

# EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## THE STAGE ONE ASSESSMENT FORM - the initial screening process

### SERVICE, POLICY OR FUNCTION BEING ASSESSED: Non Domestic Rates

**DESCRIPTION OF SERVICE, POLICY OR FUNCTION:** The Council has a statutory duty to bill and collect Non Domestic Rate from businesses and other organisations that occupy non-domestic premises that appear in the rating list covering the Babergh district. Liability is determined by identifying who has control of the premises concerned and who is in occupation. The amount of non-domestic rates payable is calculated using the rateable value, (fixed independently of the Council by the Valuation Office Agency) and the multiplier, (which is set by the government) and applying any reductions, relief's or exemptions that the ratepayer may be entitled to. 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, for companies that mean the removal of working stock, plant & equipment or closure of the business, for individuals or partnerships the loss of personal possessions and assets, bankruptcy or a possible prison sentence.

The main impact of the service is directly upon the ratepayer(s). In the event of enforcement action being taken, particularly the later stages there may be a potential consequential impact upon domestic households, individuals and the community in general through the loss of services, employment opportunities and the impact upon a local economy. Discretionary powers available under the Local Govt Finance Act 1988 allow the Council to respond to those possibilities where appropriate by reducing the Non Domestic Rate liability of the ratepayer concerned, provided it is in the interests of Council Taxpayers. That aspect of the legislation is used to give ongoing support a wide range of organisations essential to local communities. e.g. Post Offices and village shops, sports clubs, voluntary organisations, village halls and community centre. In determining whether assistance is given applicants where appropriate are requested to show how factors such as age, belief or faith, disability, gender and race feature in their operation.

Common issues which arise within the service are:

- Failure to claim assistance to which the ratepayer(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.
- Business trading with only marginal profitability yet providing important services within local communities.

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

<b>Target Equality Group</b>  <i>(see guidance note 2 for details)</i>	<b>Does it have a Positive Impact</b>  If yes, please explain how  <i>(see guidance note 6 for details)</i>	<b>Does it have a Neutral Impact</b>  If yes, please explain how  <i>(see guidance note 9 for details)</i>	<b>Does it have a Negative Impact</b>  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>	<b>If it has a negative impact, is the level of this impact high or low?</b>  <i>(see guidance note 10 for details)</i>
<b>Age</b>	<b>Yes.</b> In some situations an individuals age may determine the process undertaken to recover unpaid Non Domestic Rate. e.g. Charging orders.	<b>Yes.</b> A statutory process determines who is the ratepayer for National Non-Domestic Rates; this is applied regardless of age.	<b>No.</b> An individual's age does not negatively influence their personal liability for Non Domestic Rate.	
<b>Belief or faith</b>	<b>No.</b> An individual's belief or faith does not positively influence their personal liability for Non Domestic Rate.	<b>Yes.</b> A statutory process determines who is the ratepayer for National Non-Domestic Rates; this is applied regardless of belief or faith.	<b>No.</b> An individual's belief or faith does not negatively influence their personal liability for Non Domestic Rate.	
<b>Disability</b>	<b>Yes.</b> 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.	<b>Yes.</b> A statutory process determines who is the ratepayer for National Non-Domestic Rates; this is applied regardless of disability.	<b>Yes.</b> 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. The impact is unintentional.	<b>Low</b>

<b>Target Equality Group</b>  <i>(see guidance note 2 for details)</i>	<b>Does it have a Positive Impact</b>  If yes, please explain how  <i>(see guidance note 6 for details)</i>	<b>Does it have a Neutral Impact</b>  If yes, please explain how  <i>(see guidance note 9 for details)</i>	<b>Does it have a Negative Impact</b>  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>	<b>If it has a negative impact, is the level of this impact high or low?</b>  <i>(see guidance note 10 for details)</i>
	<p>The Non Domestic Rate leaflet issued with all initial bills carries an alternative formats statement.</p> <p>The Council's website enables changes in text size or audio descriptions.</p> <p>The impact is intentional.</p>			
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>No.</b> An individual's sexual orientation does not positively influence their personal liability for Non Domestic Rate.	<b>Yes.</b> A statutory process determines who is the ratepayer for National Non-Domestic Rates; this is applied regardless of sexual orientation.	<b>No.</b> An individual's sexual orientation does not negatively influence their personal liability for Non Domestic Rate.	
<b>Gender</b>	<b>No.</b> An individual's gender does not positively influence their personal liability for Non Domestic Rate.	<b>Yes.</b> A statutory process determines who is the ratepayer for National Non-Domestic Rates; this is applied regardless of gender.	<b>No.</b> An individual's gender does not negatively influence their personal liability for Non Domestic Rate.	

<b>Target Equality Group</b>  <i>(see guidance note 2 for details)</i>	<b>Does it have a Positive Impact</b>  If yes, please explain how  <i>(see guidance note 6 for details)</i>	<b>Does it have a Neutral Impact</b>  If yes, please explain how  <i>(see guidance note 9 for details)</i>	<b>Does it have a Negative Impact</b>  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>	<b>If it has a negative impact, is the level of this impact high or low?</b>  <i>(see guidance note 10 for details)</i>
<b>Race</b>	<b>Yes.</b> 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.	<b>Yes.</b> A statutory process determines who is the ratepayer for National Non-Domestic Rates; this is applied regardless of ethnic origin.	<b>Yes.</b> Alternative formats statement omitted from bills and is inconsistently applied on other documentation. However the Council Tax booklet* sent with all bills highlights the availability of this information in other formats. (* Regulations requires that Non Domestic Ratepayers receive information on council Tax.)	<b>Low</b>

**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?**

The inconsistency in making information available in other formats appears to have a low impact. Contact with both disabled ratepayers and ratepayers from China, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Turkey and European Union countries indicates the most business operations have arrangements in place to deal with the translation of business documents.

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.

**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 out going correspondence.
Ensure all new staff receives 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: .....