

Equality & Diversity Impact Assessments

Directorate / Service / Department:	Finance
Person responsible for the assessment:	Julie Ryan (Training & Development) Nicola Stephenson (Performance) Rita Silcock (Fairer Charging) Janet Kirk (Fairer Charging) Ann-Louise Worstenholme (Appeals/DHP Officer)
Name of (proposed) policy / function:	Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) Policy New: Existing: ✓
Process area Identifier (PID) / Name:	999 Discretionary Housing Payment
(1)	<p>Briefly describe the aims, objectives and purpose of the policy / function:</p> <p>To assist our customers who need extra help with housing costs in addition to what they are already receiving in housing and/or council tax benefit.</p>
(2)	<p>Are there any associated objectives of the policy / function?</p> <p>Through the operation of the DHP policy, the Benefits Service aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alleviate poverty ▪ Encourage and sustain residents in employment ▪ Support the vulnerable ▪ Safeguard residents in their homes and keep families together.
(3)	<p>Who is intended to benefit from the policy / function and in what way?</p> <p>Housing and/or council tax benefit customers. The award is intended as a short-term measure to ease difficult circumstances.</p>
(4)	<p>What outcomes are expected from this policy / function?</p> <p>To help customers through personal crises and difficult events. To assist Benefit staff to administer the scheme fairly.</p>

(5)	<p>What factors / forces could contribute to / detract from the outcomes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The funding for DHPs comes from Central Government and is limited per year, so if the allocated amount is spent, no more awards can be made. (This circumstance has not yet occurred within Barnsley MBC). ▪ No DHP award will cross over into a new financial year. Customers are expected to reapply. ▪ The customer providing the relevant supporting evidence. ▪ The customer providing correct and accurate details, wrong information could lead to fraudulent claims. ▪ Lack of knowledge/awareness of the scheme by both customers and employees. ▪ The DHP officers take into consideration a wide variety of circumstances when deciding on awarding DHP, examples are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is there a genuine risk of eviction if help with housing costs is not provided? ○ What other outgoings does the customer have? ○ Does the customer or family members suffer health problems? ○ Could the customer re-locate to alternative accommodation with lower housing costs?
(6)	<p>Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the policy / function?</p> <p>Customers, Appeals & Overpayments Staff, Central Government.</p>
(7)	<p>Who implements the policy and who is responsible for the policy / function?</p> <p>Chris Armitage, Benefits Manager, Benefits & Taxation Division.</p>
(8)	<p>Is there any monitoring data available? (e.g. results from consultations, surveys, focus groups)</p> <p>No, there was no diversity data available.</p>

(9)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact on ethnic groups? Yes Please explain:</p> <p>The publicity materials / application form for DHPs is only available in English; this has potential to impact on certain non-English speaking groups.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i></p> <p>We have viewed the actual form and leaflets that are displayed within the Barnsley Connects town centre office.</p>
(10)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to gender? No Please explain:</p> <p>The application form does not question an individual's gender. The policy has no differential effect on gender. Both males and females have equal access to Housing Benefit; there is no preferential treatment of either sex.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i></p> <p>By viewing the application form. Also the Appeals/DHP Officer confirms that 'gender' is not taken into account when making a decision on awarding a DHP.</p>
(11)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to disability? Yes Please explain:</p> <p>Medical circumstances are taken into account when awarding DHPs. Decisions are made based on the disabled person's needs and requirements. The policy is likely to have a positive impact on disabled customers.</p> <p>A reason for refusal of a DHP could be that an individual's housing costs are too high, so they are advised to find an alternative home. But, if a disabled person's property has been adapted it might not be feasible for this person to re-locate.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i></p> <p>Discussions with Appeals/DHP Officer.</p>

<p>(12)</p>	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to sexual orientation? No Please explain:</p> <p>DHP officers are not aware of an individual's sexual orientation when making decisions. The award is made purely on the individual's financial situation.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i></p> <p>Written documentation does not currently ask for these details, but will do from December 2005, when forms will be updated to include information on civil partnerships</p>
<p>(13)</p>	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to age? No Please explain:</p> <p>The DHP scheme is available to individuals irrespective of their age. The customer must demonstrate that he/she is suffering from financial hardship. Customers under 25 are likely to apply for a DHP if they are living on their own in privately rented accommodation, these people are restricted in the benefits they receive, this is due to legislation regarding single room rent. The legislative requirement does have a negative effect on under 25s.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i></p> <p>Discussions with Appeals/DHP 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 Please explain:</p> <p>The award of a DHP will not be affected or determined by the religious beliefs of a customer. None of the benefit forms ask for this information, the assessment is based on financial circumstances.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i></p> <p>There is no need to ask the customer for these details.</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 Please explain:</p> <p>The policy may have a differential impact as the assessment takes into account dependents/caring responsibilities. DHP Officers could decide it unreasonable to expect a customer to re-locate with their children and have to change schools. But cases are all looked at individually, taking into account the needs of the customer and their family.</p> <p>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</p> <p>DHP Application Form.</p>
<p>(16)</p>	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to their offending past? Yes Please explain:</p> <p>The policy intends to have a positive impact on these groups of people, particularly in cases where there is an issue of homelessness. If an individual has just left prison and has nowhere to live the Authority would award a DHP.</p> <p>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</p> <p>Existing DHPs.</p>
<p>(17)</p>	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact on Trans people? No Please explain:</p> <p>DHP officers would be unaware of whether an individual is Transgendered or transsexual. This would have no bearing on whether a DHP is awarded.</p> <p>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</p> <p>There is no need to ask the customer for these details.</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 Please explain:</p> <p>The overall aim of the DHP policy is to alleviate poverty. The differential impacts identified do not amount to an adverse impact in this policy.</p> <p>The possible chance of discrimination could lie with the DHP officer, who is responsible for making the decision, but this member of staff discusses the application with another DHP officer, and it is then passed to the Principal Officer to authorise.</p> <p>If a customer disagrees with the DHP decision, they can request that their application be reviewed. This review is carried out by a different DHP officer.</p> <p>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this? The differential impacts identified were of a positive nature and are in accordance with DHP legislation.</p>		
(19)	<p>Are the differential impacts caused by unlawful discrimination? No</p> <p>The function satisfies all current legislative requirements.</p>		
(20)	<p>Findings</p> <p>We found there was no negative impact on the individual equality target groups. The identity of some groups is unknown, as the DHP application form does not ask customers to reveal this information for example: gender, religion, sexual orientation. Although, there is an unintended negative impact on the public as a whole, due to the scheme not actively being promoted or being used to its full advantage. See DHP expenditure below:</p> <table data-bbox="478 1473 1117 1512" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">2003/04 £24,279</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2004/05 £23,730</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">Allocated amount for DHPs from the Department of Works & Pensions is £36,930</p> <p>There seemed to be a lack of knowledge of the DHP scheme with staff, customers and other outside bodies, (eg: Welfare Rights, CAB, Visiting teams, CIS, Community groups). We are aware that the DHP fund has a limit, but that limit has never been reached.</p>	2003/04 £24,279	2004/05 £23,730
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(21)

Action Points

The principal DHP officer has rewritten the policy.
Awaiting approval by the Benefits Manager.

Review DHP leaflet and application form. DHP leaflet could be simplified, i.e. heading could read 'Do you need help with your housing costs'.

Leaflet and form should be available or offer to be available in different formats.

A 'DHP notice' could be included on benefit notifications, as this will certainly target everyone who could possibly apply.

Further promotion of DHPs.

Completed by: Nicola Stephenson

Date: 28/10/05