

Equality Impact Assessment Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)

Service Area	Revenues & Benefits Service
Policy/Service being assessed	Council Tax Reduction Scheme
Is this is a new or existing policy/service?	Existing Policy
If existing policy/service please state date of last assessment	17 October 2014
EIA Review team – List of members	Council Tax Reduction Project Group
Date of this assessment	21 August 2015
Signature of completing officer (to be signed after the EIA has been completed)	Anne Bradbury
Name and signature of Head of Service (to be signed after the EIA has been completed)	Peter Robinson

Form A1

INITIAL SCREENING FOR STRATEGIES/POLICIES/FUNCTIONS FOR EQUALITIES RELEVANCE TO ELIMINATE DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTE EQUALITY



High relevance/priority



Medium relevance/priority



Low or no relevance/ priority

Note:

1. Tick coloured boxes appropriately, and depending on degree of relevance to each of the equality strands
2. Summaries of the legislation/guidance should be used to assist this screening process

Policy - CTRS	Relevance/Risk to Equalities											
State the Function/Policy /Service/Strategy being assessed:	Gender			Race			Disability			Sexual Orientation		
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CTRS – Maintain the current maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay at least 16% of the council tax charge.			✓			✓			✓			✓
CTRS – Reduce the maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay at least 20% of the council tax charge.			✓			✓			✓			✓
CTRS – Protected discount of the current 84% for those in receipt of severe disability premium, carers allowance and families with a child under the age of 5			✓			✓			✓			✓

Policy - CTRS	Relevance/Risk to Equalities																							
State the Function/Policy /Service/Strategy being assessed:	Gender			Race			Disability			Sexual Orientation			Religion/Belief			Age			Socio-economic			Priority status For EIA		
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
CTRS – Reduce the current Band D restriction to a Band C restriction so that taxpayers living in properties above a Band C would have CTR calculated on the Band C liability			✓			✓			✓			✓			✓	✓			✓			✓		
CTRS – Reduce the capital limit for CTR entitlement from £16k to £6k so that taxpayers who have capital of £6k and above would not be entitled to CTR (capital is defined as savings or property owned but <u>not</u> the property the taxpayer lives in or personal possessions)			✓			✓			✓			✓			✓	✓			✓			✓		

Stage 1 – Scoping and Defining

(1) What are the aims and objectives of policy/service?

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) has been in place since 01 April 2013 and replaced the National Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme. CTRS is a locally determined system of council tax support. The aim of the CTRS scheme is to provide financial assistance to council taxpayers who have low incomes.

Persons who are of state pension age (persons who have reached the qualifying age of State Pension Credit) are protected under the scheme in that the calculation of the reduction they are to receive has been set by Central Government. For working age applicants however the reduction they receive is to be determined by the local authority.

This equality impact assessment looks at the potential for **not only** protecting pensioners (as required under the legislation) **but also** retaining a large amount of the protections already present for working age within the existing CTRS scheme carried forward from the CTB scheme.

Where a **working age claimant** applies or continues to receive Council Tax Reduction, it is proposed that the reduction will be calculated on the same rules as the current CTRS scheme except for the following;

- Maintain the current maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay at least 16% of the council tax charge
- Reduce the maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay at least 20% of the council tax charge
- Protected discount of the current 84% for those in receipt of severe disability premium, carers allowance and families with a child under the age of 5
- Reduce the current Band D restriction to a Band C restriction
- Reduce the capital limit for CTR entitlement from £16k to £6k

These changes will apply from 01 April 2016

Central Government has not been prescriptive in how an authority should protect vulnerable groups, but points to the Council's existing responsibilities including the Child Poverty Act 2010, the Disabled Person Act 1986 and the Housing Act 1996 as well as the public sector equality duty in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

The current level of assistance (*6,594 claimants and average amount per week of £18.50 per claimant*) is provided for pension age claimants, details for working age claimants are given at the end of this assessment.

<p>(2) How does the policy/service fit with the council's wider objectives?</p>	<p>All persons within the Council's area who have a low income may apply for support and assistance with their Council Tax.</p> <p>By making an application, providing evidence of their income and household circumstances, their potential entitlement for support will be calculated in line with Central Government prescribed requirements for the Council Tax Reduction scheme.</p> <p>The maintenance of a full reduction scheme, with few changes from the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme fits with the Corporate objectives in that it meets, as far as possible, equality and sustainability.</p> <p>The reduction scheme assists the local economy and also ensures, as far as possible within the constraints on a reduced budget, that persons on a low income will be able to meet their Council Tax liability.</p> <p>Pension age claimants will not see a reduction in their support however working age cases will see a reduction in the support they currently receive.</p>
<p>(3) What are the expected outcomes of the policy/service? Who is intended to benefit from the policy/service and in what way?</p>	<p>The desired outcomes are as follows;</p> <p>Pension Age Claimants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That all pensioners receive the level of support required by regulations set by Central Government (Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Prescribed Requirements) Regulations 2012); • That all pensioner claimants or existing working age claimants who rise to pension age are able to receive Council Tax Reduction in line with the regulations; and • That all pensioner claimants continue to receive the correct level of council tax reduction at all times. <p>Working Age Claimants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That all working age claimants are still able to receive Council Tax Reduction but the level of reduction payable will reduce; and • That all working age claimants continue to receive the correct level of council tax reduction at all times.

<p>(4) Does this policy/service have the potential to directly or indirectly discriminate against any particular group?</p> <p>Please identify all groups that are affected and briefly explain why</p>	<p>RACE NO</p> <p>The reduction support scheme does not take race into account when calculating the level of support</p>	<p>AGE YES</p> <p>The reduction support scheme takes into account age when calculating the level of support available. Pensioners will not see any reduction in the support paid (as they are protected under regulations set by central government). Working age claimants will be affected due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction of the maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay at least 20% of the council tax charge • Reducing the current Band D restriction to a Band C restriction • Reduce the capital limit for CTR entitlement from £16k to £6k 	<p>GENDER NO</p> <p>The reduction support scheme does not take gender into account when calculating the level of support</p>
	<p>RELIGION/BELIEF NO</p> <p>The reduction support scheme does not take religion or belief into account when calculating the level of support</p>	<p>DISABILITY NO</p> <p>The reduction support scheme continues to have in-built protections for disability in the form of;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the award of additional premiums for disablement; • disregarding higher levels of income where a claimant is in remunerative work and is disabled; and • there is no requirement to have non dependant deductions where a claimant is disabled 	<p>SEXUAL ORIENTATION NO</p> <p>The reduction support scheme does not take sexual orientation into account when calculating the level of support</p>

<p>(5) Are there any obvious barriers to accessing the service?</p>	<p>No – customers will continue to access the reduction scheme in an identical fashion to the existing Council Tax Reduction scheme. The approach of the Council has been to provide a range of options for claiming and customers are encouraged to make a claim at any time.</p>
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(6) How does the policy/service contribute to promotion of equality?	The Council Tax Reduction scheme provides essential help towards the Council Tax liability for all claimants on a low income. By continuing to assess entitlement on a mean tested basis, similar to the national approach to means tested benefits, the scheme is equitable albeit that the level of support overall may be reduced to working age claimants.
(7) Does the policy/service have the potential to promote good relations between groups?	Due to the nature of the cuts required in the level of council tax reduction, all working age claimants will see a reduction to their current entitlement, however the way that the Council is introducing the changes by maintaining the means test, allows the most vulnerable to receive a relatively higher level of support.

<u>Stage 2 - Information Gathering</u>	
(1) What type and range of evidence or information have you used to help you make a judgement about the policy or service?	<p>Extensive modelling from existing data. The modelling has been based on changes to the existing Council Tax Benefit scheme administered by the Council.</p> <p>Modelling information has included number of working age claimants and amount of council tax benefit paid (<i>6,738 claimants and average amount per week of £14.37 per claimant</i>), claim numbers and benefit paid across council tax bands, range of income types and household make-up.</p>

(2) What consultation/ information has been used?

What new consultation, if any, do you need to undertake?

A full consultation with the public has been undertaken as required by the legislation (Local Government Finance Act 2012). Whilst pension age claimants are protected, the authority will still, as part of the consultation process, envisage pension age claimants and pensioners generally to respond to the consultation itself.

The consultation process is comprehensive and encourages a full response to the changes to the current reduction scheme, (notwithstanding the fact that the authority is obliged to implement the scheme determined by Central Government for pension age claimants).

Interest groups have been directly consulted as part of the process.

The Public consultation took place during the period 06.07.15 until 16.08.15

The results on the proposals are as follows:-

Proposal 1	Strongly Agree / Agree	Strongly Disagree / Disagree
Financial support 20% and	51%	42%
CTR cap to Band C	45%	47%
Capital Limit £6000	48%	47%
Average %	48%	45%
Proposal 2		
Financial support 20%	48%	45%

<u>Stage 3 – Making a Judgement</u>	
(1) From your data and consultations is there any adverse or negative impact identified for any particular group? Is there any evidence of needs not being met? e.g. language or physical access barriers; lack of appropriate resources or facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No the impact on the working age group is consistent • Comments from the consultation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Financial - Inability to meet the increased charge
(2) If there is an adverse impact, can this be justified?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
(3) What actions are going to be taken to reduce or eliminate negative or adverse impact?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance in meeting payments – 12 monthly instalments / payment arrangements to prevent recovery process • Advice of the Council Tax Discretionary Hardship Scheme for customers experiencing exceptional hardship
(4) Is there any positive impact? Does it promote equality of opportunity between different groups and actively address discrimination?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No

<u>Stage 4 – Action Planning, Review & Monitoring</u>	
<p>If No Further Action is required then go to – Review & Monitoring</p> <p>(1) Action Planning – Specify any changes or improvements which can be made to the service or policy to mitigate or eradicate negative or adverse impact on specific groups, including resource implications.</p>	<p>Following the consultation, the changes proposed are to be reviewed. The scheme will be reviewed annually thereafter.</p> <p>The Council has established a full project plan to ensure that changes are introduced correctly, accurately and on time</p>
<p>(2) Review and Monitoring State how and when you will monitor policy and EIA Action Plan</p>	<p>Full monitoring of scheme implementation will be undertaken on a monthly basis in line with the accepted project plan.</p> <p>The Revenues and Benefits Service will undertake monthly and quarterly collection of data.</p> <p>The Council will review the policy annually. It is expected that due to changes in legislation and funding, that the level of Council Tax Support available will change annually.</p>

An Equality Impact Assessment on this policy was undertaken on 21 August 2015