

INITIAL SCREENING – STAGE 1 (See Guidance information)

As a public authority we need to ensure that our strategies, policies, functions and services, current and proposed have given due regard to equality and diversity.

Please complete the following questions to determine whether a Full Equality Assessment is required.

Name of policy, strategy or function: Discretionary Hardship Payment scheme within the localised Council Tax Support scheme.	Ref: cbDHP
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Responsible Officer: Clive Biddlestone	Role: Equality Assessment Task Group
Directorate: Corporate Resources	Assessment Date: 8 March 2013

Is this a:	<u>Policy X</u>	Strategy ☐	Function x	Service ☐
Is this:	New or Proposed ☐	Already exists and is being reviewed	Is Changing	☐

1. What are the main aims, objectives of the policy, strategy, function or service and the intended outcomes and who is likely to benefit from it

Aims: The Equality Assessment carried out on the Council Tax Support scheme identified there will be particular groups that would be adversely impacted by the local scheme. In an attempt to mitigate some of this a £1million hardship fund was proposed as part of the design of the scheme. The policy for the hardship fund seeks to address some of the financial difficulties likely to occur following the introduction of the Council Tax Support scheme by those most adversely affected, those being citizens of working age and not included in any of the protected categories.

This scheme aims to provide short term financial assistance with payment of Council Tax. The objectives being to:

- Alleviate poverty
- Help those who are helping themselves
- Support work incentives
- Supporting the vulnerable

This scheme is a cash limited discretionary fund to support people to meet their Council Tax liability where they are able to demonstrate hardship. The test of hardship will be determined by the applicant's individual circumstances and financial ability to make payment.

Each application will be considered on its own merits.

For the purpose of claimants being treated as being in hardship, this is where they cannot meet their immediate basic and essential needs. Basic and essential needs are defined as those listed below, they are in line with Universal Credit regulations but this does not constitute an exhaustive list.

Heating
Food
Hygiene

In assessing basic and essential needs we will take into consideration the claimants age, health and status.

A Discretionary Hardship Payment scheme limited to £1m will be provided by the City Council.

The demand for assistance is expected to significantly outstrip the overall funding.

Applications will be subject to an income and expenditure assessment (including looking at levels of savings) as part of the assessment of entitlement to an award and the value and length of any award.

2. Explain how the main aims of the policy, strategy, function or service will demonstrate due regard to the aims of the General Duty?

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| 1. Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation? | Yes |
| 2. Advance equality of opportunity? | Yes |
| 3. Foster good relations? | Yes |
| 4. Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people? | Yes |
| 5. Encourage participation of disabled people? | Yes |
| 6. Consider more favourable treatment of disabled people? | Yes |

Discretionary Hardship Payment Scheme awards will be made to applicants irrespective of age, disability, gender re-assignment, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, marital status or whether the claimant is pregnant. The defining factor for an award is an inability to meet the cost for basic and essential needs, including heating, food and hygiene. All applicants have to be in receipt of some Council Tax Support.

When designing the Council Tax Support Scheme protection was maintained for Pensioners (as prescribed by statute), claimants entitled to a disability premium, claimants responsible for a child under the age of 6, claimants responsible for a disabled child, those of working age in receipt of a war pension, carers and people in receipt of ESA with a qualifying disability benefit.

The Discretionary Hardship scheme will compliment the already provided protection to vulnerable groups and dependant on individual financial circumstances will assist CTS claimants who have disabilities without having a qualifying benefit.

During the extensive consultation exercise undertaken to obtain views of the proposed Localised Council Tax Support scheme feedback suggested that the Discretionary Hardship scheme was well received and believed to be a positive aspect of the overall scheme. 76 % of respondents were in favour of the scheme.

3. What does your current data tell you about who your policy, strategy, function or service may affect:

Service users	Yes
Employees	No

Wider community no

Please provide an explanation for your 'Yes' or 'No' answer

We are aware that 47227 working age claimants will be affected by the reduction in funding of the Council Tax Support Scheme. This policy aims to assist those in severe financial difficulties.

During the extensive consultation exercise undertaken to obtain views of the proposed Localised Council Tax Support scheme feedback suggested that the Discretionary Hardship scheme was well received and believed to be a positive aspect of the overall scheme. 76 % of respondents were in favour of the scheme.

There are no adverse differential impacts noted for different equality characteristics. The Discretionary Hardship Scheme aims to provide additional support to those most in need regardless of protected characteristics.

4. Are there any aspects of the policy, strategy, function or service, including how it is delivered, or accessed, that could contribute to inequality? (including direct or indirect discrimination to service users or employees)

No

Please provide an explanation for your 'Yes' or 'No' answer

Discretionary Hardship Payment Scheme awards will be made to applicants irrespective of age, disability, gender re-assignment, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, marital status or whether the claimant is pregnant. The defining factor for an award is an inability to meet the cost of basic and essential needs, including heating, food and hygiene. All applicants have to be in receipt of some Council Tax Support

The Discretionary Hardship Payment scheme is part of the response to abolishing Council Tax Benefit and is intrinsically linked to the Council Tax support scheme.

There are no adverse differential impacts noted for different equality characteristics within this policy.

The Discretionary Housing Payments Policy recognises and addresses the needs of individuals on a case by case basis. It will target support within these areas and will continue to monitor the impact on them.

The discretionary hardship scheme is available to those people who will experience severe financial difficulty as a result of the introduction of the Council Tax Support scheme. It will be promoted widely and included on the City Council website along with a downloadable application form.

5. Will the policy, strategy, function or service, have an adverse (negative) impact upon the lives of people, including employees and service users?

No

Please provide an explanation for your 'Yes' or 'No' answer

There are no adverse differential impacts resulting from the Discretionary Hardship Payment Scheme, noted for different equality characteristics.

The funding from the City Council recognises that some people will need help following the changes but the level of funding is unlikely to be sufficient to support all individuals identified as needing help.

The policy for the hardship fund seeks to address some of the financial difficulties likely to occur following the introduction of the CTS scheme by those most adversely affected, those being citizens of working age and not included in any of the protected categories.

6. Is an Equality Assessment required?

If your answer to question 2 has identified potential adverse impact and you have answered '**yes**' to any of the following questions 3, 4, or 5, then you should carry out a Full Equality Assessment.

Does the Policy, Strategy, Function or Service require a Full Equality Assessment? **No**

If a Full Equality Assessment is required, before proceeding you should discuss the scope of the assessment with service managers in your service area as well as the Directorate Contact Officer.

If a Full Equality Assessment is **Not** required, please sign the declaration and complete the Summary statement below, then forward a copy of the Initial Screening to your Directorate Contact Officer

If a Full Equality Assessment **Is** required, you will need to sign the declaration and complete the Summary statement below, detailing why the Policy, Strategy, Function or Service is moving to a Full Equality Assessment. Then continue with your Assessment

DECLARATION

A Full Equality Assessment not required, the Initial Screening has demonstrated that the Policy, Strategy, Function or Service is robust; there is no potential for discrimination or adverse impact. All opportunities to promote equality have been taken.

Chairperson: Clive Biddlestone

Summary statement:

Having considered the impacts in respect of the

Sign-off Date: 08/03/13

it is not considered that any of the protected characteristic groupings will be adversely impacted by the Discretionary Hardship payment scheme and therefore a full EA is not required.

However, the approach taken will help those with severe financial difficulties which may include people from all protected equality characteristics.

Quality check: The screening document has been checked using the agreed audit arrangements in the Directorate:

Name: (Officer/Group carrying out the Quality Check)

Date undertaken:

Screening review statement:

Directorate:

Contact number:

Equality Assessment Task Group Members

☐	<u>Name</u>	<u>Role on Task Group</u> (e.g. service user, manager or service specialist)	<u>Contact Number</u>
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