



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

Equality Impact Analysis

Title of policy, function or service	Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework
Lead officer	Semeta Bloomfield
Person completing the EIA	Semeta Bloomfield
Type of policy, function or service:	Existing (reviewed) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New/Proposed <input type="checkbox"/>
Version & Date	Version 1.0 18 October 2023

1. Background

Watford Borough Council is committed to supporting a vibrant, flourishing and engaged voluntary sector which can collaborate in order to deliver sustainable, high quality and value for money services that benefit those who live, work in and visit Watford. Through its Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (VSF) the council sets out its strategic approach and priorities for commissioned organisations delivering services on behalf of the council. The framework currently in place ran from 2019-2023, and was extended for an additional year to end in March 2024 to account for the impacts and uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A review of the 2019-2023 Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework was undertaken in order to identify the approach and outcomes required from the next iteration of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (2024-2028).

The outcomes of the review identified:

1. The services to be commissioned
2. The expected deliverables and governance required in order to measure them
3. The budget available and options for its allocation
4. The approach to engagement with the voluntary sector and with the wider community impacted by the framework.

This Equality Impact Analysis considers the potential impacts, both positive and negative, of the refreshed iteration of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework 2024-2028.

The framework has been informed by evidence-based research on local needs, based on demographic and socioeconomic and qualitative insights about our communities, engagement with the commissioned organisations and the wider voluntary and community sector (VCS), the identification of local priorities in line with the the Council Plan 2022-26 and a review of the performance of the commissioned organisations over the previous four years.

2. Focus of the Equality Impact Analysis

This EIA, therefore, considers the potential equality related impacts, both positive and negative of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (2024-2028) on the 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

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the organisations commissioned within the current framework and their service users, officers led a series of structured meetings between July and September 2023, to seek their feedback on the current VSCF, understand what processes and changes organisations have implemented in order to become more sustainable and less reliant on the funding, review the proposed framework and consider any initial concerns from organisations regarding the impact of the proposed changes on their service users.

As this EIA considers the impact of the proposed reduction of funding to organisations commissioned by the framework, all organisations were asked to provide evidence of the impact of a 5%, 10% and 15% reduction to their annual funding and the effect on its service users.

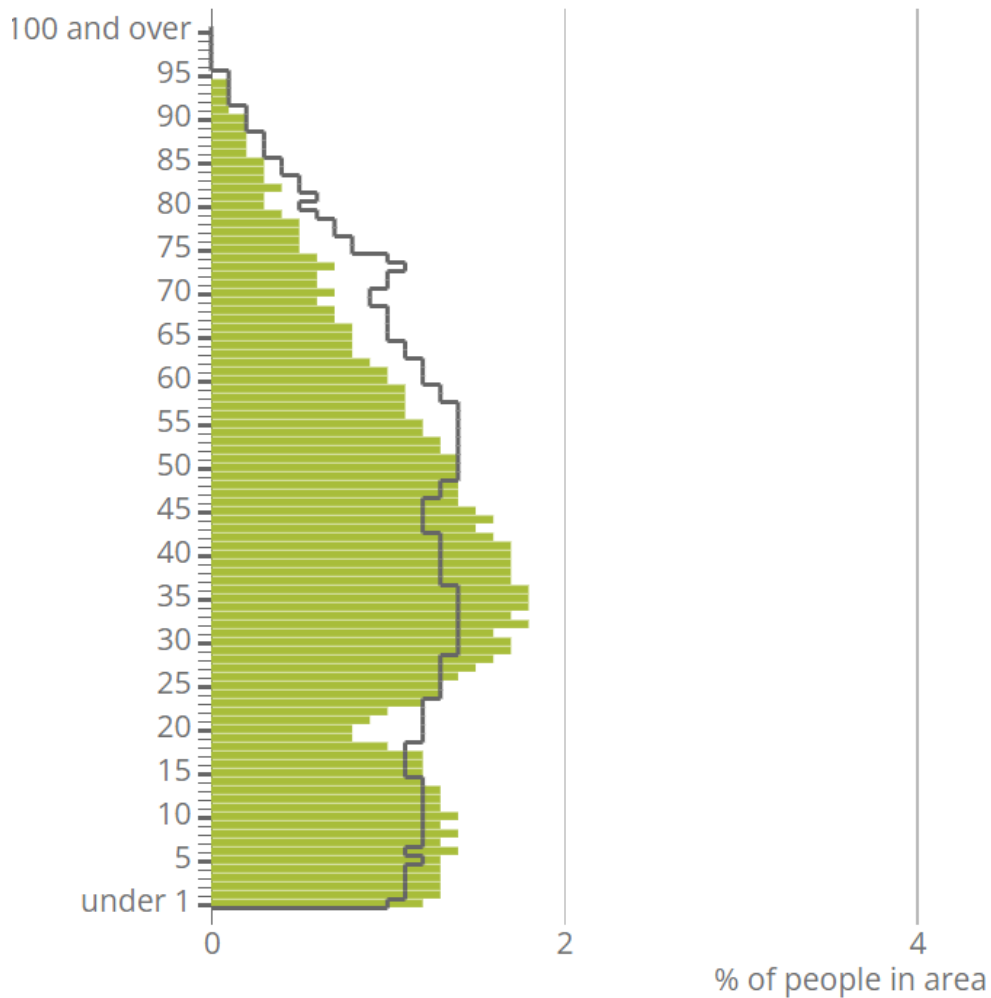
4. What we know about the Watford population

[Understanding our population is the basis of the needs assessment we have undertaken to inform the VCSF and this EIA.](#)

Population

Watford is a town with a growing population. The census data 2021 indicates that Watford has a population of 102,300, an increase of 13.3% since the previous census in 2011. This is higher than the overall increase for England (6.6%), where the population grew by nearly 3.5 million to 56,489,800.

The chart below shows Watford's age ranges between 0 – 100 and over in percentage of the population (green) compared with the England / Wales percentages (black line).



Overall, this comparison shows that Watford is a relatively young town. This is particularly the case in the 0 to 19 age range. Similarly the 30 to 49 cohort accounts for a significantly higher proportion of the Watford population than nationally.

The median age in Watford is 36 compared with 40 for England. This means that we are a town which is popular with families and, whilst we are a town for all, we recognise that our plans need to reflect our large number of young people and families. In terms of voluntary and community sector organisations, this means there are likely to be demands for help across all age profiles but those supporting families and younger children may face higher than average demand.

Population density

The population density for Watford is circa 4,770 people per square kilometre. This makes it the most densely populated district area in Hertfordshire and in the country (434 per square kilometre). This is a reflection that we are an urban district, 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.

Households

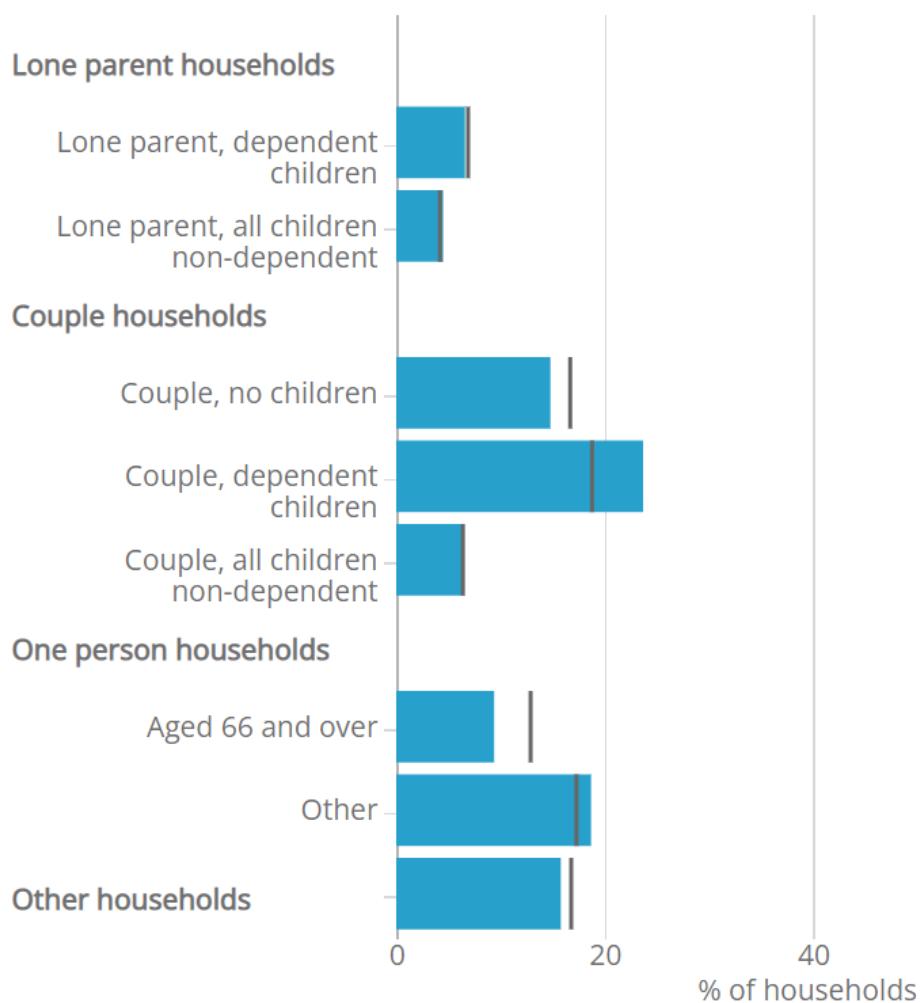
Number of households

The ONS data, based on the census, says that there were 39,628 households in Watford at the time

of the Census. The average household size in Watford is currently 2.57. This is slightly higher than the national average of 2.45 and is in line with the Census 2021 household composition data below.

