

“Every Customer Counts” Initiative	21 June 2016
Corporate Policy and Resources Committee	Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Leader and Champion
Outcome	Provide civil leadership to our citizens
Lead Officer	Elizabeth Beattie
Cost: (If applicable)	

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Equality Commission is currently promoting an initiative called *“Every Customer Counts”* which aims to support Northern Ireland traders seeking to promote accessible services.
- 1.2 The goal is to encourage business men and women to use a free self-assessment tool and consider how open their services currently are to disabled people. The Equality Commission are also committed to providing additional support to anyone seeking to make adjustments to their current arrangements.

2.0 What’s Involved?

- 2.1 Every organisation has duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to make reasonable adjustments and remove barriers as a service provider and as an employer. The aim is to provide equality in service provision and employment for everyone with the same level of access, dignity and choice.
- 2.2 The aim of *Every Customer Counts* is to encourage businesses and other organisations to do something to improve their customer service to disabled people. An accessible business is one that is open for business to the 360,000 potential customers in Northern Ireland who currently have a disability.
- 2.3 Apart from the legal duty placed on businesses, there are many other reasons why a business should stop and consider how accessible their business currently is. These include:
- Enabling customers of all ages and abilities to access services can widen a customer base.

- A disabled customer can often quickly become a loyal customer who may also bring their friends and family, meaning repeat business.
- We're all getting older, the market and need for accessible services and products will continue to grow in the future.
- 20% of people in NI have a disability (which includes hearing, visual and cognitive impairments as well as people with physical disabilities)
- 40% of households in NI include a disabled resident
- £80 billion pounds is spent by disabled customers in the UK each year

2.4 The Equality Commission are recommending a “*three steps to success*” approach which involves:

- (a) Conducting a business self-audit to identify any potential service gaps or possible areas for improvement (a self-audit tool is available on the Equality Commission website).
- (b) Identify practical actions to take after reading the Equality Commission’s good practice guides for ideas and handy tips on how to improve services.
- (c) Promote the business as an accessible business and tell customers about the steps taken to make every customer count.

3.0 Council’s Involvement

3.1 The Equality Commission has widened the ‘*Every Customer Counts*’ initiative to include the public sector and would encourage public authorities to follow the ‘*three steps to success*’ approach (see above) as this will also assist them in complying with duties and requirements covered by the Disability Discrimination Act and Section 75.

3.2 Public authorities have additional proactive duties under the DDA part 5A Section 49A, to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation by disabled people in public life. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act also requires designated public authorities (such as the Council), in carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons with a disability and persons without.

3.3 By signing up to the initiative the Council would register its commitment to the idea with the Equality Commission, conduct a self-audit, develop and adopt an inclusive customer service policy and put in place an action plan to promote customer accessibility.

3.4 The Equality Commission will provide Council with ‘*Every Customer Counts*’ window stickers which could be displayed on our facilities to communicate our commitment to customers. This will tell our customers that we will:

- review the accessibility of our services
- make reasonable adjustments for disabled customers

4.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee recommend to Council that the Council makes a commitment to participate in the *'Every Customer Counts'* initiative.