

Equality impact assessments – for services, policies and projects

What is an equality impact assessment?

An equality impact assessment is an important part of our commitment to delivering better services for our communities. The form will help us find out what impact or consequences our functions, policies, procedures and projects have on our communities, as well as employees and potential employees.

By undertaking an impact assessment, we are able to:

- Take into account the needs, experiences and circumstances of those groups of people who use (or don't / can't use) our services.
- Identify any inequalities people may experience.
- Think about the other ways in which we can deliver our services which will not lead to inequalities.
- Develop better policy-making, procedures and services.

Background

Name of service / policy / project and date	2020 Vision - Business case for sharing revenues and benefits services
Lead officer	Mark Sheldon
Other people involved in completing this form	Mark Sheldon, Richard Gibson, Paul Aldridge, Jayne Gilpin

Step 1 - About the service / policy / project

What is the aim of the service / policy / project and what outcomes is it contributing to

The aim of the business case for sharing revenues and benefits services is to share the service with the 2020 partnership; this will be a 4-way share between Cheltenham, Cotswolds, Forest and West Oxfordshire Councils.

For the first year, the service will be shared on an “as is” basis, with no changes to the way the service is delivered. From year 1 onwards, it is likely that the service will be delivered through a Teckal company, though this will be subject to a separate business case to be considered by the Councils in late Summer / Autumn 2016.

The Revenues service administers and collects council tax in respect of domestic properties and business rates in respect of all commercial properties. It also provided a client support service to Forest of Dean District Council in respect of its outsourced Revenues & Benefits Service.

The benefits service has traditionally provided welfare support for residents. The benefits service is undergoing considerable transformation and is at the heart of the government’s welfare changes, providing help and support as people transfer to the new universal credit, implementing the bedroom cap and bedroom tax restrictions along with all the other benefit changes/restrictions being introduced.

Through a cabinet Member Working Group, members agreed the most important outcomes that the services deliver:

People live in strong, safe and healthy communities

People are supported to make a smooth transition onto universal credit

People who struggle to read or write, or who are non-IT literate are supported in engaging with the service

Transform our council so it can continue to enable delivery of our outcomes for Cheltenham and its residents.

The service will deliver appropriate savings over time

How we want the service to be delivered

The service retains discretionary opportunities to enhance service provision to reflect local needs and environment:

- Empty homes
- Second homes
- Those in need (vulnerable people)
- Business Improvement District
- Those moving onto Universal Credit

	<p>The service is able unlock investment into technology The service encourages customers to self-serve via the web wherever possible, but maintains face to face and telephone support which is highly valued by customers The service delivers excellent service levels for customers, where customer enquiries are dealt with quickly and appropriately – using the principles of first time fix. The service is built on staff with local knowledge, delivering a local service to local people.</p> <p>The service maintains effective relationships with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the single advice contract provider • CBH • Other independent benefits advice providers • Elected members 																																				
<p>Who are the primary customers of the service / policy / project and how do they / will they benefit</p>	<p>Revenues</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="728 738 1991 879"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Number of properties</th> <th>Annual debit after discounts & council tax support</th> <th>2014/15 collection rate</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Council Tax</td> <td>54,570</td> <td>£60.0m</td> <td>98.08%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Business Rates</td> <td>4,055</td> <td>£56.5m</td> <td>98.12%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Benefits</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="728 981 2145 1193"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Working age</th> <th>Pension age</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Council tenants</td> <td>1,889</td> <td>1,043</td> <td>2,932</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Housing associations</td> <td>1,242</td> <td>423</td> <td>1,665</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Private tenants</td> <td>1,737</td> <td>443</td> <td>2,181</td> </tr> <tr> <td>HB tenants</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Council tax support (owners plus joint claims)</td> <td>4,326</td> <td>3,136</td> <td>7,462</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Number of properties	Annual debit after discounts & council tax support	2014/15 collection rate	Council Tax	54,570	£60.0m	98.08%	Business Rates	4,055	£56.5m	98.12%		Working age	Pension age	Total	Council tenants	1,889	1,043	2,932	Housing associations	1,242	423	1,665	Private tenants	1,737	443	2,181	HB tenants				Council tax support (owners plus joint claims)	4,326	3,136	7,462
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<p>How and where is the service / policy / project implemented</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mainly in the municipal offices - Personal visit to customers homes or property inspections - Customers visiting the two area housing offices 																																				
<p>What potential barriers might already exist to achieving these outcomes</p>	<p>Declining budgets has seen significant amounts of funding taken out of the service. Accessibility to the municipal offices for the disabled and elderly We do not have a CRM system so are unable to benchmark who access the service (in terms of their equality profile) against the profile for the population of Cheltenham.</p>																																				

