

Durham County Council – Altogether Better equality impact assessment form

NB: Equality impact assessment is a legal requirement for all strategies plans, functions, policies, procedures and services. We are also legally required to publish our assessments.

You can find help and prompts on completing the assessment in the guidance from page 7 onwards.

Section one: Description and initial screening

Section overview: this section provides an audit trail.

Service/team or section: Resources

Lead Officer: Ian Ferguson

Start date: September 2012

Subject of the Impact Assessment: (please also include a brief description of the aims, outcomes, operational issues as appropriate)

Localisation of Social Fund

This impact assessment relates to plans for a local discretionary payments scheme in County Durham following devolution of funding relating to replace two elements of the Social Fund which is currently administered by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The scheme would be implemented from April 2013 to replace the current national arrangements for crisis loans and community care grants. The proposed scheme would provide for 'Daily Living Expenses' (formerly Crisis Loans) and a 'Settlement Grant' in place of the current Community Care Grant.

Background:

The Social Fund currently seeks to meet a range of needs that are not met by regular benefit or tax credit payments. It came into operation in 1988, following the 1986 Social Security Act, and replaced single payments of what was then Supplementary Benefit for one off needs.

Crisis Loans are interest-free loans available to anyone (whether on benefit or not) who cannot meet their immediate short-term needs in an emergency or as a consequence of a disaster. Crisis Loan items include one off items such as cookers and beds and Crisis Loan Living Expenses cover day to day items such as monies for food, travel expenses and energy reconnection/charges.

The loan cannot exceed £1,500 and applicants must be likely to be able to repay the loan.

From 4 April 2011, the following changes were introduced by DWP to try to limit expenditure:

- Crisis Loans for items such as cookers and beds are now only available following a disaster such as flooding, this has significantly reduced the expenditure on these items;

- the rate paid for living expenses has reduced from 75 per cent to 60 per cent of the personal allowance benefit rate; and
- a cap of three Crisis Loan awards for general living expenses in a rolling 12 month period has been implemented.

Community Care Grants (CCG) are non-repayable grants awarded for a range of expenses including household equipment. They are primarily intended to support vulnerable people to remain in or return to the community or to ease exceptional pressure on families. Eligibility is conditional on receipt or imminent receipt of an income related benefit.

Type of CCG payment	% of total amount
People moving out of institutional or residential care	7.2%
Helping people stay in the community	28.5
Families under exceptional pressure	56.7
Prisoner or young offender on release on temporary license	0.2
People setting up home as part of a planned programme of resettlement	6.2
Travelling expenses	1.1

The funding to be delegated to the council is not ring-fenced and development of a local scheme is at local discretion for each authority.

Who are the main stakeholders: General public / Employees / Elected Members / Partners/ Specific audiences/Other (please specify) –

Social Fund applicants, General public, employees, elected members

Is a copy of the subject attached? See Cabinet report

If not, where could it be viewed?

Initial screening

Prompts to help you:

Who is affected by it? Who is intended to benefit and how? Could there be a different impact or outcome for some groups? Is it likely to affect relations between different communities or groups, for example if it is thought to favour one particular group or deny opportunities for others? Is there any specific targeted action to promote equality?

Is there an actual/potential negative or positive impact on specific groups within these headings?

Indicate :Y = Yes, N = No, ?=Unsure											
Gender	Y	Disability	Y	Age	Y	Race/ethnicity	?	Religion or belief	?	Sexual orientation	?

How will this support our commitment to promote equality and meet our legal responsibilities?

Reminder of our legal duties:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination & harassment
- Promoting equality of opportunity
- Promoting good relations between people from different groups
- Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people and taking account of someone’s disability, even where that involves treating them more favourably than other people
- Involving people, particularly disabled people, in public life and decision making

Potential impacts are dependant on Council’s final decision to implement a discretionary payments scheme. Any local scheme would be available to people from all protected characteristics to ensure fair and equal access but evidence suggests that some groups are more likely than others to apply or receive awards under the current Social Fund arrangements. The proposals for a local scheme seek to take account of varied needs in order to respond effectively to all groups although eligibility criteria will reflect the limited funding available. Some data is available on current arrangements in relation to age, gender and disability, there is none for the other protected characteristics including transgender so whilst we assume there could be an impact we do not have access to any evidence.

If a local scheme is not adopted this could affect people in financial hardship – this can be linked to lower income on the grounds of age, disability and gender (for example, lone parents are most likely to be female and may be affected by reduced support but there are also more older women in the population than men).

There may be potential impacts in terms of race, religion or belief and sexual orientation (for example, through links with younger people at risk of homelessness because they’ve ‘come out’ about their sexual orientation and therefore may be living alone and reliant on benefits/support) but there is no evidence available from DWP on these equality characteristics.

The potential negative impacts of not adopting a scheme or an ineffectual scheme include:

- Financial and standard of living – for example, inability to make payments for essential items or services.
- Health and wellbeing – for example, inability to pay for food, medical or personal care items, stress or anxiety as a result of financial worries.
- Housing – for example, inability to meet housing costs or resettle in community when leaving care or institutions.

