

EQUALITY ANALYSIS

You must complete this in conjunction with reading Equality Analysis Guidance

Name of Policy/Decision/Project/Activity:

Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2018/19

Date: 30/11/17

Version Number: v1

Equality Analysis completed by:

Name/Job title: Sharon Holden (Revenues Manager)

Responsible Officer or Group:

Name/Job title: Paul Wilson (Head of External Funding,
Revenues and Commercial Finance)

Is the Activity:

New/Proposed ()

Changing/Being Reviewed (x)

Other ()

1. Purpose and scope

Purpose

In this section outline briefly:

- what the policy, decision or activity is and what the intended outcomes/benefits are (linked to the Corporate Outcomes Framework)
- over what period of time the outcomes will be achieved
- why it needs to be implemented or revised
- what populations are affected by the proposal
- who is expected to benefit and how, i.e. young people, older people, carers, BME groups, ward areas/communities, etc
- whether there are any overlaps with regional, sub-regional, national priorities.

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 abolished the Council Tax Benefit system and replaced it under the Local Government Finance Act 2012 with the Local Council Tax Support scheme from 1st April 2013, thereby transferring responsibility from central to local government. The Local Government Finance Act 2012 also legislated that pensioners must receive protection, in that they must receive the same levels of entitlement under the new local Council Tax Support scheme as they had received under the old Council Tax Benefit scheme.

Following the implementation of the scheme in April 2013, the council adopted an updated scheme which was based on the government's default scheme. Evaluation of previous consultation resulted in some minor modifications to the scheme in 2015/16 such as utilising assumed consent that applicants of Housing Benefit also wished to be considered for Local Council Tax Support.

The council must approve its Local Council Tax Support Scheme by 31 January 2018 In line with reviewing the scheme, the following changes were proposed for 2017/18 and subject to a consultation exercise.

- **Universal Credit**
Treat a notification of Universal Credit as an indication of a claim under the LCTSS. This will assist claimants in accessing the LCTSS.
- **Backdating Rules**
Reduce the period for which LCTSS claims can be backdated to one calendar month (currently 6 months). This is to mirror Housing Benefit regulations and will improve the administration process.
- **Temporary absence**
Align the LCTSS rules to Housing Benefit scheme so a claimant will not be entitled to council tax support if they are temporarily absent from Great Britain for a period which is likely to last more than 4 weeks (exceptions apply to certain groups for example if a claimant is in hospital). This would apply to both working age and state pension credit age claimants.
- **Self Employed**

Where a claimant is self-employed, assess their self-employed income as being equivalent to the Minimum Income Floor (an assumed level of earnings) after a period of 12 months.

- **Family Premium**

It is proposed to remove the family premium from the LCTSS calculation for new applicants from April 2018. This will have no impact on existing recipients (unless they have a break in their entitlement). The change will make the LCTSS consistent with Housing Benefit regulations and will aid administration.

- **Two child limit**

There will be no personal allowance for any third or later child born after 6 April 2017, unless special circumstances exceptions apply for example if the child was born as part of a multiple birth. This proposal aligns with the changes to Housing Benefit regulations and will again aid administration.

Subject to approval by 31st January 2018, the scheme will come into force on 1st April 2018. The scheme will be reviewed each year and any impacts will be assessed and reviewed when considering the scheme for 2019/20 and future years alongside any implications from the full rollout of Universal Credit which has now been delayed for Sunderland until July 2018. The current proposals are intended to make the scheme easier to understand for claimants and more administratively efficient.

The proposals will impact on all Council Tax payers. The non-claimants will benefit as the cost of the scheme will reduce, albeit the savings are anticipated to be minimal. Those persons on low incomes who claim Council Tax Support may see a reduction in the level of Council Tax Support they are entitled to although, not all claimants will be negatively impacted. A pensioner's entitlement is unaffected, with the exception of proposal three which may have an impact on persons of pensionable age if they were to take extended holidays in excess of four weeks out of the country.

None of the protected groups are restricted from claiming council tax support. Their eligibility is determined by their financial and personal circumstances. The current caseload is 33,492 of which 14,492 are pensioners and 19,000 are working age claimants.

Intelligence and Analysis

Please describe:

- What sources of information have been used to inform this assessment/analysis (this should include but is not limited to consultations, resident/service user feedback and statistical data and intelligence)
- **What the information is telling you** – this should be broken down by each of the protected characteristics or other identified groups which could be disadvantaged. Each of the aims of the equality act should be considered in relation to each of the protected characteristics.

