

Equality and Fairness Analysis

Scoping and findings report – Default scheme

Officer responsible for equality and fairness analysis	Bill McCafferty Revenues and Benefits Manager	
Officer responsible for policy development	Bill McCafferty Revenues and Benefits Manager	
Policy area	Revenues and Benefits	
Service area responsible for implementing the policy	Benefits	
Originator (if not the Council)	Central Government	
Is the policy proposed (new) or existing?	New	
Is it an EBC policy or a partnership initiative?		Partnership (with East Sussex Councils and ESCC)
Key people involved in the policy development and its implementation	Ian Fitzpatrick, Senior Head of Community Bill McCafferty, Revenues & Benefits Manager Representatives from East Sussex Districts and Boroughs Representatives from East Sussex County Council	
Decision making bodies the policy will be referred to	Cabinet – December 2012	

	Council – January 2013
Snr/Head of Service	Ian Fitzpatrick
Date of Equality and Fairness Steering group	

Policy = the full range of our policies, practices, activities, projects, procurement and decisions, whether it is formally written down or whether it is informal custom and practice. This includes all existing policies and any new policies under development.

Title of policy	Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme – The Default Scheme
What is the purpose of the policy and why is it needed?	
<p>The Government has decided that there will no longer be a national Council Tax Benefits scheme from 1 April 2013. Instead the council will need to introduce its own local Council Tax Reduction scheme or implement the Government’s Default Scheme.</p> <p>The Government’s assumption, following the last Comprehensive Spending Review, is that there will be a 10% reduction in expenditure through these changes from 1 April 2013 and that it will be for local authorities to determine how to manage that funding reduction. Eastbourne Borough Council will receive approximately £1m less money from Government as a result of this change.</p> <p>Currently Council Tax Benefits is a national scheme for low income households. You may get Council Tax Benefit if you pay Council Tax and your income and capital (savings and investments) are below a certain level. You may apply whether you rent or own your home, or live rent-free. You could qualify if you are out of work, or in work and earning a wage. Individuals apply for Council Tax Benefits through a single application process for Housing & Council Tax Benefits. If you are eligible for council tax benefits you will receive a reduction in your council tax bill and the council receives grant to pay for this.</p> <p>The government has stated that council tax support for older people will not be reduced as a result of the introduction of this reform. This is because the government wants to ensure that low income pensioners, who would struggle to pay council tax without additional support, and whom the government does not expect to work to increase their income, will continue to receive support for their council tax. Pensioner protection will be achieved by keeping in place national rules.</p> <p>The Council, if it does not adopt the Default Scheme, needs to give consideration to vulnerable groups in the design of a new system. The Government’s consultation response appears to be less prescriptive about how this should be done than perhaps originally envisaged. Rather the government draws councils’ attention to existing responsibilities including the Child Poverty Act 2010, the Disabled Person Act 1986 and the Housing Act 1996, as well as the public sector duties in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.</p>	

The scheme will determine how much support people will receive to help them pay their council tax.

One option is to adopt the Default Scheme which is, in effect, the current Council Tax Benefit scheme transposed to a discount scheme. Claimants will get the same amount of support as they would have under the current CTB scheme.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has completed an Impact Assessment for the implementation of the Default Scheme;

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/lgfblocalisingcounciltax>

In what context will it operate and who is it intended to benefit?

The scheme will operate as a means tested discount to be set against a person’s council tax liability. The scheme is intended to give support to those people most in need of financial assistance towards paying their council tax.

What are the expected outcomes of the policy?

- That people are able to meet their council tax liabilities.
- That pensioners are protected.
- That there are work incentives.
- That the vulnerable are protected.

Which protected groups will it affect the most?

Considering who the policy is intending to benefit and what the expected outcomes are, assess each characteristic and indicate whether the policy has ‘M’ more or ‘L’ less relevance and circle those that apply.

Age	<u>M</u>	L
Disability	M	L
Gender reassignment	M	L
Marriage and civil partnership	M	L
Maternity and pregnancy	M	L
Race	M	L
Religion or beliefs	M	L
Sex	M	L

	Sexual orientation	M	L
Which parts of the PSED¹ is it relevant to? Use the same assessment as for protected groups.	1. Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation	M	L
	2. Advance equality of opportunity	M	L
	3. Foster good relations	M	L

Equality Information

List all the sources of information you have gathered and will use to evaluate the effectiveness, or potential effectiveness, of the policy. Include evidence gathered from engagement.

