

HDC Due Regard (Equality Analysis) Template

Due Regard (Equality Analysis) is an on-going proactive process which requires us to consider the effect our decisions are likely to have on local communities, service users and employees, particularly those most vulnerable and at risk of disadvantage.

This template has been designed to assist in the collation of information and evidence required to support the 'Due Regard' process when introducing new policies/procedures/functions and services or reviewing existing ones.

For help with this template please view the guidance document, which contains advice to assist you when you are considering the impact (both positive and negative) of the proposed actions on each of the protected equality characteristics.

Name of policy/procedure/function/service being analysed: Discretionary Housing Payments

Department and section: Corporate - Revenues and Benefits Service

Name of lead officer: Leigh Butler

Other people involved (assisting or reviewing - including any service users or stakeholder groups etc.): Ann Ball - Housing Manager, Seven Locks Housing Association, Registered Social Landlords, District and Borough Councils within Leicestershire, Landlord Forum events

Date assessment completed: 23rd December 2013

Step 1: Defining the policy/procedure/function/service

Is this a new, amended or reviewed policy? What are the aims, objectives and purpose and how will they be achieved? What are the main activities and which communities are likely to be affected by these activities? What are the expected outcomes?

The Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) guidelines have been revised resulting from the Coalition Governments Welfare Programme introduced from April 2013.

Summary

This Equality Analysis covers the equalities impact for the revised Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Policy. DHPs can be used to meet shortfalls between a customer's rent and Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

The aims and objectives of these guidelines are to:

- Reduce arrears and avoid deprivation.
- To safeguard accommodation.
- To help customers through difficult personal events and personal crisis on a short-term emergency basis.

The outcomes of these guidelines are to:

- Safeguard residents in their accommodation or to support the move into affordable accommodation.
- To alleviate poverty.

Step 2: Data collection & evidence

What relevant evidence, research, data and other information do you have and is there any further research, data or evidence you need to fill any gaps in your understanding of the potential or known affects of the policy on different communities? Include quantitative data as well as qualitative intelligence such as community input and advice.

We are capturing data for both successful and unsuccessful applications to help inform future development of the scheme. Currently there are 4,084 active claims for housing benefit of which 80 individual awards have been made for DHP.

Step 3: Consultation and involvement

Have you consulted and if so outline what you did and who you consulted with and why.

The DWP issued further guidance in March 2013 which has supported the review of the guidelines hence the changes made.

We have consulted with landlords through forums held within the district covering welfare reform changes introduced from April 2013. We have consulted with council departments and awareness sessions have been provided for staff. We have also consulted with all social landlords within the district and have provided feedback which was considered when finalising the revision to the guidelines.

Step 4: Potential impact

Considering the evidence from the data collection and feedback from consultation, which communities will be affected and what barriers may these individuals or groups face in relation to Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Other groups e.g. rural isolation, deprivation, health inequality, carers, asylum seeker and refugee communities, looked after children, deprived or disadvantaged communities and also the potential impact on Community Cohesion. Remember people have multiple characteristics so the impact of a policy on a particular community may impact people within the community differently. Where possible include numbers likely to be affected.

The potential impact of our scheme for working age across the protected characteristics is as follows:

<u>Protected Characteristic</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative:</u> What are the risks? <u>Positive:</u> What are the benefits/opportunities?
Age	✓	This policy will assist vulnerable or elderly customers in the local community remain in their home. It will also assist vulnerable young people such as those leaving care in the transition to adult life. Families with children at a critical stage of their education are also considered as a priority.
Disability	✓	The policy specifies that DHP applications from disabled applicants affected by the size restriction where it makes it hard for them to move to cheaper and suitably adapted accommodation will be prioritised (although each application will be looked at on an individual basis). Consideration will also be made for those who need to remain local so that they can access support services or a particular hospital.
Pregnancy & Maternity	✓	Applicants who are pregnant and require an additional bedroom for their baby do not qualify for the 2 bed rate of LHA or who are subject to a size restriction in their social rented sector property will potentially benefit from the policy as it can be used to cover excess between 1 bed and 2 bed LHA rate or the 14% size restriction pending the baby's birth.

