

FULL EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This report should be completed after a partial EIA has been carried out and you have found that:

- a. you need better or more information, and/or
- b. you have identified an adverse impact

Please complete each of the following sections and attach any evidence required to support your conclusions.

1. Terms of Reference

Derbyshire Dales District Council's Benefits Service

Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) are means-tested entitlements paid by the District Council to help local residents on low incomes meet the cost of rented accommodation and Council Tax.

The main service objectives are to ensure that Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit claims are paid correctly and quickly and to the right person. This is a statutory responsibility which also includes the need to detect and investigate benefit fraud. The service also aims to maximise benefit take-up to prevent homelessness.

Delivery of the statutory scheme relies on joint working with other partners and this enables a district wide counter service and provision of home visits and outreach work encouraging those that can claim, to claim.

2. Executive Summary

There is a need to improve access by promoting services available to those most in need e.g. home visits and improve communication so that claimants have a better understanding of the requirements of the process.

New ways of communicating with harder to reach groups need to be put in place including targeted promotion of local groups and networks.

More work is needed with partners to better understand the customer base and monitoring of take-up by equalities groups needs to improve.

3. Background and Context

The partial (desktop) EIA was completed by lead officers for the service in liaison with the District Council's Equalities Lead officer during September 2009. The initial results from this process were considered and challenged by the Housing EIA Steering Group in October and further work undertaken to complete the initial assessment.

The findings were then presented to and discussed with stakeholders representing a wide range of equalities groups and housing organisations at a joint Housing Equality Impact Assessment day in November 2009 run by the Derbyshire Dales and High Peak Local Strategic Partnership.

An independent equalities profile of the area, produced by Greenfield consultants (Sept 2007) was used to help determine priorities for action.

4. Summary of Findings

1. The service could be more accessible and information provided easier to understand
2. Communication channels need to be improved with under 25s, over 60s and other harder to reach groups e.g. farming community through partnership working to maximise take up of entitlements
3. Lack of data on customers and monitoring of take-up by different equalities groups to inform service improvement

5. Conclusion

1.
 - a) Establish an appointments system alongside the existing drop in service
 - b) Promote the home visits service more to the elderly and people with disabilities collaborating with key partners to enable efficiencies
 - c) Review standard notification letters (informing claimant of their entitlements) for plain English
 - d) Update and improve benefits advice on the District Council's website
2.
 - a) Work with local groups to carry out a targeted promotional campaign to increase take-up amongst under 25's, over 60s and the farming community
 - b) Contact under 25's and over 60's by telephone to obtain outstanding information to process claims
3.
 - a) Work with Revenues service and partner organisations to compile a more detailed customer profile for the service
 - b) Add appropriate questions to claim forms to monitor take up of the service by all equalities groups (SHARED ACTION)
 - c) Carry out biennial assessment of equalities training needs for staff (SHARED ACTION)

See Housing Equalities Action Plan for further details.

6. Monitoring

Actions and equalities outcomes to be monitored quarterly by Derbyshire Dales District Council's Benefits Manager with progress reported quarterly to the Chief Executives Departmental Management Team and bi-annually to Corporate Improvement Team.

Progress to be included in annual equalities report to the District Council and to the Derbyshire Dales and High Peak LSP Board.