As the default scheme is, in essence, the same as the Council Tax Benefit scheme no-one will receive less support than they would have done if the government had not abolished Council Tax Benefit.

Are there gaps in this information and if so, what are these?

For instance, do you have information that is sufficient for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the policy against all protected characteristics?

Current Council Tax Benefit data does not include information on:

- Gender Re-assignment
- Maternity and Pregnancy
- Religion or Beliefs
- Sexual Orientation

This is because it is not necessary to hold these details in order to decide if someone is entitled to Council Tax Benefit.

And only holds limited data on:

¹ Public Sector Equality Duty – for further information refer to the guide on same

- Disability
- Race

This is because we do not either need to know, or take into consideration someone's race in deciding entitlement to the discount.

What steps did you take, or are you intending to take, to fill these gaps?

Depending on the purpose of the policy it may prove useful to engage with service users, employees, equality/involvement groups/organisations and other interested parties etc.

As the default scheme is a government designed scheme, and it is not recommended as the local scheme, no further work will be undertaken.

What does all the information gathered tell you about the policy?

I.e. does the policy miss opportunities to advance equality and foster good relations?

The default scheme is the government designed scheme and should meet all equality duties.

Based on your evidence and engagement is there a need to balance conflicting views and how will you do this?

You will need to find an appropriate balance for these groups and the policy in question.

No. The default scheme is exactly the same as the current Council Tax Benefit scheme.

Is there a need to counter resentment or address inaccurate perceptions, if so what will you do?

This is more likely to arise in regard to policies that justifiably benefit certain groups over others and so give the impression of 'favourable treatment'.

The default scheme protects pensioners, therefore some working age claimants may feel aggrieved. We would have to explain that it is a government devised scheme.

Findings of your analysis

Having gathered in all the evidence and considered the potential or actual effect of the policy on equality, you should now be in a position to make an informed judgement about what should be done with the policy. There are four main steps to take:

1. No major change – the policy is robust and evidence shows no potential for discrimination and all opportunities to advice equality and foster good relations between groups has been taken;
2. Adjust the policy - some steps need to be taken to remove barriers in the policy or to better advance equality;
3. Continue the policy – you will adopt the policy despite any adverse effects or missed opportunities because you are satisfied that it does not unlawfully discriminate – you will need to document what the justification is for continuing the policy, and how you reached this decision;
4. Stop and remove the policy – there are adverse effects that are not justified and cannot be reduced.

Irrespective of the step you recommend you are required to provide documentation in support of your decision and the reasons why you made it together with all supporting equality information used.

Please type 'recommended course of action' against the desired step below.

No major change	The default scheme is not recommended as the Council's local scheme as it does not fill the funding gap created by the 10% reduction in funding.
Adjust the policy	
Continue the policy	
Stop and remove the policy	

Proposed action plan in regard to policy implementation

Quality checking: What was the outcome	
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of the Corporate Equality and Fairness Planning Group?	
How will you implement any recommendations the group made?	The scheme has to be adopted by the Council by 31 January 2013. Any recommendations made after this date will be considered during the review stage.
How will the policy be monitored once implemented, and who will do this? Consider how you will determine whether or not the policy is having its desired effects i.e. what type of information is needed and how often will it be gathered?	The Council Tax collection rate (Although other economic factors will affect this). Numbers of reminders, final notices and summons issued (although other economic factors will affect this). Number of successful appeals. Spend against budget will be monitored monthly
Who will analyse the monitoring at its review stages?	Senior Head of Community Revenues and Benefits Manager
What could trigger an early revision?	The scheme cannot be changed mid-year. If the council wishes to change the scheme for 2014/15 it will have to go out to consultation.
How will you involve key service users/other parties in the review process?	Through liaison meetings with: CAB Housing Brighton Housing Trust
How will you publish the results of any reviews?	

For completion by the Equality and Fairness Steering Group:

Results of group discussion and recommended course of action:	
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