



EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Partial Assessment Form

Policy, practice, function or project assessed	Under-occupation policy
Lead Officer	Peter Moston
Team	Housing Options and Allocations
Start date of assessment	23 rd July 2013
Completion of assessment	

Please use this form to record your findings in relation to the assessment of an existing policy, function, service or practice.

A. POLICY, PRACTICE, FUNCTION OR PROJECT TO BE ASSESSED

A1. Please describe what are the main aims, objectives, purpose and intended outcomes of the policy or function?

To provide clear information and advice to staff and tenants on how the Council will deal with situations where tenants are affected by the Welfare Benefit changes introduced on 1st April 2013. To enable the Council to work pro-actively to help reduce under-occupation in South Cambs properties.

A2. Is this policy or function associated with any other Council policy or priority?

Yes – The Housing Options and Allocations Policy, Homelessness Prevention Strategy and The Discretionary Housing Payment Policy.

A3. Who are the intended beneficiaries/stakeholders of the policy or function? How many people are affected and from what sections of the community?

There are currently approximately 330 council tenants who are of working age, in receipt of housing benefit and under-occupying their property. These households receive a reduction in their housing benefit eligible rent of 14% for those under-occupied by one bedroom and 25% for those under-occupied by two or more bedrooms.

South Cambridgeshire tenants have been kept well informed on Welfare Reform changes including the reduced housing benefit for working age, under-occupying households. Tenants were first written to in September 2012 regarding the changes introduced on 1st April 2013 and asked to contact the Council for advice/support. Over 400 home visits or telephone interviews have taken place since tenants were first written to and articles have been published in tenants newsletters and published on South Cambs website.

Out of the 330 under-occupied tenants approximately 80 have said they wish to move to a smaller property. South Cambs will work with under-occupied households to try to minimise the impact of the Welfare Reform changes and minimise financial hardship caused by the changes.

Stakeholders will be households experiencing financial hardship/in receipt of benefits such as Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance or Employment Support Assistance which for a single person aged over 25 is currently £71.70 per week. In some cases tenants with health/mobility issues will receive additional benefits such as Personal Independence Payment which is paid to help with additional living costs likely to be incurred when people have a disability.

The changes to council tax support from April 2013 means that a significant number of those under-occupying are also now paying a contribution towards Council Tax which has reduced their available income to pay towards their rent.

A4. Is the policy/function corporate and far-reaching?

Yes – Without this policy in place many Council tenants in financial hardship would lack the support being proposed and potentially could end up being made homeless/evicted for rent arrears. This would have a knock on effect not only for the Council but for health and social care services as many of the households are vulnerable and have support needs.

A5. Are you expecting to make any significant change to the policy or service in the near future? If so, please give details.

No

A6. Is this a new or existing policy or function?

New policy needed as a result of the recent Welfare Reform Changes in order to help and support some of the most vulnerable in our District.

B. EVIDENCE/ DATA and CONSULTATION

It is important to consider all information that is available in determining whether the policy or function could have a differential impact. Please attach examples of monitoring information, research or consultation reports.

B1. What monitoring or other information do you have about relevant target groups, which will show the impact of the policy or function?

Monitoring of those working age households affected by under-occupation is carried out on a monthly basis. Questionnaires are completed after any contact made with under-occupiers and the results are reported monthly. This covers arrears such as benefits advice, referrals/information given about the approved lodger scheme, people referred for employment support and those wanting to downsize. Numbers downsizing through direct lets are reported on a monthly basis and rent arrears for under-occupiers are monitored and reviewed closely.

B2. Have you compared the data you have with the equality profile of the local population? What does it show?

This policy is targeted at South Cambs tenants who are working age, under-occupying and in receipt of housing benefit. This represents 6% of South Cambs 5,349 tenanted properties.

As a percentage of the total households of 59,960 in the District, 9% are renting from the local authority, 5% from another social landlord and 12% privately renting.

B3. Have you identified any improvements or other changes that could be made from monitoring the data?

Due to monitoring data on under-occupiers we are proposing to introduce this new policy. Data monitoring will be on-going to help ensure we are working pro-actively to reduce under-occupation amongst South Cambs tenants and to minimise the negative impact of the Welfare Reform changes.

B4. Have you consulted or involved external stakeholders about the policy or function? If so, what were their views?

South Cambs is an active member of a regional Welfare Reform support group made up of LA's and RSL's from across the region. The aim of the partnership group is to share best practice and work pro-actively to reduce under-occupation in the social rented sector. Views from the group have been considered when developing this policy.

We have consulted with the tenant participation group indirectly about the welfare benefit changes. Whilst most of our tenant partnership group participants are over retirement age and therefore not affected by these changes the general feedback is that we should be doing all we can to mitigate the impact of the welfare reforms and help those household affected.

B5. Have you undertaken any consultation with staff to assess their perception of any impacts of the policy or function? If so, what has been learnt from them?

An internal welfare reform working group has been set up to help ensure we can provide support and assistance to those affected by the changes to the welfare support system. A dedicated Under-Occupation Officer has been recruited to work closely with those affected to help tenants cope with the changes by providing advice and support on moving to smaller accommodation, taking in a lodger, employment support schemes and/or money/benefits advice.