Other (Socio-economic factors, criminal convictions and rural living)	✓	This policy assists with reducing arrears and avoiding deprivation and safeguarding vulnerable customer's accommodation or to support the move into affordable accommodation. It also allows for DHPs to be awarded if the customer experiences unexpected change in their income/expenditure and can assist customers move into work after a long period of unemployment. The policy also prioritises people who have previously been homeless and are being supported to settle in the community.
<u>Neutral/Negative - no direct impact:</u>		
Gender Reassignment -		There is no identifiable direct impact associated with an individual's gender reassignment status
Marriage & Civil Partnership -		Couples whether of opposite or the same sexes will be afforded the same rights so there will be no differential impact.
Race and Religion & Belief -		Whilst there is not a clear positive impact on people of particular races and religions/beliefs if the applicant can prove that their household has to live in a particular area because the community gives them support or helps them contribute the district then they may be considered a priority. Cultural support and access to religious establishments may be considered as suitable support in certain circumstances.
Sex (gender) -		Female and male applicants will be afforded the same rights but female applicants may experience a slightly more positive impact in identified priority households such as those fleeing domestic violence (national statistics show that more women experience domestic violence than men) and also in single parent households (where there are statistically more females than males). However, either sex in these priority households would be treated equally on needs rather than their sex.
Sexual Orientation -		Individuals will be considered on need regardless of their sexuality

Step 5: Mitigating and assessing the impact

If you consider there to be actual or potential adverse impact or discrimination, please outline this below. State whether it is justifiable or legitimate and give reasons. If you have identified adverse impact or discrimination that is illegal, you are required to take action to remedy this immediately. If you have identified adverse impact or discrimination that is justifiable or legitimate, you will need to consider what actions can be taken to mitigate its effect on those groups of people. Consider what barriers you can remove, whether reasonable adjustments may be necessary and how any unmet needs have identified can be addressed.

DHP is available to anyone who is in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Universal Credit and they must satisfy the eligibility criteria. Eligibility is based on the need as well as the applicant's individual circumstances and the level of risk if no assistance was offered.

Step 6: Making a decision

Summarise your findings and give an overview of whether the policy will meet Harborough District Council's responsibilities in relation to equality, diversity and human rights. Does it contribute to the achievement of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations?

Senior staff and stakeholders have been consulted and involved in the design and delivery of the scheme. The council has also worked with all of the other local authorities in Leicestershire, who have been working in isolation for many years, in an attempt to review, develop and streamline the revised guidelines

The new scheme has been designed to hopefully deliver a more appropriate service for the customer by being more informed and unified.

Furthermore, it is recognised that this is just the first in a number of changes to welfare provision. It is likely that the qualifying criteria and design of the DHP scheme will continue to develop over time, through wider consultation and ongoing review of case load and analysis of applications in order to better understand and measure need and local demand.

Step 7: Monitoring, evaluation & review of your policy/procedure/service change

What monitoring systems will you put in place to promote equality of opportunity, monitor impact and effectiveness and make positive improvements? How frequently will monitoring take place and who will be responsible?

The scheme will be reviewed annually to ensure new factors have been incorporated and any feedback or recommendations can be implemented.

Equality Improvement Plan

Equality Objective :

Action: Review Scheme each year to incorporate any legislative changes and any feedback resulting from this

Officer Responsible: Leigh Butler

By when: December 2014

Equality Objective :

Action:

Officer Responsible:

By when:

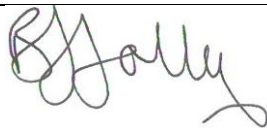
Equality Objective :

Action:

Officer Responsible:

By when:

Signed off by:



Date: 9 January 2014

Once signed off, please forward a copy for publication to Julie Clarke, Equality and Diversity Officer

e-mail: j.clarke@harborough.gov.uk , telephone: 01858 821070.