

Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment

STEP A) Description of what is to be assessed and its relevance to equality

What is being assessed? Please tick ✓

Review of a service ✓ Staff restructure ☐ Decommissioning a service ☐

Changing a policy ☐ Tendering for a new service ☐ A strategy or plan ☐

It is proposed to review the service provision of the Rural Activities Garden Centre (RAGC) and to consider relocating the support services that are provided to its volunteers, resulting in the possible closure of the existing site and the commercial garden centre.

Who is accountable? E.g. Head of Service or Corporate Director

Karrie Whelan – Corporate Director of Place
Steve Brown – Director of Environment

Date assessment completed and approved by accountable person

17/06/2025

Names and job titles of people carrying out the assessment

Steve Brown, Director of Environment

A.1) What are the main aims and intended benefits of what you are assessing?

The RAGC offers learning experiences for people with additional needs, growing their skills and confidence to support opportunity for learning.

The council regularly reviews its assets to ensure they are delivering best value for residents, and the running costs of the commercial garden centre on West Drayton Road, Hillingdon, have been found to be no longer sustainable.

As part of its required care provision for those volunteers at the site with social care needs, the council is proposing to continue their support at the Civic Centre campus in Uxbridge, offering horticultural placements across the site's gardens and public realm areas.

Recognising the unique potential of each volunteer, they will be offered enriched learning and developmental opportunities with the dedicated guidance of RAGC staff who know them well. A wider range of activities than they currently experience at the garden centre will provide them with broader skills and experience.

For the wider volunteer team, in recognition of their commitment and dedication, the council is proposing to work closely with them to help them secure new volunteer placements of a similar nature through collaborations with its voluntary sector partners, with a number of these placements already identified, or by facilitating pathways to paid employment with commercial operators so they can further develop their professional skills.

A.2) Who are the service users or staff affected by what you are assessing? What is their equality profile?

Users of the existing RAGC service can be considered in four group profiles.

- 1) Volunteers with additional needs
- 2) Volunteers with additional needs and assessed social care needs
- 3) Independent volunteers
- 4) Customers / members of the public

The site also offers support services to several schools, colleges, and education facilities across the borough whereby students with additional needs gain horticultural skills and experience.

Many of the volunteers with additional needs attend the centre with a carer or additional support.

The data held for the volunteers is presented below:

Age

Age data is held for 23 of the 29 volunteers with additional needs.

7 volunteers are under the age of 40.

8 users are aged between 40 and 59.

8 users are over the age of 60.

Disability

All of the volunteers, apart from the 6 independent volunteers, are disabled.

Sex

18 Volunteers with additional needs regularly attend the current site. 15 are male, and 3 are female

11 Volunteers with additional needs and assessed social care needs regularly attend the site. 10 are male, and 1 is female.

6 Independent volunteers regularly attend the site. All are female.

No other data is held.

No equality data is held for customers or the public that use the garden centre.

Equality data is not held for users attending through an educational facility however the students accessing this service are disabled and have Special Educational Needs.

No data is held for carers that attend the site.

More comprehensive data will be gathered as part of ongoing monitoring of the impact of the proposals, should they be agreed, and form part of any further assessment.

A.3) Who are the stakeholders in this assessment and what is their interest in it?

Stakeholders	Interest
Volunteers with additional needs	To ensure that they have access to continued provision of support services including meaningful activities and social interaction in a safe and welcoming environment.
Carers / family members	To ensure that they have access to respite / support in their role as carers.
Independent volunteers	To ensure that they have access to meaningful volunteering opportunities and social interaction in a safe and welcoming environment.
Educational facilities	To ensure that they have access to skills-based learning in a safe and welcoming environment.
Members of the public / customers	To ensure that they have access to green space and garden centre services.

Director of Environment	To ensure value for money in service delivery and to provide improved services to residents.
Corporate Director of Place	To ensure value for money in service delivery and to provide improved services to residents.
Cabinet Member for Community and Environment, Leader of the Council and Council Cabinet	To ensure value for money in service delivery and to provide improved services to residents.

A.4) Which protected characteristics or community issues are relevant to the assessment? ✓ in the box.

Age	✓	Sex	✓
Disability	✓	Sexual Orientation	
Gender reassignment		Socio-economic status	
Marriage or civil partnership		Carers	✓
Pregnancy or maternity		Community Cohesion	
Race/Ethnicity		Community Safety	
Religion or belief		Human Rights	

STEP B) Consideration of information; data, research, consultation, engagement

B.1) Consideration of information and data - what have you got and what is it telling you?

The profile of the volunteers with additional needs shows that:

100% of the volunteers are disabled, of which there are proportionately more men than women; 86% to 14% respectively.

100% of the independent volunteers are female.

30% of the volunteers are under 40 and 70% are over 40 years of age.

100% of those who visit from an educational setting have a disability.

Data is unknown for the other characteristics, and for Carers and the general public.

Consultation

B.2) Did you carry out any consultation or engagement as part of this assessment?

Please tick ✓

NO ☐

YES ✓

No formal consultation has been taken as part of this assessment; however officers have met with Volunteers and their carers at the meeting on 30 May 2025 to discuss the proposals it would be asking cabinet to consider on 26 June 2025, namely to cease the retail -side of the operations at the RAGC by 31 July 2025, due to the retail element becoming financially unsustainable.

The meeting included representatives from the Adult Social Care team and Green Spaces team and discussed other organisations we may wish to work with in the future who could provide similar volunteering services for adults using the centre.

It explained that if the proposed changes set out in the Cabinet Report are agreed, volunteers and service users will be informed of any decision and officers will further consult with all users on the decision.

For the individuals with assessed care needs, the Council will continue to meet its statutory duties under the Care Act 2014. The proposed relocation of support services to enhanced garden facilities at the Civic Centre in Uxbridge, is designed not just to maintain, but to enhance the support available. The Civic Centre campus also offers improved integration with Adult Learning and Library Services, proximity to other support networks, and opportunities for more diverse and meaningful engagement.

For volunteers who do not receive statutory assessed social care needs, the Council recognises the value of their contribution and the importance of continuity. The proposal includes consultation with them on tailored support to help them transition to alternative placements with local voluntary sector partners or into employment opportunities. This includes potential partnerships with organisations such as Heathrow and biodiversity-focused groups, offering training, skills development, and broader community involvement.

Engagement and consultation will be ongoing to ensure the impact of the proposals, if approved, is monitored.

B.3) Provide any other information to consider as part of the assessment

Legal context

The council has a public duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations (Equality Act 2010)

Financial context

Since 2010, the council has driven a transformation programme across all services

aimed at reducing costs and improving efficiency to ensure that in an environment of increased expenditure from population growth and inflationary uplifts we continue to deliver high quality services that put residents first.

The council continues to prioritise the delivery of its rigorous savings programme maintaining high standards of resident services, however the latest projections indicate that further savings of £34m will be required during 2025-26 to bridge the budget gap as a result of reducing government funding and the increasing cost of service delivery.

The current service is part funded by a Public Health grant which supports the services that are offered to Social Care clients. However, this funding does not cover all of the cost to provide the current service, with income from sales at the garden centre going only part way to cover the remaining costs.

In 2024/25, the council contributed £137k towards the running of this service, and more funding will be needed in the future to ensure that the site remains safe and welcoming.

To sustain service provision in the longer term there is a need to move to a more cost effective and sustainable site. This means operations can continue in a more structured and managed way, whilst in close proximity to other activities that our clients using the facility can continue to enjoy.

Operating this service from a different location reduces the financial burden on the general fund because the new proposals can be achieved within the envelope of grant funding provided to the council for maintaining this facility without the need for further general fund subsidy and is in line with our corporate objective which is seeking to reduce the reliance of services on subsidy financed through the general fund where possible.

ASC have and will continue to provide on going support to those affected by the changes if agreed. ASC service users who currently attend do so with their personal budget, most attend with their own staff for individual sessions and attendance at the RAGC forms part of their day time activities across the week, this will continue to be supported to ensure that their needs are met in a holistic way which is enriching and inclusive albeit potentially in an alternative location.

ASC will support those volunteers without assessed social care needs or a current care package to understand the implications, to express their views through consultation and engagement and ensure that each person in receipt of universal preventative services is supported.

C) Assessment

What did you find in B1? Who is affected? Is there, or likely to be, an impact on certain groups?

C.1) Describe any **NEGATIVE** impacts (actual or potential):

Equality Group	Impact on this group and actions you need to take
Disabled men aged over 40	<p>The data shows that this group who share characteristics may be disproportionately negatively affected by the proposals.</p> <p>Changes to the location of the service may impact this cohort as their daily routine and travel plans will be disrupted. A new environment may also have a potentially negative impact on them. This may influence their general mental health and wellbeing.</p> <p>To mitigate against this, all volunteers will be supported to find meaningful volunteering opportunities at alternative locations including at the new Civic Centre campus.</p> <p>Regular engagement activities will be carried out to ensure everyone is fully informed of the changes and supported in the transition to alternative provision.</p> <p>Alternative provision and transition support will be sought and tailored to individual need including the consideration of travel training.</p> <p>The impact of the changes will be monitored regularly and any further mitigation actions put in place.</p>
Disabled people	<p>The proposals will affect disabled people as they are more likely to volunteer and use the centre.</p> <p>Disabled people may therefore be more likely to be negatively affected by the proposals. This may influence their general mental health and wellbeing.</p> <p>To mitigate against this, all volunteers will be supported to find meaningful volunteering opportunities at alternative locations including the Civic Centre campus.</p> <p>Regular engagement activities will be carried out to ensure everyone is fully informed of the changes and supported in the transition to alternative provision.</p>

	<p>Alternative provision and transition support will be sought and tailored to individual need, including the consideration of travel training.</p> <p>The impact of the changes will be monitored regularly and any further mitigation actions put in place.</p>
Carers	<p>Changes in location or volunteering patterns may have a potentially negative effect on those that provide care, support, or assist with transport to the current site.</p> <p>All volunteers will be supported to find meaningful volunteering opportunities at alternative locations, including at the Civic Centre campus, thus continuing to provide respite and support to carers and family members.</p> <p>Every effort will be made to engage with carers and family members through the transition period to ensure that there is minimal impact.</p> <p>The impact of the changes will be monitored regularly and any further mitigation actions put in place.</p>

D) Conclusions

The proposals to close the RAGC and relocate the service to the Civic Centre campus may have an impact on the volunteers and their carers as outlined above.

The new facility at the Civic Centre campus will provide more manageable facilities where volunteers can continue to access the same services as currently provided at the RAGC.

For those volunteers who have been using the RAGC facilities more informally, there is an opportunity to signpost additional and alternative support services via collaboration with established organisations that provide similar volunteering and support opportunities.

The impact of the proposals, should they be approved, will be monitored and further mitigation actions will be put in place if required.

Signed and dated:.....  18/06/2025

Name and position:..... Steve Brown, Director of Environment