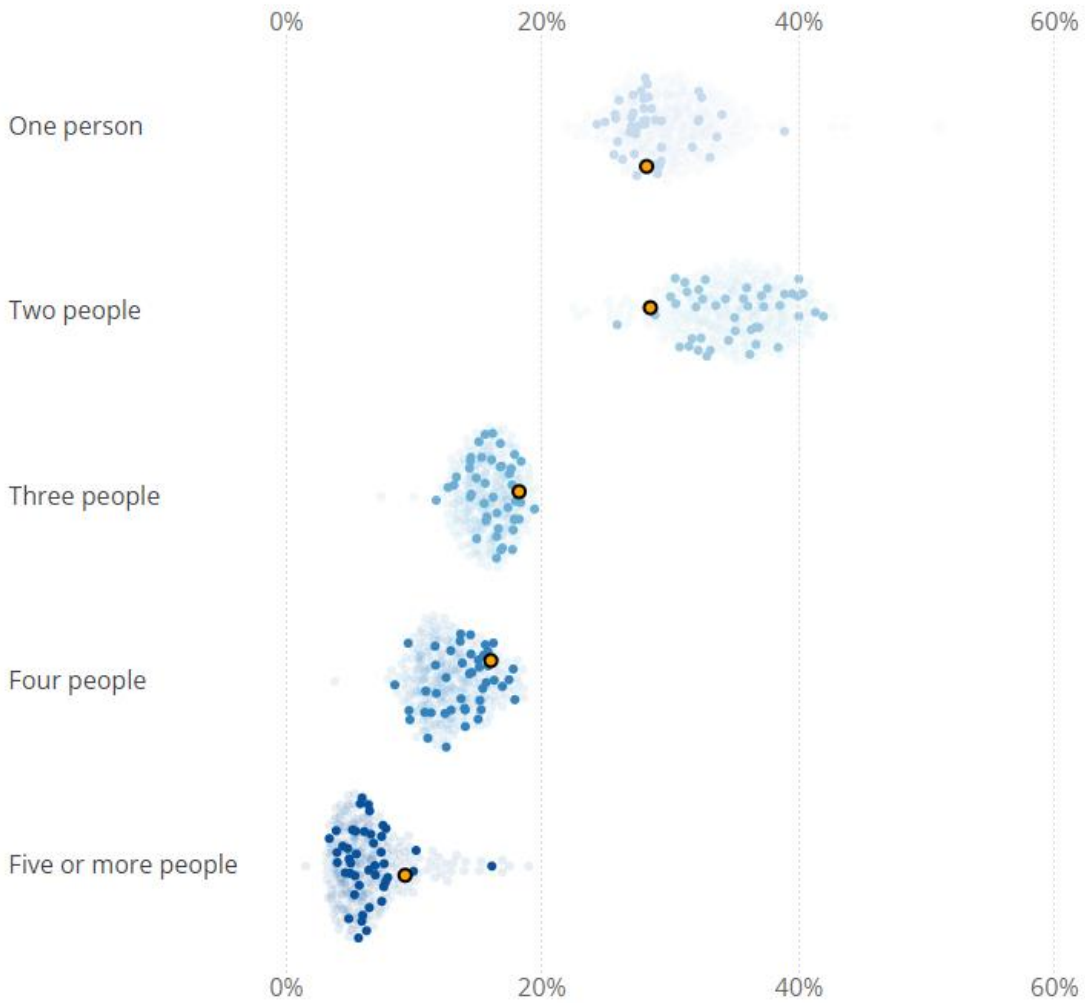
Household Composition

The chart below sets out the composition of Watford households in the Census 2021, with Watford's percentage shown in the blue bars compared to the England and Wales percentages shown by the vertical black bar. Watford has a higher percentage of both households with couples with no children and households with dependent children than England and Wales. As a town with a relatively young population it has fewer one person households with residents aged 66 and over.



The second chart on household composition shows that Watford has higher than England and Wales average for larger sized households – 3 or more people. Again this reflects that Watford is a ‘family town’ with different generations living together in one household.

Local authorities within the same region are highlighted



DEPRIVATION

Deprivation is based on four selected household characteristics.

Education

A household is classified as deprived in the education dimension if no one has at least level 2 education and no one aged 16 to 18 years is a full-time student.

Employment

A household is classified as deprived in the employment dimension if any member, not a full-time student, is either unemployed or disabled.

Health

A household is classified as deprived in the health dimension if any member is disabled.

Housing

A household is classified as deprived in the housing dimension if the household's accommodation is either overcrowded, in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating.

Category	Number of Watford households
Household is not deprived in any dimension	20,051

Household is deprived in one dimension	13,115
Household is deprived in two dimensions	5,091
Household is deprived in three dimensions	1,264
Household is deprived in four dimensions	107

Gender

The 2021 census did not allow for any option other than female or male.

FEMALE	50.8%
MALE	49.2%

LIVING STATUS

The “living arrangements” classification combines responses to the question on marital and civil partnership status with information about whether or not a person is living in a couple. This topic is only applicable to people in households. Living arrangements differs from marital and civil partnership status because cohabiting takes priority over other categories. For example, if a person is divorced and cohabiting, then in results for living arrangements they are classified as cohabiting.

Category	Number of Watford households
Does not apply <i>not eligible for a legal partnership</i>	21,282
Living in an opposite-sex couple: Married or in a civil partnership	35,782
Living in a same-sex couple: Married or in a civil partnership	166
Living in a couple: Separated, but still married or in a civil partnership	94
Living in an opposite-sex couple: Cohabiting	9,408
Living in a same-sex couple: Cohabiting	442
Not living in a couple: Single (never married and never registered a same-sex civil partnership)	22,868

Not living in a couple: Married or in a registered civil partnership	1,872
Not living in a couple: Separated (including those who are married and those who are in civil partnerships)	1,479
Not living in a couple: Divorced or formerly in a civil partnership which is now legally dissolved	4,743
Not living in a couple: Widowed or surviving partner from a civil partnership	3,397

LEGAL PARTNERSHIP STATUS

For Census 2021, this has been updated to reflect the revised Civil Partnership Act that came into force in 2019.

