

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

THE STAGE ONE ASSESSMENT FORM - the initial screening process

SERVICE, POLICY OR FUNCTION BEING ASSESSED: Council Tax Billing and Collection

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICE, POLICY OR FUNCTION: (e.g. main purpose, users or beneficiaries etc)

Council Tax is payable by householders (people aged 18 or over) and in some cases non-resident owners, of domestic accommodation. Dwellings are shown in the Council Tax banding list. Liability is determined by identifying the person(s) who reside in the dwelling and their right to occupy the dwelling in question. Liability for vacant dwellings lies with the owner or tenant. Bills are issued to liable person(s) after applying any entitlement to discounts, exemptions and disabled reduction and are normally payable over 10 monthly instalments. Accounts are updated as changes in circumstances happen. A statutory process prescribes the procedures to follow where payment is not made and the action that can be taken to obtain payment. In the most serious cases that can mean the loss of personal possessions or a possible prison sentence.

The main impact of the service is directly upon the liable person(s), however 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 Council Tax billing and collection process. e.g., removal of personal possessions used by the household as a whole, the impact of attachment of earnings orders which reduce disposable income

Common issues which arise within the service are:

- Failure to claim assistance to which the liable person(s) is/are entitled.
- Failure or delay in bringing changes in circumstances to the attention of the Council.
- Delays in making payments
- Failure to respond to requests for information or payment.
- Meeting individual obligations for payment in the later stages of the enforcement process can disadvantage other members of the household, particularly those under 18 with no personal income.

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

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	Yes. Exemptions available for dwellings occupied by residents under 18 and occupied annexes by dependent relatives over 65 In some situations an individuals age may determine the process undertaken to recover unpaid Council Tax e.g. Charging orders.	Yes. Council Tax is payable for each dwelling by the resident and in some circumstances non-resident owners.	No. An individual's age does not negatively influence their personal liability for Council Tax.	
Belief or faith	Yes. There are some statutory exemptions available for ministers of religion.	Yes. Council Tax is a statutory function, Billing and Collection is applied to taxpayers regardless of their belief or faith.	No. An individual's belief or faith does not negatively influence their personal liability for Council Tax.	
Disability	Yes. Council Tax bills can be reduced where a property has certain features to meet particular needs of a disabled person.	Yes. Council Tax is a statutory function, Billing and Collection is applied to taxpayers regardless of their disability.	Yes. Alternative formats statement omitted from adjusting bills and other documentation. People may be unaware of their obligations or factors, which influence their actual liability. They may be disadvantaged as a result.	Low

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	<p>Disregards and exemptions can be granted to people suffering severe mental impairment where regulations are met.</p> <p>The reception area for visitors meets the requirements of the Disabled Discrimination Act. A wheel chair is available for those with mobility problems. Special seats are also provided for those who cannot use low-seated chairs.</p> <p>Council Tax leaflet issued with all initial bills carries an alternative formats statement. The Council's website enables changes in text size or audio descriptions.</p>			
Sexual Orientation	No. An individual's sexual orientation does not influence their personal liability for Council Tax.	Yes. Council Tax is a statutory function, Billing and Collection is applied to taxpayers regardless of their sexual orientation.	No. An individual's sexual orientation does not influence their personal liability for Council Tax.	

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Gender	No. An individual's gender does not influence their personal liability for Council Tax.	Yes. Council Tax is a statutory function, Billing and Collection is applied to taxpayers regardless of their gender.	No. An individual's gender does not influence their personal liability for Council Tax.	
Race	Translation services are available on the Babergh website. Language support is available via language line for face to face visitors or telephone enquiries when the need arises.	Yes. Council Tax is a statutory function, Billing and Collection is applied to taxpayers regardless of their gender.	Yes. Alternative formats statement omitted from bills and is inconsistently applied on other documentation.	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 and eastern region 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 may increase the incidence of late or non-payment which may in turn lead to a consequential impact on other members of the household.

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

Gather intelligence on the range of diverse groups in contact with the Council Tax service to ensure the needs of these groups are met.

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?

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: