

Chesterfield Borough Council Equality Impact Assessment - Full Assessment Form

<i>Title of the policy, project, service, function or strategy:</i>	Advice Agency Future Funding	
<i>Service Area:</i>	Corporate	
<i>Section:</i>	Policy and Partnerships	
<i>Lead Officer:</i>	Donna Reddish	
<i>Date of assessment:</i>	Updated 20.02.24	
<i>Is the policy, project, service, function or strategy:</i>		
<i>Existing</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Changed</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<i>New / Proposed</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Section 1 – Clear aims and objectives

1. What is the aim of the policy, project, service, function or strategy?

Like all local authorities, Chesterfield Borough Council continues to face significant financial challenges. The sustained period of austerity since 2010, the ongoing risks and uncertainties over future funding arrangements, the budgetary impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and a sustained period of exceptionally high inflation, have all impacted on the Council's financial position.

The Council's Budget Strategy was approved by Council in July 2023. The accompanying report detailed the need to drive out savings of at least £2.5m at pace, within a framework that was prudent, responsible, and sustainable, and optimised to secure savings in the short- and medium-term to reduce and remove reliance on reserves, stabilising the Council's financial position and establishing affordability of Council services.

Following the Budget Strategy approval, a detailed approach to addressing the £2.5m budget gap was developed and approved by Cabinet in November 2023. One of the proposals within the plan is to phase out the discretionary grants to voluntary sector advice agencies.

2. Who is intended to benefit from the policy project, service, function or strategy and how?

Traditionally, Chesterfield Borough Council has provided or funded more services than many other district and borough councils. We are proud of this, but in the light of the serious financial challenges facing us. We cannot sustain this level of service and support in the future. This means that difficult choices need to be made and some services and provisions will need to change or cease. We are seeking to undertake this work in a managed way to enable transition periods where possible.

The current funding agreement runs out on 31.03.24 and we could choose to end the contract on three months' notice. However, we have sought to avoid this type of guillotine position and are seeking to establish a reasonable transition period which is both affordable to the Council and enables some adjustment time for the advice agencies. The original funding proposal developed for consideration included a two year funding settlement with a 50% reduction per annum from the 2023/24 funding level.

3. What outcomes do you want to achieve?

This proposal contributes towards the achievement of a balanced budget for 2024/25 and beyond. We have sought to develop proposals which are affordable for the Council and help us to maintain mandatory and core services while enabling managed transitions for services and contributions which need to be reduced or ceased.

4. What barriers exist for both the Council and the groups/people with protected characteristics to enable these outcomes to be achieved?

During the consultation with advice agencies they submitted evidence which identified a number of concerns regarding the potential impact of the phasing out of funding which relate to protected characteristics. The agencies identified that a significant proportion of their clients are disabled and/ or have long-term health conditions. Digital exclusion is a concern due to age and disability and some of the agencies have reported that women are more likely to access services than men. This can make transformation activities to reduce costs more challenging.

5. Any other relevant background information

Grants to the advice agencies are not a mandatory or a core Council service, they are entirely discretionary. Chesterfield Borough Council has however sought to maintain funding for as long as possible to the impact on communities.

Each agency provided a formal response to the consultation which has been included in full with the report. Some of the agencies included cases studies within their submissions. Disability and ill health considerations are demonstrated within these case studies and in the information provided regarding service usage.

Section 2 – Collecting your information

6. What existing data sources do you have to assess the impact of the policy, project, service, function or strategy?

- Advice agency websites
- Advice agency annual reports and financial statements
- Information gathered via the councils public budget conversation
- Consultation meetings with the advice agencies
- Formal submissions to the consultation by the advice agencies

7. Have you identified any gaps in the information/evidence that you have regarding the policy, project, service, function or strategy, which may be needed in order to give proper consideration?
It is not sufficient to say “we do not have the evidence”, you should identify gaps in the evidence and fill them in a proportionate and balanced manner.

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, gaps have been identified	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No, there are no gaps	

Section 3 – Additional engagement activities

8. Please list any additional engagement activities undertaken when developing the proposal and completing this EIA. Have those who are anticipated to be affected by the policy been consulted with?		
Date	Activity	Main findings
17.01.23 – 15.12.23	Budget Conversation	Respondents were asked to take part in a short survey and answer a series of broad questions about where and how they think CBC budgets should be spent. Information gathered during the budget conversation including comments and individual submissions are being used to inform proposals and key decision considerations.
06.11.23	Pre-consultation meeting with advice agencies.	Advice notification of proposals being developed and considered at Cabinet on 14.11.23 which included a proposal to phase out advice agency funding. Confirmed consultation approach and timescales. Advice agencies notified of budget conversation, asked to take part and encourage their service users to also take part.
27.11.23 / 29.11.23.	Individual consultation meetings with each advice agency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on the financial challenges facing the Council • Confirmed that we are doing all we can to avoid the minimum 3 month notice period on ceasing funding and want to enable a managed transition • Presented initial proposal

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmed that other current funding streams such as separately funded projects are unaffected. • Confirmed consultation and decision making timescales • Again encouraged advice agencies to take part in the budget conversation and encourage their service users to do so • A range of evidence to support the advice agency overviews was submitted by the agencies following the meeting. • Proposals adjusted around – additional options for phasing over longer period for agencies to consider • EIA updated
10.01.24 / 18.01.24	Individual consultation meetings with each advice agency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further discussion on initial proposals and alternative phasing approaches • Considering any alternative proposals developed • Discuss evidence submitted so far • Agreement made that advice agency formal submissions would be available to Cabinet, in full, as an Appendix to the report so that decisions makers can see the full impact of the proposal in the agencies own words • Confirmed CBC are open to discussions about specific projects should further external funding become available in the future • Proposals adjusted around phasing preferences for each agency • EIA updated
By 19.02.24	Formal submissions made in writing by advice agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submissions included as appendix to report • Management responses updated • Final proposals and recommendations made • EIA updated

Section 4 – What is the impact?

9. Summary of anticipated impacts. *Please tick at least one option per protected characteristic. Think about barriers people may experience in accessing services, how the policy is likely to affect the promotion of equality, knowledge of customer experiences to date. You may need to think about sub-groups within categories eg. older people, younger people, people with hearing impairment etc.*

	Positive impact	Negative impact	No disproportionate impact
Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability and long term conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender and gender reassignment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage and civil partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pregnant women and people on parental leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sexual orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Ethnicity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Religion and belief	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

10. Have all negative impacts identified in the table above been mitigated against with appropriate action?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	<p>The current funding agreement runs out on 31.03.24 and we could choose to end the contract on three months' notice. However, we have sought to avoid this type of guillotine position and are seeking to establish a reasonable transition period which is both affordable to the Council and enables some adjustment time for the advice agencies.</p> <p>The original funding proposal developed for consideration included a two year funding settlement with a 50% reduction per annum from the 2023/24 funding level. Alternative phasing options have been discussed with the advice agencies and two of the agencies have requested front loading of the</p>
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	<p>payments for year one and payment availability over an 18 month period rather than two years or the alternative three/ four years also offered.</p> <p>This proposal will enable a significant transition period for the advice agencies but there will still be a significant impact on service users unless alternative funding can be sourced by the agencies during this period and/or efficiency savings can be found.</p>
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11. Have you assessed the equality impact on the people who may have to implement your decision, such as staff or suppliers?				
Advice agencies	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A	<i>If no, please explain why</i>
Wider community	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A	<i>If no, please explain why</i>

Section 5 – Recommendations and monitoring

12. How are you going to monitor the policy, project, service, function or strategy, how often and who will be responsible?
Confirmed CBC are open to discussions about specific projects should further external funding become available in the future.

13. Summary of the Equality Impact Assessment
The equality impact assessment and consultation have informed and shaped the final proposals for Cabinet to consider. While full mitigation is not possible the proposal to enable a significant transition period is significantly less damaging than the three month minimum period which could have been applied.
Has due regard been given to the Public Sector Equality Duty statutory guidance <u>or</u> was there a good reason why the duty, or particular parts of it, did not apply to that decision?

The general duty requires public authorities, to have due regard to the need to:

- *Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other unlawful conduct prohibited by the act*
- *Advance equality of opportunity between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic*
- *Foster good relations between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic*

X Yes No N/A

Please provide further details if necessary

Section 6

– Knowledge management and publication

Please note the draft EIA should be reviewed by the appropriate Service Manager and the Policy Service **before** WBR, Lead Member, Cabinet, Council reports are produced.

Reviewed by Head of Service/Service Manager	Name:	Donna Reddish
	Date:	20.02.24
Reviewed by Policy Service	Name:	
	Date:	
Final version of the EIA sent to Policy Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Decision information sent to Policy Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	