are 'digitally excluded'. The Council will support customers who need additional support when accessing Council Services through the Customer Service Centre. Offering services across all traditional contact channels with supported and mediated self-service offered to customers as they require. Increasing opportunities for online transacting for customers who would prefer to interact with the council this way actually helps the council to direct resource towards our more vulnerable residents and those who require more support.
- As part of regular performance management in the Customer Service Team, staff are expected to offer advice and guidance about how a customer might access services digitally, and if required would assist in the online process or book them more tailored support by booking them an appointment for our face to face service at the Town Hall.
- In addition to the support detailed above, the strategy includes provision for addressing digital exclusion, with work already underway on a two year project funded by the late Captain Tom's fundraising efforts. The Council are working across Hertfordshire with Hertfordshire County Council, the NHS Trusts, and Voluntary Sector organisations including the CVS's and relevant charities across the County.

There are four main areas of this project:

- access to equipment
 - access to connectivity
 - fear of using equipment
 - skills in using the equipment
- Disabled customers, including those with visual or hearing impairments, who may find it difficult to attend the Town Hall in person will also benefit from the enhanced digital capability outlines in the strategy. The ability to undertake transactions online from home avoids the need for those customers who find making journeys difficult to travel unnecessarily.

- The strategy details the requirement that key services are designed and tested in collaboration with those customers who use / will be using the service. Services will also be continuously improved using customer feedback and insight.
- The Council's website has been designed to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (known as WCAG 2.1) standards. These are an internationally recognised set of recommendations for improving web accessibility. They explain how to make digital services, websites and apps accessible to everyone, including users with impairments to their:
 - vision - like severely sight impaired (blind), sight impaired (partially sighted) or colour blind people
 - hearing - like people who are deaf or hard of hearing
 - mobility - like those who find it difficult to use a mouse or keyboard
 - thinking and understanding - like people with dyslexia, autism or learning difficulties
- The website also features the Recite Me toolbar to assist visitors to the site with the impairments mentioned above to navigate and use the site. The Recite Me toolbar is also able to translate the website into over 200 languages for those customers where English is not their first language.
- There is an awareness across the organisation that services must be designed and delivered in a way that takes into account the requirements of all of customer groups, particularly those with accessibility, language or additional support requirements.

B. Negative impacts

The potential negative impacts of not having this policy in place would be:

- Older residents and those on low incomes are more likely to be digitally excluded so the increased emphasis on digital channels, is likely to impact older people and those on low incomes more than other residents. The principal mitigation that is already in place is the provision of a telephone customer contact centre, with assisted digital and support for customer advocacy as key elements of the operating model and procedures. There is also access to council services in person through supported / mediated self-service and by pre-booked appointment at the Council Offices.
- The Council provides free computer access in its face to face area and access to free-phones that customers can use. Customer Service staff are encouraged to identify and support customers who need help. Customer services staff also provide guidance over the phone to assist customers in using website services. Customer service staff are also able to refer residents to the Staying Connected Digital Inclusion programme where customers would benefit from the type of support offered by the scheme.

Summary of potential positive impacts and ways in which they can be ensured

Positive Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to ensure the positive impact
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will support customers who need additional support when accessing Council Services through the Customer Service Centre. Offering services across all traditional contact channels with supported and mediated self-service offered to customers as they require. 	Age, disability,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of regular performance management in the Customer Service Team, staff are expected to offer advice and guidance about how a customer might access services digitally and, if required, would assist in the online process or book them more tailored support by booking them an appointment for our face to face service at the Town Hall.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional support for those who are digitally excluded. 	Age, disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The strategy includes provision for addressing digital exclusion, with work already underway on a two year project funded by the late Captain Tom’s fundraising efforts. The Council are working across Hertfordshire with Hertfordshire County Council, the NHS Trusts, Voluntary Sector organisations including the CVS's and relevant charities across the County.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disabled customers, including those with visual or hearing impairments, who may find it difficult to attend the Town Hall in person will also benefit from the enhanced digital capability outlined in the strategy. The ability to undertake transactions online from home avoids the need for those customers who find making journeys difficult to travel unnecessarily. 	Disability	<p>There are four main areas of this project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ access to equipment ○ access to connectivity ○ fear of using equipment ○ skills in using the equipment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The strategy details the requirement that key services and designed and tested in collaboration with those customers who use / will be using the service. Services will also be continuously improved using customer feedback and insight. 	Age, disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The strategy details that services delivers services that are ‘digital by design’ in the first instance, ensuring that all customers have equal access to council services through a channel that best suits their needs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The website should be simple and clear to use for all customers and 	Age, disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A framework for continuous service improvement will be developed within the organisation to ensure customer feedback is collected and analysed to inform service design as well as testing new and existing key services with users to ensure they meet their needs.

<p>meet customer needs and expectations of a digital service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older residents and those on low incomes are more likely to be digitally excluded so the increased emphasis on digital channels, is likely to impact older people and those on low incomes more than other residents. 	<p>Age</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principal mitigation that is already in place is the provision of a telephone customer contact centre, with assisted digital and support for customer advocacy as key elements of the operating model and procedures. There is also access to council services in person through supported / mediated self-service and by pre-booked appointment at the Council Offices. • The council provides free computer access in its face to face area and access to free-phones that customers can use. Customer Service staff are encouraged to identify and support customers who need help. Customer services staff also provide guidance over the phone to assist customers in using website services. • Customer service staff are also able to refer residents to the Staying Connected Digital Inclusion programme where customers would benefit from the type of support offered by the scheme.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people who do not speak English as a first language may have difficulty understanding and/or following online or automated instructions. 	<p>Race</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The contact centre has access to a telephone interpretation service and would offer this as part of a mediated service to customers who are unable to use online or automated services due to language difficulties in the same way as they do at present. • The website has the Recite Me platform that is able to translate the content of the website into over 200 other languages.

This EIA has been approved by:

..... **Date**