Category	Number of Watford households
Does not apply <i>not eligible for a legal partnership</i>	21,282
Never married and never registered a civil partnership	30,974
Married: Opposite sex	38,023
Married: Same sex	192
In a registered civil partnership: Opposite sex	85
In a registered civil partnership: Same sex	60
Separated, but still married	1,744
Separated, but still in a registered civil partnership	7
Divorced	6,074
Formerly in a civil partnership now legally dissolved	18
Widowed	3,782
Surviving partner from civil partnership	5

Sexual orientation

Category	Number of Watford residents	Percentage of Watford residents

people aged 16 years and over - straight or heterosexual	72,016	88.95%
people aged 16 years and over – lesbian, gay	914	1.1%
people aged 16 years and over – bisexual	962	1.2%

Language spoken at home:

Below is the data collected in Census 2021 with regard to household language. This is another indication that Watford benefits from groups and organisations set up to support those who may have arrived in the town more recently.

	Number	Percentage
All adults in household have English as a main language	30443	76.8%
At least one but not all adults in household have English as a main language	3486	8.8%
No adults in household, but at least one person aged 3 to 15 years, has English as a main language	1438	3.6%
No people in household have English in England as a main language	4261	10.8%

Main Language

The Census asked people their main language, with over 90 choices. Whilst English was significantly the most chosen language with nearly 80,000 residents citing English as their main language, there are a substantial number of residents with other main languages. The top ten after English are below (see Appendix 1 for the full list of languages).

Language	Number
Other European language (EU): Romanian	3,361
Other European language (EU): Polish	1,659
South Asian language: Urdu	1,486
South Asian language: Tamil	1,193
Portuguese	1,140

South Asian language: Gujarati	954
South Asian language: Malayalam	643
Other European language (EU): Italian	551
Other European language (EU): Hungarian	489
Other European language (EU): Bulgarian	435

Disability/Health

Category	Percentage of Watford residents
Disabled under the equality act: day-to-day activities limited a lot	6.2%
Disabled under the equality act: day-to-day activities limited a little	8.7%
Not disabled under the equality act	85.1%

General Health – age standardised

Category	Percentage of Watford residents
Very good health	48.2%
Good health	34.7%
Fair health	12.4%
Bad health	3.6%
Very bad health	1.0%

The 2020/21 NHS Health Profile's summary conclusion is that the health of people in Watford is 'varied' compared with the England average. About 12% (2,256) of children live in relatively low income families and about 10% live in absolute low income families.

Ethnicity

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 place to be. This diversity is an

opportunity for our voluntary and community sector in terms of how they respond to the various needs of the Watford community and how they reach out to engage and include people in what they do.

	WATFORD 2011	WATFORD 2021
		102,245 TOTAL
White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	61.9% (55,875)	46.0% (46,820)
White Irish	2.3% (2,063)	2.1% (2,149)
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.1% (61)	0.1% (80)
White: Roma	Not a category in 2011	0.3% (343)
White: Other White	7.7% (6,947)	12.6% (12,836)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean	1.1% (990)	1.3% (1,300)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African	0.5% (412)	0.7% (692)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	1.0% (939)	1.4% (1,408)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: Other Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	0.8% (763)	1.4% (1,444)
Asian/Asian British/ Asian Welsh: Indian	5.5% (4,923)	9.7% (9,954)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Pakistani	6.7% (6,082)	8.0% (8,197)

Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Bangladeshi	0.4% (362)	0.5% (493)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Chinese	0.9% (822)	1.0% (1,024)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Other Asian	4.4% (3,981)	5.3% (5,369)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: African	3.5% (3,142)	3.9% (3,954)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Caribbean	1.7% (1,558)	1.7% (1,733)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Other Black	0.6% (529)	0.8% (801)
Other ethnic group: Arab	0.3% (294)	0.7% (763)
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	0.6% (558)	2.8% (2,885)

Religion or belief

Religious groups in Watford, 2021 census:

- Christian - 45,447 people or 44.6%
- Buddhist - 1,021 people or 0.85%
- Hindu - 8,398 people or 8.2%
- Jewish - 944 people or 0.93%
- Muslim - 13,262 people or 11.0%
- Sikh - 664 people or 0.6%
- Other - 859 people or 0.71%
- No religion – 25,340 people or 24.8%

6,311 people did not answer this question

5. How will the council ensure equality is promoted through the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework

Under the Equality Act 2010, three areas need to be considered when analysing the equality impact of the review:

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

Potential positive effects based on what you know from your analysis

The key message of the framework is to set “out the council’s strategic approach and priorities that are intended to support a broad range of community, socio-economic and cultural benefits, that will be delivered by voluntary and community sector organisations, to local people on behalf of the council”

Informed by comprehensive research and engagement and aligned to the aims of our Council Plan 2022-26, Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-26 and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2023-27, the framework sets out a shared set of priorities, principles and responsibilities for all stakeholders that will have significant benefit to and positive impact on those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

The framework seeks to improve the provision of community, cultural, social, and leisure activities in line with the deliverables defined within the four principles of the framework:

- **Principle 1: Community Cohesion**
- **Principle 2: Enable opportunities**
- **Principle 3: Community capacity and Impact**
- **Principle 4: Environmental Sustainability**

In the wake of the pandemic and as the cost of living crisis deepens, there is a need for the council to continue working closely with the voluntary sector to protect our residents from the impact of pressures. Any major changes to the current commissioned providers could destabilise the effective delivery of targeted and effective crisis support and put many households at greater risk of both

immediate hardship and reduced opportunity and wellbeing.

Following the review, the commissioning priorities and organisations for this framework will remain as:

- **Infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector**

We will continue to support and strengthen the voluntary and community sector in Watford, developing and supporting the local voluntary sector infrastructure. This service will be delivered by Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) who have extensive networks across the voluntary, statutory and business sectors within the town and beyond.

- **Advice and support services**

We will continue to support a universal advice service, which can provide detailed and expert advice and support for Watford's diverse community and, particularly, our vulnerable residents. This service will be delivered by Watford Citizens Advice, who have a proven track record in the advice and support sector and who we will work closely with to address and respond to any emerging national issues, legislative or policy changes that may impact local people.

National (such as the Fairness Foundation and local research (Watford Citizens Advice) shows that the recent cost of living crisis has impacted on certain protected characteristics disproportionately, including single parents, people with disabilities and those from minority ethnic communities.

Supporting advice services will have a positive impact on all the community but particularly those from the groups who are finding it hardest to manage.

- **Support services for families**

We will continue to provide targeted support for families, to help parents cope with the many difficulties life can bring, ensuring that they have the skills, confidence and strength they need to nurture their young children. This service will be commissioned by Home Start Watford and Three Rivers, whose trained volunteers will continue to provide early intervention by supporting families in a variety of emotional and practical ways.

Watford has a high proportion of families with young children and supporting Home Start responds to the needs of this part of the Watford community, particularly those facing vulnerabilities.

- **Mobility services**

We will continue to support services that allow independence and enhanced living for anyone with limited mobility, whether it be temporary or permanent. This service will continue to be commissioned to Shopmobility Watford who have the experience and infrastructure to deliver a range of mobility services to ensure that our town centre and all its associated services, including retail, leisure and hospitality remain accessible to people with limited mobility.

- **Arts and culture**

We will continue to support access to arts and culture ensuring that is accessible for all of its residents. Watford Palace Theatre and the Pump House Theatres will be commissioned to

deliver arts and culture services through a range of theatre productions and performances, projects and outreach programmes that bring people together, fosters good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not and support the health and wellbeing of people of all ages and backgrounds.

- **Community centre provision**

We will continue to support the management of four council owned community centres across the town to provide a programme of activities designed to meet the needs of the community they serve. The following centres will continue to be commissioned by:

- Holywell Community Centre- Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT)
- Orbital Community Centre- One YMCA
- Meriden Community Centre - Watford FC Community Sports & Education Trust
- West Watford Community Centre- West Watford Community Association

The centres will support the needs of their individual communities, fostering a sense of community spirit and cohesion by providing spaces and programmes that promote neighbourliness and activities for all ages and interests.

It is proposed that facilities provide a range of centre activities that address evidenced need in their ward in one or more the following areas:

- Public health focusing on mental health and wellbeing
- Youth and young people focused activities
- Activities for older adults
- Activities for people with disabilities

B. Negative impacts

Potential negative effects based on what you know from your analysis

The current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets a savings targets of £50k in 2024/25 rising to £100k in 2025/26 to be achieved by reducing dependency on council funding and working with the voluntary sector to identify alternative sources of finance. The Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (2024-2028) promotes a new collaborative approach amongst the VCS which encourages more self-sufficiency and partnership working.

