

EQUALITY SCREENING

Equality Impact Assessment guidance should be considered when completing this form.

POLICY/FUNCTION/ACTIVITY	LEAD OFFICER
Council Tax Support scheme	Ed Bowen

A. What is the aim of this policy, function or activity? Why is it needed? What is it hoped to achieve and how will it be ensured it works as intended? Does it affect service users, employees or the wider community?

The proposed changes to the Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme are relevant to all of the nine protected equality characteristics. This is on the basis that CTS is available to all residents of the borough.

With the above in mind, the impact of the proposed changes on each individual equality strand has been considered as part of this EIA. Diversity within the stands has also been borne in mind.

B. Is this policy, function or activity relevant to equality? Does the policy, function or activity relate to an area in which there are known inequalities, or where different groups have different needs or experience? Remember, it may be relevant because there are opportunities to promote equality and greater access, not just potential for adverse impacts or unlawful discrimination. The Protected Characteristics are; Sex, Age, Disability, Race, Religion and Beliefs, Sexual Orientation, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Gender Reassignment, Pregnancy and Maternity.

The main aspect of the proposed changes to the CTS scheme, is to simplify the scheme, make claiming easier and reduce the number of small changes to entitlement for those on Universal Credit.

Although the current scheme includes vulnerable persons some will move into a new group with some changes, but the majority of existing protections will continue. They will only move into the new group if they receive UC.

A 'vulnerable person' within the scheme is someone who qualifies for the severe or enhanced disability premium or has a child disability premium.

If the policy, function or activity is considered to be relevant to equality then a full Equality Impact Assessment may need to be carried out. If the policy function or activity does not engage any protected characteristics, then you should complete Part C below. Where Protected Characteristics are engaged, but Full Impact Assessment is not required because measures are in place or are proposed to be implemented that would mitigate the impact on those affected or would provide an opportunity to promote equalities, please complete Part C.

C. If the policy, function or activity is not considered to be relevant to equality, what are the reasons for this conclusion? Alternatively, if it is considered that there is an impact on any Protected of Characteristics but that measures are in place or are proposed to be implemented please state those measures and how it/they are expected to have the desired result. What evidence has been used to make this decision? A simple statement of 'no relevance' or 'no data' is not sufficient.

Should it be appropriate, a disabled person impacted by the proposed changes could apply for relief for any lost entitlement due to the changed non-dependant deductions, under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

This screening assessment will need to be referred to the Equality Group for challenge before sign-off.

Date completed:

Sign-off by senior manager:

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

SCOPING

1. What aspects of the policy function or activity are particularly relevant to equality? Other aspects should not necessarily be excluded from the assessment, but attention should be focused on the most important areas and include which of the equality strands the policy function or activity is relevant to. Diversity within the strands should also be considered. Please consider whether any comments made in Part B of the Screening form are relevant here.

Those considered vulnerable and claiming UC may see a reduction on their entitlement if they have a non-dependant living with them. However, the number affected is small as most will remain exempt from any non-dependant deductions.

The proposal to ignore small changes may also result in a reduction in entitlement over the year. However, for just as many there will be a slight increase.

The nature of welfare benefits is that it is predominantly claimed by women. The effect of these changes are equal regardless of sex, but it is a fact that more women than men will be face changes as they make up the majority of the caseload.

The changes of the scheme will have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics by ensuring those that may be eligible are picked up at an earlier stage and assessed rather than being invited to make a claim and for whatever reason do not do so. It reduces the need to continually assess small changes so that vulnerable families are able to meet their Council Tax obligations. The consultation has broadly supported the changes suggested and will there is also a discretionary fund that will support those who may not be entitled to CTS so acts as a safety net to the scheme.

2. Set out the available evidence that will help you assess the impact of this policy function or activity on equality. This could include service-level monitoring data, analysis of complaints/enquiry records, existing user feedback, data obtained from external sources and information about the local community. You may find it useful to compare your service-user statistics against the [Runnymede population profile](#).

Modelling these changes allows us to measure the impact on the overall budget and down to individual cases.

3. What consultation and involvement has been undertaken in relation to this (or a similar) policy, function or activity and what are the results? If none have been carried out, what consultation will be needed? Data may be available from recent consultation activities on a related policy or Equality impact assessment.

A public consultation on these changes has been carried out as required in the local government finance act. The field work took place between 12th August and 23rd September 2022 and included a canvass of 1,000 residents and a public website consultation.

4. Are there any gaps in the information established from the consultation and involvement undertaken and referred to in Part 3? If so, set out how these gaps will be filled?

None

Where it is not possible to fill information/data gaps in time to inform this assessment, specific action points will need to be included in the action plan section Part 10 below, with a focus on monitoring the actual impact of the policy function or activity.

ASSESSING IMPACT

It is essential to consider not just the intended consequences of the policy but also any unintended consequences and barriers that might prevent it being effective for people within any of the Protected Characteristic groups.

Please use the Grid included below to assess the impact of the Policy/function/action on each of the Protected Characteristics. When completing the assessment, please bear in mind the following questions.

1. **What are the main findings of your consultation and involvement activities, and do they demonstrate problems that need to be addressed? For example, could the policy, function or activity outcomes differ according to people’s ethnic group, disability, gender, religion/belief, sexual orientation, or age?** For instance, there might be evidence of higher or lower participation/uptake by different groups.

2. **If there is a disproportionate impact on one group, is it appropriate and consistent with the objective?** For instance the policy may include lawful positive action or other methods to address particular needs or may be considered to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim

Protected Characteristic	Positive		Neutral	Negative		Comments
	High	Low		High	Low	
Age			X			<p>The Council Tax Support Regulations and Welfare Reform Act 2012, stipulate any changes to a local council tax support scheme can only affect working age residents.</p> <p>For some the impact will be a reduction in annual CTS, but for others there may be an increase or entitlement for the first time.</p> <p>The proposals are designed to be broadly equal on the number and value of impacts.</p>
Disability			X			<p>The Vulnerable group are protected and only those who move onto UC will experience any change to their entitlement.</p> <p>Existing protections will remain, but some may see their entitlement change less frequently, but this is the purpose to create stability and allow for better household budgeting.</p>
Gender Reassignment			X			No impact

Marriage / Civil Partnership			X			No impact
Pregnancy / Maternity			X			No impact
Race			X			No impact
Religion / Belief			X			No impact
Sex			X			Other than as already pointed out that CTS is claimed by more women than men and so any change will affect more women than men.
Sexual Orientation			X			No impact

5. Does the policy, function or activity miss potential opportunities to promote equality or positive attitudes to (and between) different Protected Characteristics or communities?

By using data direct from DWP and making changes we are aiming to increase take up of an underclaimed benefit. Often it is those groups with protected characteristics and communities who are difficult to reach and do not claim what they are entitled to.

ADDRESSING THE IMPACT: ACTION PLANNING, MONITORING AND REVIEW

6. Does the policy, function or activity require reconsideration or amendment? If not, explain the reasons for this conclusion. If an adverse impact has been identified, you will need to set out the justification for continuing the policy, function or activity or outline measures to mitigate the impact.

We can only change the scheme once a year and have to consult with the public and preceptors if there are significant changes to be made.

The proposed scheme is to see us through another 3 years from April 2023 to March 2026. Any changes would be consulted on during 2025, ahead of any changes to be implemented for April 2026. Should it be necessary to change the scheme completely earlier, this would not be possible until the following April.

There is relief available under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to anyone impacted by the changes.

7. What actions have you identified as a result of this equality impact assessment? These might include improving data collection in order to give a clearer picture of your service-users, physical adjustments to a building, arranging for information to be sent out to individuals in alternative formats or languages, or consulting with a wider group of people to understand the impact of the policy.

Using DWP data feeds will allow for more automation of the claim process with less need for claimants to provide all their information again.

We will be able to store and record all these records in our DMS and can be used for future monitoring and gathering a better picture of our caseload to shape new services and meet demands.

8. Action Plan (where applicable): Who will be responsible for completing these actions and in what timescale? How will you review the actual impact of this policy function or activity?

Provide details of timescale and actions for review, and details of how the actions will be evaluated to measure if expected outcomes are achieved in practice. You may have identified 'triggers' that would indicate a problem with the policy, function or activity and suggest a revision is be needed.

Monthly monitoring of caseload and spend is already conducted and benchmarking each quarter is reported to Surrey CEOs and to peers in benchmarking groups.

Due to the cost-of-living crisis and potential financial crash, the caseload and spend may increase. There are a number of factors, such as the e-claim form that has increased demand for CTS by around 50%. These will be monitored, but as the CTS is demand fed, there is little that can be done to reduce this other than to reverse measures and make the scheme harsher in future years.

This assessment will need to be referred to the Equality Group for challenge.

Date completed:

Sign-off by an authorised Officer/Manager: