

Equality & Diversity Impact Assessments

Directorate / Service / Department:	Finance
Person responsible for the assessment:	Julie Ryan (Training & Development) Nicola Stephenson (Performance) Rita Silcock (Fairer Charging)
Name of (proposed) policy / function:	Benefits New: Existing: ✓
Process area Identifier (PID) / Name:	N/Ap
(1)	Briefly describe the aims, objectives and purpose of the policy / function: To assess and award housing benefit and council tax benefit quickly and accurately.
(2)	Are there any associated objectives of the policy / function? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alleviate poverty for Barnsley residents • Improve living conditions by allowing customers to access suitable housing • Ensure correct benefit take-up.
(3)	Who is intended to benefit from the policy / function and in what way? Residents of Barnsley who are on a low income. The benefits they receive are to help improve their quality of life.
(4)	What outcomes are expected from this policy / function? To pay Housing and Council Tax benefit to qualifying residents in Barnsley, promoting independence, better living conditions and a reduction in poverty.
(5)	What factors / forces could contribute to / detract from the outcomes? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance with complex legislation • Ever changing regulations • IT software • Regular and ongoing staff training • Staff sickness • Customer compliance with regulations.

(6)	<p>Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the policy / function?</p> <p>Residents of Barnsley, Barnsley MBC, Department for Work & Pensions, Inland Revenue, Berneslai Homes, Landlords, Housing Associations, Community Information Service.</p>
(7)	<p>Who implements the policy and who is responsible for the policy / function?</p> <p>Chris Armitage, Benefits Manager</p>
(8)	<p>Is there any monitoring data available? (e.g. results from consultations, surveys, focus groups)</p> <p>There was no previous research or reports to refer to.</p>
(9)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact on ethnic groups? Yes</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>The differential impact on these groups is that documentation, leaflets etc are currently only available in English, so possibly not giving the opportunity to non-english speaking customers to claim the benefits they may be entitled to. Procedures are in place for accessing the National Interpreting Services, but not all staff are aware or confident in using the service.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i></p> <p>Information provided by a Senior Officer within Benefits. No complaints have been received relating to equality issues. Viewed the claim form for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Second Adult Rebate Viewed the Benefits Assessment Team Service Plan.</p>
(10)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to gender? No</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>There would be no differential effect due to the gender of an individual. The service operates in accordance with legislation. Both males and females receive equal treatment in the assessment of a benefit claim.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i></p> <p>Discussions with the Benefits Senior Officer.</p>

(11)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to disability? Yes</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>The function tends to have a positive impact on people with disabilities, in accordance with their needs and where discretion is allowed within legislation. The service can send out visiting officers to assist people in completing their application forms.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Discussions with the Benefits Senior Officer.</p>
(12)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to sexual orientation? No</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>Benefit assessment officers would be aware of an individual's sexual orientation if the person declared this on the claim form; this is required under the civil partnership legislation.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Benefits officer confirmed this.</p>
(13)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to age? Yes</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>A beneficial impact for older members of this group. The service aims to promote take-up for older people and uses a 3-page application form instead of the 24 pages one. For backdates/return of information etc, where discretion is allowed, a beneficial approach is taken.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Discussions with the Benefits Senior Officer.</p>

<p>(14)</p>	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to religion or belief? No</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>The service would not be aware of this, it is irrelevant for the assessment of housing/council tax benefit.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Benefits officer confirmed this.</p>
<p>(15)</p>	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact on people due to them having dependants/caring responsibilities? Yes</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>Possibly a beneficial impact on these groups of people. The service would carry out an assessment taking into account the needs of the dependant. The assessor may also refer customers to the visiting team, who will assist them with application forms and provide guidance, aiming to save time for the customer and ensure they gain the benefits they are entitled to.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Discussions with the Benefits Senior Officer.</p>
<p>(16)</p>	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to their offending past? No</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>In most cases the assessors would be unaware of someone's offending past. If the 'offending past' were benefit fraud then their case would be looked at more rigorously.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Benefits officer confirmed this.</p>

(17)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact on Trans people? No</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>Assessment officers would usually be unaware of whether an individual is transgendered or transsexual. This issue could have an effect on benefit entitlement depending on if the individual was part of a civil partnership.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Benefits officer confirmed this.</p>
(18)	<p>Could the differential impact identified in 8-16 amount to there being the potential for adverse impact in this policy or function? No</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>We found the service to have some differential impact on certain groups of the community, but only in accordance with legislation and this does not amount to there being an adverse impact in the function.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Discussions with the Benefits Senior Officer.</p>
(19)	<p>Are the differential impacts caused by unlawful discrimination? No</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>The function satisfies all current legislative requirements.</p>
(20)	<p>Findings</p> <p>The Benefit Assessments function operates strictly in accordance with legislation. Its overall aim is to have a positive impact on Barnsley residents by encouraging a better quality of life for customers who are on a low income.</p>

(21)

Action Points

To undertake a review of all correspondence. Standard benefit letters are produced in font size 12 'Times New Roman' style. This is a small typeface and may not be appropriate for all, particularly our customers with visual impairments. The Royal National Institute for the Blind recommends using font size 14, and a clear font style like 'Arial'.

To compile diversity procedures for staff. These should include guidance for staff on when an interpreter is needed and what to do when a customer asks for leaflets or documents in a language other than English. These procedures should be made available for all staff within Benefits & Taxation.

Completed by: N Stephenson

Date: May 2006