

Chesterfield Borough Council

Equality Impact Assessment - Full Assessment Form

Service Area: Policy and Communications
Section: Policy and Overview and Scrutiny
Lead Officer: Donna Reddish / Anita Cunningham

Title of the policy, project, service, function or strategy the preliminary EIA is being produced for: Corporate Concessions Policy

Is the policy, project, service, function or strategy:

Existing
Changed
New/Proposed

STEP 1 – MAKE SURE YOU HAVE CLEAR AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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

The main aim of the Concessions Policy is to ensure one corporate approach to the determination and application of service charge concessions, for its discretionary services. This will provide consistency and clarity of approach across the relevant council services. The policy provides a framework to ensure concessions on service charges support the strategic aims and objectives of the council.

Who is the policy, project, service, function or strategy going to benefit and how?

Aligned with the council's strategic aims and objectives as included in the Council Plan and medium term financial plans, the policy will benefit the users of council services. In the main this includes people who live, work and/or study in Chesterfield, but also includes visitors to the area. Concessions apply to a variety of people based on income disadvantage, age and other key groups.

People that meet specific eligibility criteria to receive a concession will benefit from the reduced rate of charge which will help make services more affordable and therefore more accessible to them providing more equal opportunity for social involvement.

What outcomes do you want to achieve?

Regarding outcomes from the introduction of the policy, more clarity and consistency across the council is needed in the application of concessions. Achieving this includes identifying and using one set of eligibility criteria, most of which are based on the current, national benefits system and eligibility, taking account of benefits changes such as the migration of many benefits to the new Universal Credit benefits system.

Regarding policy outcomes for those people meeting the disadvantaged criteria specified in the policy concessions will provide an inducement to use the services in the interests of their general wellbeing by creating greater equality of access, social inclusion, physical and mental health improvement, and education and learning. This will directly assist the council in meeting a number of its social responsibilities, and strategic aims and objectives.

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

The policy will adversely affect discretionary service users who are aged over 60 as they will lose automatic access to a concession based on this criteria. The policy is moving towards a national state pension age criteria.

In place of automatic eligibility for those aged 60 or over, eligibility has been amended to apply solely to those people receiving state pension. Those people affected by this change may still meet eligibility criteria for other concessions detailed within the policy, for example they may apply for an income concession.

There are financial barriers to the council due to ongoing control and reductions by government of local government funding, alongside the requirement for the council to become self funded by 2020. The council needs to more carefully target its resources to areas of most need and review and adjust its policies accordingly.

STEP 2 – COLLECTING YOUR INFORMATION

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

Research information has been undertaken to help inform the development of this policy for its maximum success. This research includes data collected from the Scrutiny Project Group's work which looked into matters associated with the determination and application of concessions on service charges. Further research of the CIPFA (former Audit Commission) nearest neighbours has been undertaken to compare policy approach.

The subsequent report and recommendations of the council's Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum's report to Cabinet with associated EIA provide further research information gathered. This includes statistics from the national IMD index which ranks Chesterfield as 85th most deprived out of 326 authorities, and 25th most deprived for health and disability specifically, whilst also having significant employment and income challenges.

The policy will require data to be collected to enable evaluation of the impact and review of the policy. The policy requires Service Managers to have suitable methods in place to collect this data. This information will then be used to inform both decisions to vary concession rates, and to the ongoing review of the policy.

STEP 3 – FURTHER ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Please list any additional engagement activities undertaken to complete this EIA e.g. met with the Equalities Advisory Group, local BME groups, Employee representatives etc. Could you also please summarise the main findings.

| Date | Engagement Activity | Main findings |
|--|----------------------|--|
| Meetings held 16.5.16 28.6.16 14.9.16 | Policy Working Group | This Policy Working Group was established to consider the concessions policy and associated EIA. The Working Group comprises both elected councillors and employee representatives (i.e. Service Managers). Findings identify that there are different equalities needs affecting different council services. This supports the need for a corporate policy which provides a framework within which services can make flexible and responsive decisions, to ensure all services meet the council's equalities obligations. However for all services to take one single approach to application of concessions eligibility and their rates could have very detrimental effect on service delivery / cost of service delivery. Findings also include some difficulties in evidencing eligibility and the need to reprioritise eligibility for senior citizens. |
| | Research | CIPFA (former Audit Commission) nearest neighbours family group. Findings indicate that most of these local authorities have moved away from automatic eligibility for all people aged 60+, and have aligned their senior citizen concessions |