Potential negative effects could arise if:

1. No mitigating steps are taking if a decrease in funding is necessary for a currently commissioned organisation.
2. Organisations are informed too late of any changes that impact their financial planning
3. The VSCF fails to deliver upon the council priorities or needs of the sector

4. The VSCF does not allow for pivots in service delivery where new/urgent priorities arise
5. Care is not taken of disproportionate impact on those protected by law.

Whilst areas have been identified through this EIA which could impact on the local community and potentially those with protected characteristics, mitigations for the negative impacts have been identified within the principles set out within the Framework.

Any equality impacts identified through this EIA will be evaluated through new internal and external governance arrangements.



6. Overall conclusion

The main conclusion is that, overall, the refreshed Voluntary and Community Sector Framework will have a positive impact on those in Watford sharing a protected characteristics particularly around age, disability and race. The Framework will continue to provide access to detailed and expert advice and deliver a range of community, socioeconomic and cultural benefits to all residents.

This EIA notes that this is a refresh of the Framework not a review and that the principles of allocating funding, whilst modified to reflect the council’s strategic framework, remain as for the previous framework and that it continues grant funding the organisations as set out above. The EIA also recognises that the council’s financial position means that it has had to review its commissioning budget and make decisions on how this should be allocated across the commissioned service. The equality impact of these changes to funding will be reviewed and the impacts monitored and mitigated as far as possible but it is acknowledged that this will have an impact on those organisations affected.

The proposal to ring-fence the funding for Watford’s citizens advice demonstrates our commitment to address inequalities by focusing on the most vulnerable and those in greatest need, which includes those with protected characteristics as evidenced by recent data and information. The new principles that have been embedded into the framework, will help all commissioned organisations to deliver self-help and early intervention activities which help to build resilience and improve the quality of life by reducing the potential negative impacts of poverty, disability and ill health and those with protected characteristics

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

Positive Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to ensure the positive impact
Providing voluntary and community sector infrastructure that enables the setting up of new groups and existing ones to survive and thrive including those that support protected characteristics	All (there are established groups in Watford that support protected characteristics such as disability)	Commission Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) to provide this service and monitor effectiveness through a robust SLA including monitoring across protected characteristics
Providing high quality advice and support services for those in need of support across a range of issues but including debt, housing and welfare advice	All	Commission Watford Citizens Advice to provide this service and monitor effectiveness through a robust SLA including monitoring across protected characteristics
Providing support to people with mobility issues to gain access to services in the town centre	Disability Age	Commission Shopmobility to provide this service and monitor effectiveness through a robust SLA including monitoring across protected characteristics

Summary of potential negative impacts and ways in which they can be removed or mitigated

Negative Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to mitigate the negative impact
Reduction in the level of service delivered/programmes offered	All	<p>Continue equalities monitoring of commissioned organisations service users to gain a better understanding of the impact of proposed changes to funding on protected characteristics and other vulnerable groups.</p> <p>For WBC officers and the CVS to signpost and support organisations with identifying and submitting applications to other external funding opportunities.</p>

Negative Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to mitigate the negative impact
Increased cost in some instances to end user for activities and reduced concessions	All	<p>Continue equalities monitoring of commissioned organisations service users to gain a better understanding of the impact of proposed changes to funding on protected characteristics and other vulnerable groups.</p> <p>For WBC officers and the CVS to signpost and support organisations with identifying and submitting applications to other external funding opportunities.</p>
Reduced time available for recruiting	All	<p>Continue equalities monitoring of commissioned organisations service users to gain a better understanding of the impact of proposed changes to funding on protected characteristics and other vulnerable groups.</p>
Possibility of discontinuing some activities	All	<p>For WBC officers and the CVS to signpost and support organisations with identifying and submitting applications to other external funding opportunities.</p> <p>Continue equalities monitoring of commissioned organisations service users to gain a better understanding of the impact of proposed changes to funding on protected characteristics and other vulnerable groups.</p>

This EIA has been approved by:

Kathryn Robson Date 18th October 2023