Equalities Analysis in Lambeth

Proposal Title *

The Reducing Invalid Planning Applications (RIPA) Project

Author

Christopher Mizen

Toby Hamilton

Please provide name of lead author and/or those within project team who may be required to contribute to this assessment

Who will sign off the assessment?

Catherine Neal

Please indicate who will be involved in approving this assessment. This will need to be signed off by the designated Head of Service or Director

Q1a. What is changing?

The Reducing Invalid Planning Applications (RIPA) project's aim is to develop a tool and online service pattern that will effectively digitize the submission of planning applications. This will create a more transparent system and one that is easier to navigate for applicants. The online platform will assist applicants in preparing and submitting the documents required to lead to a valid application at the point of submission. However, applicants will still have the option to apply for planning permission via post, the Planning Portal and other more traditional methods.

This project constitutes a service and procedural change. This change has resulted from the realization that over 50% of Householder type planning applications are currently invalid at the point of submission. The Government has expressed a strong interest to drive digital innovation in the field of planning and supports the RIPA project with funding from MHCLG's Local Digital Fund. Lambeth and its partners were successful in a bid submitted for funding due to the significant potential of the project at the national scale. Aside from making the process for submitting planning applications easier for users, the project expects there to be wider benefits including making the process more efficient and cost-effective for users and Local Planning Authorities.

What is the most significant or key change taking place? Can you indicate the type of change in your response (e.g. policy/decision/strategy/ service/procedural/ geographic/procurement etc.) so it is clear what is being equalities assessed? Why is this change happening? What do you aim to achieve? Can you clearly indicate what decision-makers are being asked to take a decision on?

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Q1b. Who will be involved in approving this decision?

Rob Bristow

Who else will be involved in signing-off this decision?

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Please detail any project sponsors, (Head of Service, Directors cabinet member/s, legal, partners) Note: Any reports that go to anyone needing to take decisions must refer to this equalities analysis so they can consider the effects of the proposals on different groups before and during decision-making.

Q2a. What do we know about the people who will be impacted by this change?

Existing data reveals that 80% of our users will be planning agents and developers, with the remaining 20% divided between residents and charity applicants. Extensive user research was conducted throughout the project's Alpha Phase (October 2019 - March 2020). This offered additional insight into those who will be affected by this change. Lambeth received a total of 96 research volunteers and out of these volunteers, the project screened and conducted 13 usability test sessions. This covered 3 distinct user groups. The main protected groups impacted by this change are understood as those with additional accessibility requirements. Part of the RIPA project's ambition is to consider accessibility needs and to encourage these groups to be involved in finding the solution. Of those surveyed in Alpha - 5% reported having additional accessibility requirements and their feedback has been integrated into the ongoing development of the RIPA project's online platform.

Furthermore, research conducted in Alpha indicated that invalid planning applications form a national problem. Research indicates that a streamlined validation process could save planning authorities each between £66,000 and £171,000 per year. The RIPA project is only expected to impact those individuals currently involved in the planning system, comprising individuals who either own their home or rent via a very long lease or those with land to build on. Whilst all development can impact a community (both positively and/or negatively), the mechanics of submitting a planning application does not directly impact that population and therefore this project is not considered to be of a negative impact in socio-economic terms. By automating the validation process and allowing a planning authority to spend more time considering the merits of planning applications, this could increase the system's overall benefit to communities; planners will be able to spend more time carefully considering and negotiating an application, enhancing the positives and finding solutions to any negative impacts such as use of conditions and Section 106 agreements.

What does your information tell you about the people who will affected by this change? Are protected groups impacted? What information do you hold on the protected characteristics of the people affected by the change? (Age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, health, socio-economic, language) Are there any gaps or missing information?

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Q2b. How will they be impacted by the change?

The RIPA project aims to make the process for submitting planning applications easier to navigate and more transparent for users, enabled through the dynamic form of its online tool. Users will no longer have to know answers to questions where the council already holds this information - such as whether they are in a flood risk area. This reflects a positive impact of the project on those affected by the change. All work conducted on the RIPA project is carried out in an open and transparent manner, constituting a condition of MHCLG's grant funding.

The RIPA project is only expected to impact those who are involved in the planning system. Those submitting multiple applications will benefit most from the project, given a reduction of time spent preparing and submitting documents. Those with little to no experience of submitting an application will benefit by having a system that will guide them through the process, providing hints, help and examples of what is required as they go - thus making it easier for them to stay in one place to submit their application - rather than having to Google and conduct research to try to understand how to fill out the form on their own. Thus, by simplifying the language and process involved in the submission of planning applications, the RIPA project will positively impact first-time applicants and those less aware of the process involved.

Would you assess the impact as positive, adverse, neutral? Do you have any uncertainty about the impact of your proposal? Is there a likelihood that some people will more impacted than others? Can you describe the ways in which they will be affected? How might this change affect our 'general duty'

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Q3a. How do you plan to promote and deliver any positive impacts of the proposal?

Work on the RIPA project is conducted through an agile framework, involving regular collaboration between Lambeth, the five partner councils, the project's web developer and the MHCLG. This allows for the delivery of the project and associated positive impacts to be constantly assessed and improved.

The project has its own page on the Fairer Lambeth site (https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/better-fairerlambeth/project/reducing-invalid-planning-applications-a-service-pattern-for-digital) and additionally has its own website (https://www.ripa.digital/). Both of these sites provide up to date links and information informing members of the public about the proposed changes and the work as it progresses in real time. Lambeth's Communications team regularly tweets to update residents and the project has a Medium Blog site which the Fairer Lambeth site provides links to. Those who are interested and/or want to get involved are invited to join the project's fortnightly Show and Tell sessions broadcast live on MS Teams (also available on the Lambeth and project web pages as information of work to date).

Part of the funding requirements include four output reports - including a User Research report and a Benefits Case report. In terms of User Research outputs - the project is regularly calling out for volunteers for user testing by way of existing planning database information (via LIAs), council data collected from entries to the council's web pages, Twitterand other social media call out approaches. Feedback from both practices is continually integrated into the development of the prototype of the online tool. Surveys to other LAs nationally were undertaken during the Alpha phase of the project in order to get their feedback on the project and its goals. As part of the Benefits Case, various metrics are being assessed including customer experience and satisfaction. A customer survey is currently being developed to monitor the metrics relating to customers both pre and post-beta tool. The survey will be distributed by Lambeth and the five partner councils, monitored closely by MHCLG.

How might the principles of fairness, equality of opportunity and positive
relationships be further promoted as a consequence of this proposal? How
do you propose to measure your positive outcomes and the benefits outlined
to find out if these have been achieved?

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Q3b How do you plan to address and mitigate any negative impacts of the proposal?

The Benefits Case again will be capturing this type of information alongside the User Research work and report. Similarly with the positive impacts of this proposal, negative impacts are constantly reviewed through user testing and the practice of reaching out to members of the public (via the website and Show & Tell sessions) for feedback. As per the above, the customer survey metrics will measure outcomes from the pre and post-Beta tool. The survey is currently being developed and will help to better identify any outstanding issues with the proposal.

Given the collaborative nature of work on the project, strategies for implementation are continually reviewed. The collaborators on the project consist of LPAs, central Government and a not for profit developer and design team. Collectively, these collaborators possess a wealth of knowledge and experience in this field. By drawing on this expertise to address and mitigate any negative impacts, it is expected that appropriate solutions will be found.

What impact has this evidence had on what you are proposing? What can you do differently that might lessen the
impact on people within the timeframes i.e. development-implementation? Who can help you to develop these
solutions?

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Q4. How will you review/evaluate your proposal, mitigating actions and/or

benefits? Who will be responsible for this?

The RIPA project is constantly reviewed and developed through an agile framework and closely monitored by MHCLG, who are funding the project. Weekly meetings between the lead at MHCLG and Lambeth lead officer are held to ensure that the project is meeting the required progress and direction. Additionally, fortnightly workshops are held with the partners to discuss progress and issues arising from each sprint. This enables close collaboration between all partners involved. As the project lead, Lambeth is primarily responsible for the outcomes of the RIPA Project (primary contact: Catherine Neal). Four output reports have to be produced - Recommendations, Benefits Case, User Research report, Prototype/Beta tool. This is required at each stage of the project and forms a key requirement of funding from MHCLG's Local Digital Fund.

In Alpha, performance indicators used were feedback from user research (using iterative stages of design), partners' data surrounding the reasons for invalidation, as well as a national survey to review reasons for validation, time taken to validate applications data and other application activity data from the partner back office systems. The customer survey (currently in development) will feature a range of new metrics, which will allow the project to measure the customer experience and satisfaction without the Beta tool; this will then will be run again to assess the same metrics using the new tool (based on a limited Private Beta sample of users). This survey will be distributed by all six councils involved in the RIPA project and is expected to generate valuable additional data surrounding the proposal and associated benefits.

Who will you be accountable to for the above actions/outcome? How will those responsible know these actions have worked? What performance indicators will you use to demonstrate this? Are there any other forms of evidence you can use to support this assessment of their effectiveness?

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Section to be completed by Sponsor/Director/Head of Service

Outcome of equality impact assessment

- ◉ No adverse impact, no change required
- ○ Low adverse impact, minor adjustment required
- ○ Significant adverse impact, further action required
- ○ Significant impact identified unable to mitigate fully
- ○ Unlawful in/direct discrimination, stop and rethink

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Comments from Sponsor/Director/Head of Service
Should help improve experience for householder users and reduce their overall spend in submitting their planning applications.

Submit for approval
Submit for approval

Executive Approval
Approved

Attachments

Close