This equality analysis has been informed by a consultation exercise carried out between 5th October 2017 and 19th November 2017 and also two briefings held with elected members.

The consultation exercise attracted 162 responses. There was a 22% greater response from females to male and the majority of respondents were Council Tax payers (93%), of which 12 % were in receipt of Council Tax Support. The highest level of respondents came from the 45-59 age group (38%), whilst 22% of respondents were over 60 years old. 22% of respondents considered themselves to have a disability. 3% of respondents were non British

Gaps in intelligence and information

Having analysed the information available to you:

- are there any gaps in intelligence or areas where understanding needs to be improved? Please describe what these are and what actions you intend to take to obtain/improve the information. These actions should be covered in the action plan.
- are there any groups who should be expected to benefit who do not? Please describe why not and whether you will amend the decision to change this outcome. This should also be covered in the action plan.

Not applicable.

Additional Impacts

The policy or action may also have an impact on other groups or individuals which are not covered by statutory requirements. Please outline any additional individuals or groups which have not already been covered. This could include socio-economic groups, voluntary and community sector, carers or specific communities which face additional challenges (such as former coal mining areas or areas of high deprivation)

Not applicable.

2. Analysis of impact on people

In this section you must **review the intelligence described above and summarise the intended and potential impact of the policy, decision or activity** on the people of Sunderland. This includes specific consideration of the impact on individuals, groups with protected characteristics and communities of interest within the city. Please briefly outline any positive, neutral or negative impacts on the specific groups below. Please note that any negative impacts should have a corresponding action in the action plan in the page below.

In this assessment it is important to remember the **Council is required to give due regard to:**

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Each of these aims must be summarised in turn in relation to the groups outlined below.

| Characteristic | List of Impacts | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|--|
| | Positive | Neutral | Negative |
| Age | Pensioners are protected under the scheme and are still eligible to receive up to 100% council tax support. | . | It could be assumed that pensioners are more likely than most groups to take extended breaks abroad (particularly in winter) and therefore may be affected by proposal two which restricts their claim if they are out of the country for more than 4 weeks. |
| Disability | . | There is no significant impact relative to other groups. | |
| Gender/Sex | | There is no significant impact relative to other groups. Whilst woman may be statistically lower earners, and therefore more likely to claim Council Tax Support there is no evidence of a greater impact from any of the proposed changes. | |
| Marriage & Civil Partnership | | There is no significant impact relative to other groups. | |

| | | | |
|-------------------------|--|--|---|
| Pregnancy and maternity | | | There may be an impact on those potential claimants whose circumstances mean their next child is the third in the family and they are not covered by an exception. Given that this is an unknown future event, it is hard to assess what the specific impact will be. |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | The proposal relating to temporary absence may impact on certain ethnic groups who may return to their home country for extended periods exceeding four weeks. There is no evidence to confirm that this will be the case and the change in policy will be monitored and reviewed as necessary. |
| Religion/belief | | There is no significant impact relative to other groups. | |
| Sexual Orientation | | There is no significant impact relative to other groups. | |
| Gender identity | | There is no significant impact relative to other groups. | |

Please add any additional groups mentioned in “additional impacts” above to this table.

3. Response to Analysis, Action Plan and Monitoring

In this section please outline what actions you propose to take to minimise the negative, and maximise the positive, impacts that have been identified through the analysis. By considering and implementing these actions the policy or action can be refined to make sure that the greatest benefits are achieved for the people of Sunderland. The performance monitoring process should also be set out to explain how ongoing progress is going to be followed to make sure that the aims are met.

From the analysis four broad approaches can be taken, (No major change; continue with the policy/action despite negative implications; adjust the policy/decision/action; or stop the policy/action). Please indicate, using the list below, which is proposed.

No Major Change ()

Continue Despite Negative Implications ()

Adjust the Policy/Decision/Project/Activity (x)

Stop ()

Action Plan

| ACTION | WHO | WHEN | In conc |
|--|--|-----------|--------------------------------------|
| Monitor the impact on ethnic groups in relation to the temporary absence change. | Sharon Holden (Revenues Manager) Loraine Nelson (Benefits Manager) | Quarterly | In conjunction with Benefits Service |
| Monitor impact on claimants | Sharon Holden (Revenues Manager) and Loraine Nelson (Benefits Manager) | Quarterly | In conjunction with Benefits Service |
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