

Cambridge City Council Equality Impact Assessment



Completing an Equality Impact Assessment will help you to think about what impact your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service may have on people that live in, work in or visit Cambridge, as well as on City Council staff.

The template is easy to use. You do not need to have specialist equalities knowledge to complete it. It asks you to make judgements based on evidence and experience. There are guidance notes on the intranet to help you. You can also get advice from David Kidston, Strategy and Partnerships Manager on 01223 457043 or email david.kidston@cambridge.gov.uk or from any member of the Joint Equalities Group.

1. Title of strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service:

Discretionary Housing Benefit (DHP)

2. What is the objective or purpose of your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) were introduced in July 2001 as a mechanism for Local Authorities to provide further financial assistance with housing costs. The regulations covering DHPs are The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001. Introduction of further Welfare Reforms from April 2013 has increased the number of requests for Discretionary Housing Payments. The number, amount and duration of these awards are difficult to predict and will require careful monitoring during 2013/14.

Traditionally, Discretionary Housing Payments are not viewed as long term solutions but a short term financial assistance until a more permanent solution is found. Until the Welfare Reforms of 2013, the usual period of a DHP award was 3 months. From April 2013, awards relating to Spare Room Subsidy can be for the whole financial year, especially where the award is to support a disabled individual to stay in a specially adapted property.

The period of an award is restricted by regulations to the end of the financial year that an application is made, even in the above circumstances. A new award would have to be made for subsequent years and a review of circumstances will be carried out at that time. This can adversely affect the health of some vulnerable people who need the knowledge of financial security.

3. Who will be affected by this strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service? (Please tick those that apply)

Residents

Visitors

Staff

A specific client group or groups (please state):
Housing Benefit recipients

4. What type of strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service is this? (Please tick)

- New
 Revised
 Existing

5. Responsible directorate and service

Directorate: Customer and Community Services

Service: Revenues and Benefits

6. Are other departments or partners involved in delivering this strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?

- No
 Yes (please give details):

Customer Service Centre, City Homes, Strategic Housing

7. Potential impact

Please list and explain how this strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service could **positively** or **negatively** affect individuals from the following equalities groups.

When answering this question, please think about:

- The results of relevant consultation that you or others have completed (for example with residents, people that work in or visit Cambridge, service users, staff or partner organisations).
- Complaints information.
- Performance information.
- Information about people using your service (for example whether people from certain equalities groups use the service more or less than others).
- Inspection results.
- Comparisons with other organisations.
- The implementation of your piece of work (don't just assess what you think the impact will be after you have completed your work, but also think about what steps you might have to take to make sure that the implementation of your work does not negatively impact on people from a particular equality group).
- The relevant premises involved.
- Your communications.
- National research (local information is not always available, particularly for some equalities groups, so use national research to provide evidence for your conclusions).

(a) Age (any group of people of a particular age, including younger and older people)

Requests for Discretionary Housing Payments can come from claimants of any age, although from April 2013, Welfare Reforms are primarily affecting working age claimants and some of these claimants will have dependant children. This is particularly relevant for those affected by Benefit Cap restrictions from July 2013. As at 31 August 2013, all claims affected by the Benefit Cap included at least 3 children in the household.

(b) Disability (including people with a physical impairment, sensory impairment, learning disability, mental health problem or other condition which has an impact on their daily life)

Welfare Reforms relating to Size Related Restrictions do affect disabled individuals and except where there is an overnight carer, where an additional bedroom may be given or due to severe disabilities that prevent siblings sharing a bedroom at night, support will have to be given using Discretionary Housing Payments. Disabilities can be both physical or mental. Training has been given to officers to identify where an additional room may be given in the assessment or a DHP application made.

(c) Gender

Potentially more female single parent families than male single parent families. Single parent families, irrespective of gender are treated the same under benefit rules.

(d) Pregnancy and maternity

Women who are pregnant may be affected by Local Housing Allowance and Social Rented Sector size restrictions until their baby is born. Staff have been trained to identify potentially affected claimants and offer DHP support until child is born if appropriate.

(e) Transgender (including gender re-assignment)

No effect on transgender, benefit rules are the same irrespective of gender.

(f) Marriage and Civil Partnership

No effect on marriage and civil partnerships as all couples, whether married, in a Civil Partnership or living together as a couple are treated the same.

(g) Race or Ethnicity

No specific effect on race or ethnicity, although some families may have larger numbers of children than others and may be affected by the Benefit Cap.

(h) Religion or Belief

No effect on religion or belief. A persons religion or belief are not affected by benefit rules.

(i) Sexual Orientation

No effect on sexual orientation, benefit rules are the same irrespective of sexual orientation.

(j) Other factor that may lead to inequality (please state):

None

8. If you have any additional comments please add them here

For 2013/14, 290 applications for DHP have been received, of these, 233 were successful and 57 refused. Some of these refusals were because other help and assistance was available.

Spare room subsidy restrictions that came in on 1 April 2013, accounted for 137 of the 233 awards with 26 of these granted to assist people with disabilities.

As at the end of August 2013, 44% of the Government Contribution of £182,340 has been spent or committed. We cannot draw any final conclusions for the call on the DHP funding for the remainder of the financial year for a number of factors. These include receiving renewal requests for DHP applications where they are initially for less than the full financial year and the effect on arrears recovery by City Homes and Registered Social Landlords, which may prompt more applications.

9. Conclusions and Next Steps

- If you have not identified any negative impacts, please sign off this form.
- If you have identified potential negative actions, you must complete the action plan at the end of this document to set out how you propose to mitigate the impact. If you do not feel that the potential negative impact can be mitigated, you must complete question 8 to explain why that is the case.
- If there is insufficient evidence to say whether or not there is likely to be a negative impact, please complete the action plan setting out what additional information you need to gather to complete the assessment.

All completed Equality Impact Assessments must be emailed to David Kidston, Strategy and Partnerships Manager, who will arrange for it to be published on the City Council's website. Email david.kidston@cambridge.gov.uk

10. Sign off

Name and job title of assessment lead officer: Naomi Armstrong, Benefit Manager

Names and job titles of other assessment team members and people consulted:

Date of completion: 10 September 2013

Date of next review of the assessment: 30 September 2014

Action Plan

Equality Impact Assessment title:

Date of completion: 10 September 2013

Equality Group	Age
Details of possible disadvantage or negative impact	<p>Elderly or very young claimants or those with children may find it difficult to move if rent is not met by Housing Benefit. Large families may find it difficult to access appropriate affordable accommodation.</p> <p>With the implementation of Benefit Cap, larger families or those living in expensive accommodation may find themselves subject to the Cap and have a shortfall in their Housing Benefit.</p>
Action to be taken to address the disadvantage or negative impact	<p>Monitor the requests for Discretionary Housing Payment to include where possible age. Support moving to suitable, sustainable accommodation through liaison with Housing Advice Service with short term or one off Discretionary Housing Payments where appropriate or until restrictions change.</p> <p>As at 31 August 2013, there were 27 claims affected by the Benefit Cap, all have children, the most has 7 children.</p>
Officer responsible for progressing the action	Naomi Armstrong
Date action to be completed by	30 September 2014

Equality Group	Disability
Details of possible disadvantage or negative impact	Disabled customers may require larger accommodation to store medical equipment or may need to live close to support networks or medical facilities.
Action to be taken to address the disadvantage or negative impact	Monitor the requests for Discretionary Housing Payment to include where possible disability. Where appropriate award additional payments where a property has been substantially adapted. Look at additional support where larger accommodation is required. Liaise with Housing Advice Service if a claimant is able to and wants to move. As at the end of August 2013, 26 DHPs were made on the basis of disability.
Officer responsible for progressing the action	Naomi Armstrong
Date action to be completed by	30 September 2014

Equality Group	Gender
Details of possible disadvantage or negative impact	None identified
Action to be taken to address the disadvantage or negative impact	
Officer responsible for progressing the action	
Date action to be completed by	

Equality Group	Pregnancy and Maternity
Details of possible disadvantage or negative impact	Pregnant women may be affected by bedroom calculations before baby is born.
Action to be taken to address the disadvantage or negative impact	Advertise that where claimant is pregnant and restrictions on eligible rent apply, that assistance may be available. Where a request is made and there is maternity income be supportive in a claim for Discretionary Housing Payment. Staff awareness required.
Officer responsible for progressing the action	Naomi Armstrong
Date action to be completed by	30 September 2014

Equality Group	Transgender
Details of possible disadvantage or negative impact	None identified
Action to be taken to address the disadvantage or negative impact	
Officer responsible for progressing the action	
Date action to be completed by	

Equality Group	Marriage and Civil Partnership
Details of possible disadvantage or negative impact	None identified
Action to be taken to address the disadvantage or negative impact	
Officer responsible for progressing the action	
Date action to be completed by	

Equality Group	Race or Ethnicity
Details of possible disadvantage or negative impact	All claims affected by the Benefit Cap as at the end of August 2013 have a number of children (ranging from 3 children to 7 children). It is often families from ethnic backgrounds that may have larger families and may therefore be affected by the new rules disproportionately.
Action to be taken to address the disadvantage or negative impact	Advise people affected of assistance as appropriate. Monitor take up due to Benefit Cap.
Officer responsible for progressing the action	Naomi Armstrong
Date action to be completed by	30 September 2014

Equality Group	Religion or Belief
Details of possible disadvantage or negative impact	As with above, larger families may become subject to Benefit Cap and some families with particular religions or beliefs may have larger families.
Action to be taken to address the disadvantage or negative impact	Advise people affected of assistance as appropriate. Monitor take up due to Benefit Cap.
Officer responsible for progressing the action	Naomi Armstrong
Date action to be completed by	30 September 2014

Equality Group	Sexual Orientation
Details of possible disadvantage or negative impact	None identified
Action to be taken to address the disadvantage or negative impact	
Officer responsible for progressing the action	
Date action to be completed by	

Other factors that may lead to inequality	
Details of possible disadvantage or negative impact	Wider Welfare Reforms may have an impact on claimants' ability to fund shortfalls in rent.
Action to be taken to address the disadvantage or negative impact	Advise claimants who are in difficulty that additional funding may be available, support moves to sustainable accommodation. Offer budgeting advice through Third Sector organisations. Monitor take up of Discretionary Housing Payments and the reasons for awards. Cambridge CAB have been offered a grant through Community Development to give debt advice at Mandela House.
Officer responsible for progressing the action	Naomi Armstrong
Date action to be completed by	30 September 2014