

Summary Fair Treatment Assessment (FTA)

Area for Assessment:	
Name of service or function etc	Fees and Charges Framework
Which Service does this affect?	Business Support/Financial Operations
Is this a new, existing or revised function?	Revised
Summary of findings:	
Main conclusions on the likely impact of the function on different equality groups (protected characteristics):	
<p>The Fees and Charges Framework recognises that the Council provides a range of very different chargeable services and that it would not be possible for a single policy to provide prescriptive requirements that could be applied in all service areas. As a high level policy document therefore it seeks to establish some underlying principles to guide charging decisions while allowing for flexibility to suit particular circumstances. This does however mean that not all the elements of the Fair Treatment Assessment are applicable to the Fees and Charges Framework itself, but that responsibility for applying charging policies fairly at a service level remains with the service manager.</p> <p>The development of the framework and the completion of the Fair Treatment Assessment have been informed by consultation with service managers (through the FTA team), members (through the Income Optimisation Task and Finish Group) and colleagues within Financial Operations. Account has also been taken of recommendations made by Internal Audit and PricewaterhouseCoopers. Service users have not been directly consulted but it is expected that service managers will have their own arrangements in place for consulting on and monitoring the impact of chargeable services which are outside the scope of the framework itself.</p> <p>As a result the FTA found that although there may be some chargeable services which are disproportionately used by different groups, it has not been possible to be definitive about the potential for the framework to impact differently on such groups, as much will depend on the charges set in a particular service area. However, the assessment identified three factors as being the most likely to lead to charging decisions affecting different groups in different ways: age, disability and socio-economic factors.</p> <p>Where applicable, consideration of the potential negative impacts identified through the assessment and how managers may mitigate such impacts has been reflected in the updated Fees and Charges Framework.</p> <p>One of the most significant findings of the FTA is that it is crucial to consider how best to target concessions policies in order to encourage take-up of chargeable services by different groups in support of the Council's customer outcomes. However, it is recognised that the development of a corporate-wide approach to concessions (for example in terms of target groups, level of concession and proof of eligibility) remains an aspiration at this stage and this is considered a key area to be explored in the next twelve months.</p>	

Actions:		
Actions identified to address negative impacts identified or to better promote equality, human rights, cohesive and sustainable communities and safeguarding issues		
Action	Outcome	Timescale
Review the use of concessions across the authority to identify eligible groups, level of concession and proof of eligibility in different service areas.	Understanding of current position with regard to concessions policies to inform decision as to whether a corporate approach is required.	August to December 2011 (reports on any recommended changes as part of budget reports in January 2012)
Discuss with Internal Audit options for assessing compliance with the Fees and Charges Framework as part of regular audits	Improved understanding of whether/how Fees and Charges Framework is being applied in service areas	July 2010 [Action completed. Framework circulated to internal auditors for inclusion in audit testing where appropriate. In addition to considering whether income opportunities are being maximised, audit testing will assess broad compliance with the processes outlined in the framework, e.g. approval of fees and charges.]
Date Assessment Signed Off	8 August 2011	