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| | | eligibility to people receiving state pension. Concession rates vary across different local authorities and different services, ranging from no concession to 50% concession, or even free service in some cases. Regarding the migration of means tested benefits to Universal Credit, little evidence was found to indicate the approach other councils are taking. |
| 20.09.16 | Financial Planning Group | Discussion regarding principles and financial considerations emerging from the policy and draft EIA. The importance of impact assessment and prioritisation in line with the Council Plan and medium term financial plan were emphasised. |

STEP 4 – WHAT’S THE IMPACT?

Is there an impact (positive or negative) on some groups/people with protected characteristics in the community? (think about race, disability, age, gender, religion or belief, sexual orientation and other socially excluded communities or groups). You may also need to think about sub groups within each equalities group or protected characteristics e.g. older women, younger men, disabled women etc.

Please describe the potential impacts both positive and negative and any action we are able to take to reduce negative impacts or enhance the positive impacts.

| Group or Protected Characteristic | Positive impacts | Negative impacts | Action |
|---|--|--|--|
| Age – including older people and younger people. | The Policy offers an inducement to encourage access to and inclusion of older and younger people in discretionary council services. | The older age eligibility criteria has been increased to state pension age. This means some people aged 60 or over, who are not receiving state pension, will lose access to a concession offered solely on this criteria. | Service users should be informed of the change. Service users should also be informed of the other concessionary categories, or other discounts, which they may be eligible for. Promote the policy to all the council's discretionary services making a charge. |
| Disabled people – physical, mental and sensory including learning disabled people and people living with HIV/Aids and cancer. | The Policy offers an inducement to encourage access to and inclusion of disabled people in discretionary council services. Eligibility criteria specifically includes concessions for Carers accompanying disabled people. | No impacts identified. | Promote the policy to all the council's discretionary services making a charge. |
| Gender – men, women and transgender. | No impacts identified. | | |
| Marital status including civil partnership. | No impacts identified. | | |

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| Pregnant women and people on maternity/paternity. Also consider breastfeeding mothers. | No impacts identified. | | |
| Sexual Orientation – Heterosexual, Lesbian, gay men and bi-sexual people. | No impacts identified. | | |
| Ethnic Groups | No impacts identified. | | |
| Religions and Beliefs including those with no religion and/or beliefs. | No impacts identified. | | |
| Other groups e.g. those experiencing deprivation and/or health inequalities. | The Policy offers an inducement to encourage the inclusion of financially disadvantaged and disabled groups in discretionary council services offered. | No impacts identified. | Promote the policy to all the council's discretionary services making a charge. |

From the information gathered above does the policy, project, service, function or strategy directly or indirectly discriminate against any particular group or protected characteristic?

Yes
No

If yes what action can be taken to stop the discrimination?

STEP 5 – RECOMMENDATIONS AND DECISION MAKING

How has the EIA helped to shape the policy, project, service, function or strategy or affected the recommendation or decision?

An EIA formed part of the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum’s Scrutiny Project Group’s work and report considered by Cabinet on 7.1.16. The recommendations in that report were supported in principal by Cabinet subject to some further review work leading to the appointment of this working group to develop a corporate Concessions Policy. Equalities issues were considered throughout the scrutiny investigation and have continued to be considered by the Concessions Policy Working Group throughout the development of this policy. Given that council services are delivered in the public interest, the EIA has helped to focus the development of the policy on the public interest, particularly those more disadvantaged and or vulnerable in society who have greater need. In this way the EIA helps place the councils social and legal responsibilities in relation to equalities, at the centre of the policy.

How are you going to monitor the policy, project, service, function or strategy, how often and who will be responsible?

The council’s Policy and Communications Manager will be responsible for ongoing monitoring and review of the policy in accordance with the Council’s scheme of delegation. The full review of the policy will take place at least every 2 years.