

EqlA - Full Equality Impact Assessment

Policy or Service to be assessed:

Revenues & Benefits Service – Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS)

Service and lead officer:

Stuart Dawson

Officers involved in the EqlA:

Patrick Lane Business Development Manager

What are you impact assessing?

Existing

New/proposed

Changing/Update/ revision

Other, please list:

Step 2: Scoping – what are you assessing?

Q1: What is the title of your service/strategy/policy/project?

Dorset Council – Council Tax Support Scheme April 2019

Q2: What is the aim of your service/strategy/policy/project?

The Council Tax Support Scheme is a means tested discount scheme which aims to provide financial support to Council Tax payers who are on a low income by making a reduction to their Council Tax bill.

At its meeting on 17 September 2018 the Dorset Shadow Executive agreed to undertake a review of Council Tax Support so that a new scheme can be in place for Dorset Council from 1 April 2019.

A public consultation exercise will take place between 15 October and 10 December 2018 allowing customers and key stakeholders to have the opportunity to comment on the following options:

- **Option A - Status quo**

Under this option, the Dorset Council CTS scheme would be based on incorporating the existing sovereign Council schemes.

- **Option B - aligned scheme with a maximum support for those of working age (not protected) limited to 90%**

Under this option, the Dorset Council CTS scheme would be an aligned scheme which would limit the maximum support provided to unprotected working age claimants to 90%. The scheme would also look to simplify arrangements where the claimant is receiving Universal Credit.

- **Option C - aligned scheme with a maximum support for those of working age (not protected) limited to 85%**

Under this option, the Dorset CTS scheme would incorporate the conditions mentioned in Option B but would limit the maximum support provided to unprotected working age claimants to 85%.

Protection arrangements will continue for those claimants who are Pensioners or who are considered by the Council to be vulnerable. (see question 3 for definition of vulnerable)

Q3: Who does/will it have an impact on? e.g. public, visitors, staff, members, partners?

Any changes to the CTS scheme will impact on those customers in receipt of CTS who are of working age and who are not in a protected group. Any change will also apply to any potential future claimants of CTS. The changes will apply to those people living in the current area covered by East Dorset District Council, North Dorset District Council, Purbeck District Council, West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council.

The following types of claimant are protected and so any changes to the CTS scheme would not apply:

- Pensioners.
- Those receiving Disability Living Allowance, Disability Living Allowance (Mobility), Personal Independence Payment, Carers Allowance or Employment Support Allowance Component. (Some claimants who receive these benefits do not always receive the necessary premium if there are other benefits in payment and this provision helps address this anomaly).
- Those in receipt of War Disablement Pension, War Widows Pension or War Widows Disablement Pension.

There will be a positive impact on those people identified above with protected characteristics.

There will be an impact on staff having to implement the changes and to become familiar with the scheme to ensure they are giving correct information and advice to the public.

Q4: Are there any potential barriers to implementing changes to your service/strategy/policy/project?

The proposed changes are open to public consultation and ultimately Member approval. The need for the council to deliver a balanced budget is likely to be one factor taken into consideration when deciding on the final scheme.

Q5: Who else will be involved in implementing this service/policy service/strategy/policy/project?

The staff of the Revenues & Benefits Service, along with the software supplier who will be required to make the necessary changes to the systems that calculate CTS.

Step 3: Information gathering – what do you need to know about your customers?

Q6: What data do you already have about your service users, or the people your policy or strategy will have an impact on, that is broken down by equality strand?

Age/Disability

- As of August 2018, there were 25,717 households in the new Dorset Council area that received some level of CTS and of these 66% received full protection. These will be people of Pension Credit age and those who are protected because of a disability. Consequently approximately 8,750 households will be affected by the proposed changes.

Gender re-assignment

- There is no published information regarding the number of CTS claimants who have undergone gender re-assignment and is not relevant in assessing eligibility.

Race

- Whilst we offer help with translation services and assistance to complete forms we do not record the race of people claiming CTS. This lack of recording could potentially have a negative impact. Race is not relevant in assessing eligibility.

Religion or belief

- We do not record the religion or belief of people claiming CTS, however this is not relevant when assessing eligibility.

Sex

- Whilst we do record the sex of the person claiming CTS the proposed changes apply regardless of sex.

Sexual orientation

- We do not record the sexual orientation of people claiming CTS, however this is not relevant when assessing eligibility.

Pregnancy and maternity

- In some cases we may be aware that someone claiming CTS is pregnant or on maternity leave by virtue of certain benefits they are claiming however this is not recorded as a separate factor as it is not relevant when assessing eligibility.

Marriage & Civil Partnership

- We do record whether someone claiming CTS is either married or in a civil partnership and would be able to extract this data, however the proposed changes apply to equally to both couples and single claimants.

Q7: Do you need any further information broken down by equality strand to inform this EqlA?

Yes No

If yes, list here and add actions to gather this data to your action plan at Step 5:

Q8: Is there any potential for direct or indirect discrimination?

Yes No Don't know

If yes, please explain how you are going to change this?

Under the proposed changes, and indeed the existing scheme, customers of working age, who are not protected, will receive less Council Tax Support than those of pensionable age, or those with a disability. This could be argued to be positive discrimination on the grounds of age and/or disability, however it is national government policy and is covered by legislation. (The Council Tax Reductions Schemes (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2017).

Step 4: Making a judgement about impacts

Age:

Claimants of CTS who have reached state pension credit qualifying age are not affected by any of the proposed changes.

Unprotected working age claimants will be on average £0.25 per week worse off under Option B and £1.09 per week worse off under Option C.

Disability:

Claimants of CTS who due to their disability receive one of the benefits listed in Q3 continue to be protected and will not be impacted by any of these changes.

Gender re-assignment:

Regardless of whether someone has undergone gender re-assignment anyone of working age who is not protected will be impacted by these changes.

Race:

Regardless of race anyone of working age who is not protected will be impacted by these changes.

Religion or belief:

Regardless of religion or belief anyone of working age who is not protected will be impacted by these changes.

Sex:

- Regardless of sex anyone of working age who is not protected will be impacted by these changes. It is likely however that the number of female single parents claiming CTS significantly outweighs the number of male single parents and consequently there is likely to be a higher number of females affected than there are males.

Sexual Orientation:

Regardless of sexual orientation anyone of working age who is not protected will be impacted by these changes.

Pregnancy and Maternity:

Regardless of whether someone is pregnant anyone of working age who is not protected will be impacted by these changes.

Marriage and Civil Partnerships:

Regardless of whether someone is married or in a civil partnership anyone of working age who is not protected will be impacted by these changes.

Conclusion:

The main impact of the proposed changes (option B or option C) will be an increase in the Council Tax payable and consequently a reduction in the disposable income for unprotected customers who currently pay a minimum of 8% towards their Council Tax charge.

Under Option A the Dorset Council CTS scheme would replicate the existing schemes having regard to where the customer lived. This would mean however that some residents would be treated more favourably than others as a direct result of where they live.

Under Option B unprotected customers would pay a minimum of 10% towards their Council Tax charge and on average would be £0.25 per week (£13 per year) worse off.

Under Option C unprotected customers would pay a minimum of 15% towards their Council Tax charge and on average would be £1.09 per week (£56.68 per year) worse off.

Step 5: Action planning

Step 5: Improvement plan – what are you going to change?

Expand boxes as necessary

Issue	Action	Performance Target (what difference will it make)	Lead Officer	Achieved
Making people aware of the changes	Ensure any agreed changes to the scheme are publicised on D4U	The people likely to be affected by the changes are made aware	Tina Frampton	
Answering queries	Ensure an advice line is available, utilising “Inform”	The people affected will be able to find out answers to their questions	Tina Frampton	

EqIA approved by:

Date:

Review date:

Check with your equality officer for the EqlA signing-off process and for posting the EqlA on the web