

Equality & Diversity Impact Assessments

Directorate / Service / Department:	Finance
Person responsible for the assessment:	Nicola Stephenson (Performance) Julie Ryan (Training & Development) Rita Silcock (Fairer Charging) Richard Thorpe (Enquiry Officer)
Name of (proposed) policy / function:	Enquiry Officers New: Existing: ✓
Process area Identifier (PID) / Name:	N/Ap
(1)	Briefly describe the aims, objectives and purpose of the policy / function: Providing a high quality enquiry service (telephone, written or visiting) in relation to Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates.
(2)	Are there any associated objectives of the policy / function? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximising the collection of CTax & NDR • Ensuring the correct charge is applied to properties • Ensuring maintenance of the taxation database • Minimising fraud • Assisting in the recovery of debt by tracing absconders.
(3)	Who is intended to benefit from the policy / function and in what way? BMBC – By maximising revenue for the Council Residents and property owners – By receiving discounts/ exemptions they are entitled to for council tax and non-domestic rates.
(4)	What outcomes are expected from this policy / function? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To assist CTax & NDR section in ensuring tax charges are applied correctly • Ensuring sections have enough information to carry out their roles • Increased revenue for the Authority through debt recovery by the tracing of absconders.

(5)	<p>What factors / forces could contribute to / detract from the outcomes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Protection legislation – makes it difficult to trace absconders • The Internet and computer systems are extremely valuable and contribute to the outcome of this service. The provision of laptops whilst officers are on visit benefit the function with links to internal computer systems • Lack of written procedures may detract particularly if any claims for discrimination occur • Lack of information from both staff and residents can create difficulties for the function.
(6)	<p>Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the policy / function?</p> <p>Barnsley MBC, residents, property owners & business owners</p>
(7)	<p>Who implements the policy and who is responsible for the policy / function?</p> <p>Dave Whittingham, Taxation Manager</p>
(8)	<p>Is there any monitoring data available? (e.g. results from consultations, surveys, focus groups)</p> <p>There was no previous diversity data available.</p>
(9)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact on ethnic groups? No</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>This function aims to have no differential impact on these groups. Sometimes whilst enquiry officers are conducting a property inspection difficulties can arise from language barriers. In some circumstances with non-English speaking individuals there is often a family member who is able to speak some English. Also, the National Interpreting Service could be used. There can be difficulties in tracing absconders who were born outside the UK; this is due to lack of background information.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i></p> <p>None, there was no policies or procedures to refer to; the assessment was compiled through discussions with the Enquiry Officer.</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 is no differential impact due to the gender of an individual. Gender is not taken into account for council tax/non domestic rate purposes, it is purely on value of property and the rateable value for NDR. An individual's gender would be irrelevant to Officers when carrying out property inspections.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Same as Section (8)</p>
(11)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to disability? No</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>The function has no differential impact on someone with disabilities. A disabled person, whose property has been adapted for their needs, could be entitled to a discount in their Council Tax, but this is in accordance with legislation. The officer's role is to visit the property for which an application has been made in order to determine eligibility. Visits are made as soon as possible. The officer aims to be responsive to the needs of the individual and in some circumstances carers may need to be present at the time of the visit.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Same as Section (8)</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>An individual's sexual orientation is irrelevant to the role of the enquiry officers.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Same as Section (8)</p>

(13)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact due to age? No</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i> The officers' duties are carried out regardless of the age of individuals involved in the enquiry. Telephone calls or visits may need to be tailored to suit the individual.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Same as Section (8)</p>
(14)	<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> The religious beliefs of an individual are usually unknown and would make no difference to how they were dealt with by the enquiry officers. Customers can re-arrange visits if necessary to suit their circumstances.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Same as Section (8)</p>
(15)	<p>Are there any concerns that the policy/function could have a differential impact on people due to them having dependants/caring responsibilities? No</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i> The function has no differential impact on people with dependants or caring responsibilities. The enquiry officers will assist the council tax section in considering claims for discounts. Discounts can be awarded for carers, students, and people resident in hospital, nursing homes or hostels. These discounts are in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Same as Section (8)</p>

(16)	<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>This information would be unknown. The internal computer system has a function that identifies health and safety risks i.e. violent or aggressive individuals. The officer could then tailor their visit i.e. by taking another officer along.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Same as Section (8)</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>In most cases whether an individual was transgendered or transsexual would be unknown and would be irrelevant for the purpose of the Enquiry Officers visit.</p> <p><i>What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?</i> Same as Section (8)</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?</p> <p><i>Please explain:</i></p> <p>There were no differential impacts identified for this function.</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>We feel the function would benefit from having clear written procedures for its Enquiry Officers. A code of practice could be devised which sets the standards and requirements that the Division expects, particularly in relation to conduct and health & safety issues on visits. Compliance with these instructions would ensure standards in quality are maintained and could help to avoid claims of discrimination.</p>

(21)

Action Points

The introduction of a code of conduct.

Completed by: N Stephenson

Date: 25/5/06