

# Equality Impact Assessment

## Summary Report

<b>Name of function, policy or strategy being assessed:</b>	Council Tax Support Scheme
<b>Service:</b>	Housing, Revenues and Benefits
<b>Department:</b>	Operations
<b>Name and job titles of officers completing this assessment:</b>	Caroline Newman – Head of Housing, Revenues and Benefits Zoey Hillary – Benefits Assessment Manager
<b>Date of Assessment:</b>	23 November 2016

## **Summary of findings of detailed assessment:**

An EIA has been undertaken in response to the proposals to amend the local Council Tax Support scheme from April 2017 for working-age claimants. The government continue to prescribe the level of assistance to be provided for pensioner-age claimants therefore the EIA is only relevant to the scheme of assistance to working-age claimants.

The key principles of our local scheme have remained unchanged since they were agreed in 2014. These principles also meet the requirements of the guidance and legislation issued by the Department for Communities & Local Government. The principles as detailed below will continue in the scheme proposed from April 2017:

1. Every working age claimant should pay something towards their Council Tax
2. The scheme should protect the most vulnerable claimants.
3. The scheme should incentivise work.
4. Everyone in the household, who can contribute, should contribute.

The changes proposed for the forthcoming financial year are being made so as to align the scheme with recent changes made by the government to Housing Benefit and the prescribed requirements in Council Tax Support for pensioner-age claimants. We feel that to avoid unnecessary confusion for customers and to support the government's reform of welfare, our scheme should be amended as follows:

- Reduce backdating of new claims to one month
- Reduce the period for which a person can be absent from GB and still receive CTS to 4 weeks
- The way in which we calculate a claimant's needs allowance will match that in other welfare benefits

A public consultation exercise was undertaken between 11 October 2016 and 22 November 2016 seeking views on these proposals. A similar response rate was achieved as in the previous year and shows:

- 74% of respondents agreed that the current scheme is fair
- 82% of respondents agreed that people with severe disabilities and those receiving a war pension should continue to receive full support
- 84% of respondents agreed that the backdating of claims should be reduced from 6 months to 1 month
- 83% of respondents agreed that the amount of time a claimant can stay outside of GB before support stops should reduce from 13 weeks to 4 weeks
- 83% of respondents agreed that the way claimant's needs allowances are calculated should match that in other welfare benefits

It should be noted that the changes only apply to the working-age scheme although the consultation was open to everyone.

We have given consideration to the effects on working-age claimants and in particular any vulnerable groups within the design of our proposed scheme. Analysis of our current caseload and associated financial modelling shows that 90% of the total claims for backdated Council Tax Support were for less than one month. It is impossible to determine the impact of the changes to rules regarding absence from GB however the Housing Benefit regulations (*Housing Benefit and State Pension Credit (Temporary Absence)(Amendment) Regulations 2016*) allow for exemptions from the four week rule where the requirement to be outside of

GB for more than 4 weeks is for exceptional circumstances (for example due to medical treatment, death of a close relative or fleeing violence) and it is proposed to include the same exemptions in our local scheme. Changes to the way in which we calculate a claimant's needs allowances will only affect claimants making a new claim for support after 1 April 2017 or existing claimants who have a break in their claim after this date.

The Hardship Fund and money advice service remains available to help in extreme cases of financial hardship and will therefore remedy any impact as a result of the changes.