

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

THE STAGE ONE ASSESSMENT FORM - the initial screening process

SERVICE, POLICY OR FUNCTION BEING ASSESSED: **BENEFITS SERVICE**

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICE, POLICY OR FUNCTION: Housing & Council Tax Benefit is granted by the Council to householders to assist with the payment of rent (Housing Benefit) and Council Tax (Council Tax Benefit). Benefit is awarded in either case by assessing the make up of the household, overall income and rent or Council Tax liability against criteria set out in detailed regulations. Supplementary payments can be made at the discretion of the Council to assist householders facing particular difficulties. (Discretionary Housing Payments-DHP) e.g. poverty because of unusual household circumstances not fully reflected in benefit entitlement, such as expenses associated with chronic illness, disabled householders needing time to find accommodation suitable for their needs. Benefit awards are made to the householder liable to pay the charges for which relief is being given. Once Benefit has been awarded the householder(s) concerned is responsible for ensuring that any subsequent change in their circumstances is notified to the Council. Overpayments of Benefit arising from a change in circumstances are recovered from the claimant either by repayment or a regular deduction from any revised ongoing Benefit entitlement or subsequent award of Benefit. The main impact of the service is directly upon the householder(s), there may be a consequential impact upon other members of the household because of the actions of the householder engaging ineffectively, or failing to engage, with the benefits system.

Common issues which arise within the service are:

- Failure to claim assistance to which the householder is entitled.
- Failure or delay in bringing changes in circumstances to the attention of the Council.
- Delays in paying benefit because insufficient information has been provide to support a claim
- Understanding how benefit entitlement has been calculated and what factors have been taken into account

The most common alternative languages likely to occur across the district are Polish, Portuguese and Kurdish (Source: ISCRE). Staff regularly deal with individuals from China, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Turkey and European Union countries.

A wide range of faith groups exist across the district, the most common of which are Christian (Church of England and Roman Catholic, etc) Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs.

Please indicate if it is an existing area of service or a new area/project: **Existing service**

Target Equality Group <i>(see guidance note 2 for details)</i>	Does it have a Positive Impact If yes, please explain how <i>(see guidance note 6 for details)</i>	Does it have a Neutral Impact If yes, please explain how <i>(see guidance note 9 for details)</i>	Does it have a Negative Impact If yes please explain how, indicate if it is legal and whether or not it is intended. <i>(see guidance note 7 for details)</i>	If it has a negative impact, is the level of this impact high or low? <i>(see guidance note 10 for details)</i>
Age	No. Benefit regulations do not allow additional benefit to be awarded on age criteria.	Yes. The service is well publicised across the local community. Claims are received from all ages There is no evidence to suggest that any particular age or age range is not aware or is excluded from the service.	Yes. Intended impact. Benefit regulations specifically restrict the payment of benefit to certain age groups.	Low
Belief or faith	No. An individual's faith or beliefs does not feature in the calculation of entitlement or influence the outcome.	Yes. An individual's faith or beliefs are not captured or recorded as part of the claim process and do not feature in the calculation of entitlement.	No. An individual's faith or beliefs does not feature in the calculation of entitlement. Religious gathering points could however present a publicity opportunity and access point for the Benefits Service which is currently untapped	

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Disability	Yes. The nature of a disability and the impact upon their lifestyle is taken into account for home visits and when awarding Discretionary Housing payments. Help is available in understanding the system and submitting a claim. Documents are available in Braille, audio and large text. Our Hadleigh offices are DDA compliant. The Babergh website enables changes in text size or audio descriptions.	No. The Benefit regulations recognise the presence of a disability and the severity of the condition is taken into account when calculating entitlement.	Yes. Although Benefit applications are made by disabled householders and from that it appears that disabled people are aware of the Benefits service. Inconsistency in the presence of an alternative formats statement on leaflets and correspondence means that there is a chance some are not aware of the Benefits service and the assistance potentially available.	Low.
Sexual Orientation	No. An individual's sexual orientation does not feature in the calculation of entitlement or influence the outcome.	Yes. Civil partnership has the same status as marriage in the Benefit regulations. For an individual their sexual orientation is not captured or recorded as part of the claim process and does not feature in the calculation of entitlement.	No. Civil partners of both sexes make benefit applications. There is no evidence to suggest than an individual sexual orientation leads to them being unaware of the Benefits service.	

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Gender	No. An individual's gender does not feature in the calculation of entitlement or influence the outcome.	Yes. Benefit applications are made by both sexes.	Yes. First time mothers encountering the Benefits appear to have a reduced level of awareness of the assistance that may be available to them. This is an unintended impact.	Low
Race	Yes. A translation service is available. Information either highlighting the Benefits service or providing more detailed information is available and reflect the range of cultures and languages known to exist in the district. Translation services are available on the Babergh website. It also enables changes in text size or audio descriptions. Language support is available via language line for face to face visitors or telephone enquiries when the need arises.	No. Every effort is made to ensure that an individual's ethnic origin and cultural/language issues do not preclude access to the Benefits Service or disadvantage an individual making a claim or once engaged with the system.	Yes. Although Benefit applications are received from a range of nationalities and cultures, and from that it appears that ethnic origin is not a potential barrier to accessing the Benefits service. Inconsistency in the presence of an alternative formats statement on leaflets and correspondence and the possibility that publicity may not be targeted on locations regularly used by ethnic groups means that there is a chance some are not aware of the Benefits service and the assistance potentially available. This is an unintended impact.	Low

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IF ANY AREAS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED WITH LOW LEVEL NEGATIVE IMPACT

IS THE IMPACT LIKELY TO CHANGE OVER TIME?

Yes

IF YES, HOW WILL THE IMPACT CHANGE?

Economic migration patterns have changed in recent years and are likely to change further given the current world economic climate. If significant variations occur in the range of new nationalities taking up residence in the district there may be a short-term increase in negative impact until their presence is detected.

No variation is anticipated with regard to disabled people. There are no obvious factors, which indicate that a significant variation in the number of disabled residents is likely to occur in the future.

Increasing pressure upon household budgets will inevitably force households to look for assistance wherever possible.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MINIMISE OR REMOVE ANY *UNINTENDED* NEGATIVE IMPACT?

Greater emphasis will be placed on publicising the Benefits service or dispensing advice (outreach surgeries) at locations which feature in the first year of a baby's life. E.g. health centres, nurseries etc.

Similar action will be taken to identify locations, which feature in the daily routine of ethnic groups.

Review all standard letters and publications to ensure the recipient knows their availability in alternative formats and include an alternative formats statement with outgoing correspondence.

Ensure all new staff receive equality and diversity awareness training as part of their induction course and all staff are regularly refreshed.

HOW COULD YOU MONITOR THIS WORK?

Outreach surgeries will give good feedback on the likelihood of benefit being needed, awareness of the Benefits service and the potential take up of Benefit. Capture monitoring data each time a new claim for Benefit is made.

Implement regular quality assurance checks. Instruct staff to check for and report omissions.

IF YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED ANY AREAS WHERE THE LEVEL OF NEGATIVE IMPACT IS HIGH PLEASE REFER TO YOUR HEAD OF SERVICE PRIOR TO COMPLETING A STAGE TWO ASSESSMENT FORM

Signed:Service Manager undertaking the Assessment.

Date: