



## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

<p>Stage 1: Title and aims of the activity (“activity” is an umbrella term covering policies, procedures, guidance and decisions).</p>	
Service	Business Services
Section	Finance - Benefits
Title of the activity etc.	Benefits Budget
Aims of the activity	<p>This EIA concerns the Benefits budget within Finance. The budget funds the delivery of the Council’s legal obligation and strategy in relation to housing benefit, council tax reduction, free school meal, school clothing grants, the Scottish Welfare Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments and Blue Badge applications mainly through a staff resource.</p> <p>The strategy ensures that the council continues to meet the needs of our financially vulnerable residents and other stakeholders by providing a fast and effective benefit processing system.</p> <p>The Benefits budget will fund the Benefits Team to ensure financially vulnerable residents receive the right amount of benefit on time, receive a responsive telephone and face-to-face enquiry service and that the Benefits Team is able to continue to adapt to the challenging change agenda particularly in regard to welfare reform.</p> <p>We will do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that all our processes are as streamlined as possible in order to deliver a fast and accurate benefit calculation</li> <li>• Working with other services, external partners and stakeholders to ensure a joined up approach to customer service</li> <li>• Working with senior management to promote the strategic direction of the council</li> <li>• Ensuring compliance with legal frameworks and guidance</li> <li>• Engaging with customers on issues that affect them</li> <li>• Through a rigorous performance monitoring and management regime</li> <li>• The Benefits budget will be impacted in 2015/16 because of a reduction in administration grant from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) followed in 2016/17 by a reduction to take account of the transfer of fraud investigation work to the Single Fraud Investigation Service under the (DWP). The widening of the gap between the cost of delivering the service and administration grant is a concern.</li> </ul>

Author(s) & Title(s)	<input type="text"/> Benefits Manager
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Stage 2: List the evidence that has been used in this assessment.	
Internal data (customer satisfaction surveys; equality monitoring data; customer complaints).	The Benefits Team Plan includes a range of performance measures, which enable managers to monitor both quantitative and qualitative performance. Customer satisfaction levels are monitored on a regular basis, including the level of satisfaction with the delivery of the benefit service
Internal consultation with staff and other services affected.	Consultation with members of the Benefits team, members of the Benefits Policy Board, Finance Management Team and consultation with senior management team which identified the requirement for continued investment in Benefits to support financially vulnerable residents at a time of significant change.
External consultation (partner organisations, community groups, and councils).	<p>This budget supports the work of the service as it continues to deliver a range of financial assistance schemes to financially vulnerable residents.</p> <p>The Budget Simulator (online tool where members of the public can set the budget) will provide feedback on where they believe the local priorities are.</p> <p>Community Engagement events with Area Managers have taken place and these are further opportunities to explore views in regard to the general views of budgets.</p>
External data (census, available statistics).	The Department of Work and Pensions publishes caseload and speed of processing data in relation to housing benefit. The Scottish Government publishes similar data in relation to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
Other (general information as appropriate).	The Benefits Team Plan was developed to take account of work priorities and the timetable for the UK Government's welfare reform programme. It is reviewed on an annual basis.

Stage 3: Evidence Gaps.	
Are there any gaps in the information you currently hold?	<p>This is a strategic document that looks at the overall approach to benefits service delivery. The benefits budget covers this approach.</p> <p>We are aware that engaging with financially vulnerable residents can be challenging, particularly when advising them of future changes that will affect their benefit entitlement.</p>

Stage 4: Measures to fill the evidence gaps.		
What measures will be taken to fill the information gaps before the activity is implemented? These should be included in the action plan at the back of this form.	Measures:	Timescale:
	The Benefits Team will work with the Corporate Communications Team to monitor the impact of communications and identify where improvements can be made.	Ongoing

Stage 5: Are there potential impacts on protected groups? Please complete for each protected group by inserting "yes" in the applicable box/boxes below.				
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unknown
Age – Younger			Yes	
Age – Older			Yes	
Disability			Yes	
Race – (includes Gypsy Travellers)			Yes	
Religion or Belief			Yes	
Gender – male/female			Yes	
Pregnancy and maternity			Yes	
Sexual orientation – (includes Lesbian/ Gay/Bisexual)			Yes	

Gender reassignment – (includes Transgender)			Yes	
Marriage and Civil Partnership			Yes	

**Stage 6: What are the positive and negative impacts?**

Impacts.	Positive (describe the impact for each of the protected characteristics affected)	Negative (describe the impact for each of the protected characteristics affected)
Please detail the potential positive and/or negative impacts on those with protected characteristics you have highlighted above. Detail the impacts and describe those affected.		

**Stage 7: Have any of the affected groups been consulted?**

If yes, please give details of how this was done and what the results were. If no, how have you ensured that you can make an informed decision about mitigating steps?	There needs to be careful parameters set in relation to the discussion because the administration of benefits is based on a legal framework and public attitudes can sometimes be quite harsh towards benefit claimants resulting in unfair characterisations.
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**Stage 8: What mitigating steps will be taken to remove or reduce negative impacts?**

These should be included in any action plan at the back of this form.	Mitigating Steps	Timescale

Stage 9: What steps can be taken to promote good relations between various groups?	
These should be included in the action plan.	Engagement events are held in the evenings in order to maximise the widest possible attendance from a cross section of the population.

Stage 10: How does the policy/activity create opportunities for advancing equality of opportunity?
The budget will support the Benefits Team in the development of systems and processes that will improve the assistance offered to financially vulnerable households and will promote a holistic approach to service delivery.

Stage 11: What equality monitoring arrangements will be put in place?	
These should be included in any action plan (for example customer satisfaction questionnaires).	The overall budget will not change, but equality considerations are considered as part of the development of the Benefits Team Plan. However where the action points within the Team Plan relate to UK or Scottish Government legislation or policy changes it is the responsibility of those bodies to carry out an EIA.

Stage 12: What is the outcome of the Assessment?	
Please complete the appropriate box/boxes	1      No negative impacts have been identified –please explain.
	The Benefits budget is an over-arching budget which supports how the council deliver financial assistance to its residents. As the remit of the team is constrained by a legislative framework at UK Government level, it is more appropriate to consider any negative or positive impacts as and when the benefits team develops projects that are part of a council driven improvement agenda.
	2      Negative Impacts have been identified, these can be mitigated - please explain. * Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen.
	3      The activity will have negative impacts which cannot be mitigated fully – please explain. * Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen

\* Stage 13: Set out the justification that the activity can and should go ahead despite the negative impact.

Stage 14: Sign off and authorisation.

Sign off and authorisation.	1) Service and Team	Corporate Services, Finance, Benefits.	
	2) Title of Policy/Activity	Benefits Budget	
	3) <b>Authors:</b> I/We have completed the equality impact assessment for this policy/activity.	Name: <input type="text"/>	Name:
		Position: Benefits Manager	Position:
		Date: 06/11/14	Date:
		Signature:	Signature:
		Name:	Name:
		Position:	Position:
	Date:	Date:	
	Signature:	Signature:	
4) Consultation with Service Manager	Name: Head of Finance, <input type="text"/>	Date:	
5) Authorisation by Director or Head of Service	Name: <input type="text"/>	Name:	
	Position: Director of Corporate Services	Position:	
	Date:	Date:	
6) If the EIA relates to a matter that has to go before a Committee, Committee report author sends the Committee Report and this form, and any supporting assessment documents, to the Officers responsible for monitoring and the Committee Officer of the relevant Committee. e.g. Social Work and Housing Committee.			Date:
7) EIA author sends a copy of the finalised form to: eia@abdnshire			Date:
(Equalities team to complete) Has the completed form been published on the website? YES/NO			Date:

Action Plan					
Action	Start	Complete	Lead Officer	Expected Outcome	Resource Implications
Development of Team	Mar 2015	Mar 2015	<input type="text"/>	Plan will take account of performance during 2014, customer feedback and the DWP timetable for the implementation of universal credit.	
Carry out EIA in relation to any action points within the Team Plan which are solely at the behest of the Council	Mar 2015	Mar 2015	<input type="text"/>	EIA	
Benefits Team will work with Corporate communications Team to monitor the impact of communications	Mar 2015	Mar 2015	<input type="text"/>	Identify improvements in communication with stakeholders	