Step 2 – What do you know already about your existing / potential customers

<p>What existing information and data do you have about your existing / potential customers e.g. Statistics, customer feedback, performance information</p>	<p>National, county and local performance indicators eg Council tax/NNDR collection rates, benefit payments</p> <p>National, county and local statistics eg Local areas of deprivation, county maiden data, national take up/ unclaimed benefits in our area.</p>
<p>What does it tell you about who uses your service / policy and those that don't?</p>	<p>Customers who have rent and council tax to pay who are on a low income</p> <p>Customers who have to pay council tax or business rates</p> <p>Customers who purchase council services</p> <p>Customers who fraudulently claim benefit</p>
<p>What have you learnt about real barriers to your service from any consultation with customers and any stakeholder groups?</p>	<p>Complicated regulations to claim national means tested benefits</p> <p>Large amounts of form filling and supporting evidence to prove income and personal circumstances</p>
<p>If not, who do you have plans to consult with about the service / policy / project?</p>	<p>None at this stage</p>

Step 3 - Assessing community impact

How does your service / policy / project impact on different groups in the community?

Group	What are you already doing to benefit this group	What are you doing that might disadvantage this group	What could you do differently to benefit this group	No impact on this group
People from black and minority ethnic groups	Translation service which is promoted on all forms, leaflets, customer service enquiry points.			
Gender				No differential impact on this group
Gender Reassignment				No differential impact on this group
Older people / children and young people	Home visits to help make pension credit or benefit claims if housebound Targeted take up work for pensioners and areas of deprivation and a referral system to other support services	Some challenges remain with access to the Municipal Offices with people with mobility problems due to steps at front of the municipal buildings. Though good disabled access from the rear of the building.	Difficult to make any further improvements to access within current building.	
People with disabilities and mental health challenges	Home visits to help make claims for benefit if housebound. Hold names of support workers, appointee's or if customer blind or deaf etc Record disability benefits in payment, so target resources/visits Targeted take up work and liaison with other support services	Some challenges remain with access to the Municipal Offices with people with mobility problems due to steps at front of the municipal buildings. Though good disabled access from the rear of the building.	Difficult to make any further improvements to access within current building.	



	<p>Provision of hearing loop in public areas. Text phone and sign language is available</p> <p>Visiting officers are aware of disability grants discounts available to this group and give advice.</p>			
Religion or belief	<p>Send visiting officers and key staff on awareness training</p>			
Lesbian, Gay and Bi-sexual people				No differential impact on this group
Marriage and Civil Partnership				No differential impact on this group
Pregnancy & Maternity				No differential impact on this group
Other groups or communities	<p>Staff available to help complete forms if poor literacy skills.</p> <p>Overpayment recovery policies/ procedures have means test forms for setting recovery arrangements based on ability to pay.</p> <p>Benefit forms, leaflets etc are written in Plain English</p>			

Step 4 - what are the differences

<p>Are any groups affected in different ways to others as a result of the service / policy / project?</p>	<p>The service goes the extra mile to make sure that all customers can access the service. There are access challenges to the Municipal Offices but these cannot be resolved easily. Instead, access to the service will be significantly improved with the planned office relocation.</p> <p>We do not have a CRM system so are unable to benchmark who access the service (in terms of their equality profile) against the profile for the population of Cheltenham.</p>
<p>Does your service / policy / project either directly or indirectly discriminate?</p>	<p>None identified</p>
<p>If yes, what can be done to improve this?</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Are there any other ways in which the service / project can help support priority communities in Cheltenham?</p>	<p>Continue to explore training opportunities for staff.</p>

Step 5 – taking things forward

<p>What are the key actions to be carried out and how will they be resourced and monitored?</p>	<p>Ensure service accessibility and the discretionary support the service provides to those that need it most continues within the shared service set-up – captured in the proposed outcomes.</p>
<p>Who will play a role in the decision-making process?</p>	<p>Our two elected members on the Joint Committee</p>
<p>What are your / the project's learning and development needs?</p>	<p>None identified</p>
<p>How will you capture these actions in your service / project planning?</p>	<p>Within the annual service plan.</p>