

Appendix 3 - Initial Equalities Impact Assessment screening form

Prior to making the decision, the Council's decision makers considered the following guide to decision making under the Equality Act 2010:

The Council is a public authority. All public authorities when exercising public functions are caught by the Equality Act 2010 which became law in December 2011. In making any decisions and proposals, the Council - specifically members and officers - are required to have due regard to the 9 protected characteristics defined under the Act. These protected characteristics are: age, disability, race, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage & civil partnership.

The decision maker(s) must specifically consider those protected by the above characteristics:

- (a) *To seek to ensure equality of treatment towards service users and employees;*
- (b) *To identify the potential impact of the proposal or decision upon them.*

The Council will also ask that officers specifically consider whether:

- (A) *The policy, strategy or spending decisions could have an impact on safeguarding and / or the welfare of children and vulnerable adults*
- (B) *The proposed policy / service is likely to have any significant impact on mental wellbeing / community resilience (staff or residents)*

When considering 'due regard', decision makers must consider the following principles:

1. *The decision maker is responsible for identifying whether there is an issue and discharging it.*
2. *The duties arise before the decision or proposal is made, and not after and are ongoing.*
3. *The decision maker must be aware of the needs of the duty.*
4. *The impact of the proposal or decision must be properly understood first.*
5. *What does 'due regard' entail?*
 - a. *Collection and consideration of data and information;*
 - b. *Ensuring data is sufficient to assess the decision/any potential discrimination/ensure equality of opportunity;*
 - c. *Proper appreciation of the extent, nature and duration of the proposal or decision.*
6. *Responsibility for discharging can't be delegated or sub-contracted*

1. Within the aims and objectives of the policy or strategy which group (s) of people has been identified as being potentially disadvantaged by your proposals? What are the equality impacts?

Council Tax Reduction is claimed by low income households in the city. The following groups are over represented in this cohort compared to the general population:

Women

Single parent households

Ethnic Minorities

People with a disability or lifelong illness

Age is not affected by this scheme as Pensioners are covered by the national default scheme and this consultation relates to the working age CTR scheme only.

2. In brief, what changes are you planning to make to your current or proposed new or changed policy, strategy, procedure, project or service to minimise or eliminate the adverse equality impacts?

Please provide further details of the proposed actions, timetable for making the changes and the person(s) responsible for making the changes on the resultant action plan.

At this stage proposals are only being submitted for consultation. The 2023/24 Council Tax Reduction Scheme will be informed by this consultation process.

This will include:

- Whether or not to increase the Income Bands or to freeze at current levels
- If we do increase, to use CPI instead of RPI in line with the DWP up-ratings
- To consider if the banded income approach should take into account family size. Currently the scheme has a single structure for a total income for all applications, with no regard to household composition
- To consider giving a reduction of up to 100% for passported cases, limiting the reduction to 96% for all other claims
- To automatically reduce the CTR award to a maximum of 75% if there is a non-dependant in the property. In cases where there is a disability benefit in payment for the applicant or an additional adult, then the reduction would not be applied. This mirrors the application of the single person discount.

Within the existing Council Tax regulations, there is provision for discretionary payments to be made to people experiencing hardship. Anyone disadvantaged by the Council Tax Reduction scheme can apply for help from this scheme.

3. Please provide details of whom you will consult on the proposed changes and if you do not plan to consult, please provide the rationale behind that decision.

Please note that you are required to involve disabled people in decisions that impact on them.

The main report seeks approval for consultation about changes to the proposed scheme. This includes general public consultation and advice agencies as well as consulting with the major preceptors. We will use electronic means to consult to avoid respondents using paper forms, as with the current Covid-19 pandemic access to the places we would normally place forms is restricted and we also want to limit any opportunity to spread the virus.

4. Can the adverse impacts you identified during the initial screening be justified without making any adjustments to the existing or new policy, strategy, procedure, project or service?

Please set out the basis on which you justify making no adjustments.

Within the existing Council Tax regulations, there is provision for discretionary payments to be made to people experiencing hardship. Anyone disadvantaged by the Council Tax Reduction scheme can apply for help from this scheme.

5. You are legally required to monitor and review the proposed changes after implementation to check they work as planned and to screen for unexpected equality impacts.

Please provide details of how you will monitor/evaluate or review your proposals and when the review will take place.

The impact will be monitored via applications for discretionary support. This should highlight any areas of concern.

As people see changes in their circumstances, there will be an opportunity to revise the scheme in future years, if there is any unexpected negative impact on certain groups of customers.

We will talk to other Councils who have adopted different approaches to their CTR scheme to see what works well and what doesn't. The Department for Work and Pensions guidance and case law often influences the approach this Council takes as it will inform us of the impact of certain elements of schemes and the adjustments, if any that are needed.

Lead officer responsible for signing off the EqIA: Laura Bessell

Role: Service Manager-Benefits

Date: 7th August 2022