B6. Please provide information about any other consultation, research, or involvement undertaken in relation to this impact assessment.

All affected tenants have been contacted and surveyed regarding what assistance the Council could provide and so that we understand better the circumstances of tenants affected by the welfare benefit changes.

C1. IMPACT OF THE POLICY OR FUNCTION

Assess the potential impact on each of the following protected characteristics. The impact could be negative, positive or neutral. If you assess a negative impact for any of the groups then you will need to assess whether that impact is low, medium or high. Refer to the evidence you use.

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACT	Nature of Impact (Positive, Neutral, Adverse)	Extent of Impact (Low, Medium, High)
AGE: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on different age groups.		
Currently the welfare reform changes only affect those of working-age. Therefore this policy is aimed at helping those affected, i.e those aged under Pension Credit Age.	Positive	
DISABILITY: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on disabled people.		
A high proportion of those households in receipt of housing benefit also experience health and or disability issues. This policy will positively help those households.	Positive	

GENDER REASSIGNMENT: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on people that have changed gender identity.		
This policy is inclusive to people who have undergone or are undergoing gender reassignment, but is not specific to gender reassignment.	Neutral	
MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on people who are married or in a civil partnership.		
This policy is inclusive to people regardless of their marital status, but is not specific to marriage or civil partnerships.	Neutral	
PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on pregnant or maternal mothers and those women who wish to breastfeed.		
This policy is inclusive to pregnant and maternal mothers, but is not specific to pregnancy or maternity.	Neutral	
RACE: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on different ethnic groups, including national origins, colour and nationality.		
This policy is inclusive to different ethnic groups, including national origins, colour and nationality, but is not specific to race.	Neutral	
RELIGION/BELIEF: Identify the potential impact the policy or function on different religious/faith groups.		
This policy is inclusive and applies to people of all religious/belief groups, but is not specific to religion/belief.	Neutral	
SEX: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on men and women.		
This policy is inclusive and applies to both men and women, but is not specific to sex.	Neutral	
SEXUAL ORIENTATION: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on lesbian, gay men, bisexual or heterosexual people.		
This policy is inclusive and applies to lesbian, gay men, bisexual or heterosexual people, but is not specific to sexual orientation.	Neutral	

OTHER CHARACTERISTIC SPECIFIC TO SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE – RURALITY: Identify the potential impact of the policy or function on people who are rurally isolated.		
The policy will have a positive impact on rurally isolated households by providing a range of support and advice options to help people move or receive financial/benefits advice to support their existing tenancy.	Positive	

PLEASE NOTE: Following completion of the section above, if the nature of the impact is adverse then you may need to proceed to a full equality impact assessment.

<p>C2. Could you minimise or remove any adverse or potential impact that is high, medium or low significance, in advance of a full impact assessment? Explain how.</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>C3. Does the policy or function actively promote equal opportunities and good community relations? Or could changes be made so that it does so?</p> <p>This policy is specific to council tenants of working age in receipt of housing benefit. It is intended to help those affected most by the changes to welfare reform, alleviating some of the financial hardship that will be faced by many. It will also free up some larger properties which can then be allocated to families needing larger properties and therefore making best use of Council stock.</p>
<p>C4. Please provide any further information, qualitative or quantitative that does not fit into the questions but you feel has a likely impact on this assessment.</p>

D. CONCLUSIONS			
D1. Was there sufficient data to complete the partial	Yes?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	If “NO”, what arrangements are in place for evidence gathering and continuing with the assessment?

assessment?	No?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
D2. Is the outcome of the partial assessment that the policy or function would have an adverse impact (medium or high impact) on one or more target group?	Yes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	If "YES", will you proceed to a full assessment? If so, what arrangements are in place to carry out the full assessment?
	No?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
D3. Is the outcome of the partial assessment that the policy or function would have a neutral or positive impact on equalities?	Yes?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>If "YES", have you included proposals in the Action Plan to further improve the impact of the policy or function on equalities?</p> <p>Do you plan to review the service or policy again in future to assess whether there has been any change? If so, when? This will be monitored closely and reported through the Welfare Reform Group.</p>
	No?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Has the Equalities Steering Group and the Consultative Forum reviewed the assessment? If so what were their comments?</p>
D4. Do you have any other conclusions/outcomes from the partial assessment?			

ACTION PLAN for enhancing existing practice

Recommendation/ issue to be addressed	Planned Milestone	Planned completion of milestone (date)	Officer Responsible	Progress
Continued monitoring and reporting through internal and external Welfare Reform working groups/partnerships.	N/A	Usually meet quarterly	Peter Moston	

RESOURCES

Does the above action plan require any additional resources?

No

ARRANGEMENTS FOR MONITORING

Please give your plans for monitoring the achievement of the above actions.

Through the welfare reform working group and updates to Housing Services Management Team.

SIGN OFF: The officers below confirm that this partial assessment has been completed in accordance with the Council's guidance

Signature of Lead Officer		Date:
Signature of Corporate Manager or Chief Officer:		Date:

Please retain the original form on your service area and return a copy of the completed form to the Equality & Diversity Officer.