Potential positive impacts of adopting an effective local scheme:

- Urgent needs are met which may prevent the need for further long-term support or interventions.
- Support for vulnerable people to remain in or return to communities.

- Increased take up of other entitlements.
- Opportunities to provide financial or debt management advice and support to vulnerable groups.

It is important to note that the changes to the Social Fund are being made alongside wider welfare reforms which will have an impact on benefits and financial inclusion across all protected groups. The overall impact of welfare reforms for some people could be significant reductions in household income.

What evidence do you have to support your findings?

The Government's equality impact assessment identified that the majority of Crisis Loans decisions were made in relation to applications from single males (58%) with 38% in respect of single females and 8% for couples. However the success rates were similar for all three groups with 76% of single males and single females making a successful application and 74% of couples. The decisions made in relation to Community Care Grant applications show a higher proportion of single females applying (49%) with 36% for single males and 15% for couples. The success rates were highest for couples at 53% with single females at 49% and single males at 42%.

In terms of age, the highest proportion of decisions on Crisis Loan applications were made for customers aged 18 to 24, those aged 35 to 59 had the highest success rate at 79% with over 65 year olds having the lowest success rates, particularly those aged 80 and over. Community Care Grant decisions show a higher proportion for those aged 18 to 45 but a higher success rate for those over 50 which increases with age.

National research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2006 looked in more detail at success rates of certain applicants for the Social Fund, see table below.

Applicant group	Community Care Grants % of total expenditure	Crisis loans % of total expenditure
Pensioners	8.4	1.3
Unemployed	17.4	54.2
Disabled	30.8	18.5
Lone Parents	30.4	14.9
Others	13.0	11.2

They found that:

- Pensioners received a disproportionately small proportion of social fund expenditure compared to their presence in the eligible population. The report suggests that a lack of knowledge, the stigma of applying, communication difficulties, high

repayment rates for budgeting loans and an antipathy to borrowing all hold pensioners back from applying.

- Couples with children and single parents were significantly more likely to have accessed the social fund than those without children.
- Those in rented accommodation were more likely to receive awards than those who owned their own home, particularly those in Council or Housing Association properties.
- Disabled people were significantly more likely to receive a community care grant or budgeting loan

Decision: Proceed to full impact assessment –Yes Date: 20.9.12

If you have answered ‘No’ you need to pass the completed form for approval & sign off.

Section two: Identifying impacts and evidence- Equality and Diversity

Section overview: this section identifies whether there are any impacts on equality/diversity/cohesion, what evidence is available to support the conclusion and what further action is needed.

	Identify the impact : does this increase differences or does it aim to reduce gaps for particular groups?	Explain your conclusion, including relevant evidence and consultation you have considered.	What further action is required? (Include in Sect. 3 action plan)
Gender	<p>Potential impacts where discretionary support may be needed include: Male/female</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Women are more likely to provide care for others including children. Their employment opportunities and income are often limited by care responsibilities, for example they are more likely to work part-time or be unemployed. ○ There is a greater number of older women in the county 	<p>National evidence from Equality & Human Rights Commission Triennial Review.</p> <p>Local evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis Loans were split fairly evenly between single male and female recipients whereas over half of all CCGs went to single females. • Around a fifth of Crisis Loan awards go to lone parents (Crisis Loans Items 19%, Crisis Loans Living Expenses 20%) but almost a third (31%) of Community Care Grants go to lone parents. These proportions are all relatively high 	<p>Equality statements and monitoring to be included in policy or any relevant contract to ensure fair treatment – applies to all characteristics.</p>

	<p>population than men. Historically older women are less likely to have good pension provision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lone parents are more likely to be a female primary carer. National evidence shows they are more likely to be unemployed or work part-time, have lower incomes and lower savings. ○ Women also experience greater financial impacts as a result of divorce or separation, national evidence shows that their employment opportunities, income and savings levels are less than men. ○ National evidence also shows that male employment has reduced during the recession. Although female employment has also been affected women are more likely to find part-time or seasonal work as an alternative. <p>Transgender – national surveys and local anecdotal evidence suggests transgender people may be more likely to be unemployed or self-employed due to concerns about hostile work environments. It is also possible that transgender people have limited savings where they have self-funded surgery.</p>	<p>compared to the proportion of lone parent families in the UK population (11%).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community Care Grants also tended to be awarded more frequently to families with children, especially those with young children aged 0-5. <p>Support would be available for those with dependent children, for pregnancy/maternity, affected by domestic violence if they meet the relevant criteria. The support would include the needs of babies and children, e.g. nappies and milk.</p> <p>The application process would enable carers to make or support an application as well as other third party organisations.</p>	
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<p>Age</p>	<p>Local evidence shows a higher rate of support currently goes to younger people.</p> <p>Potential impacts where discretionary support may be needed include: Older people are less likely to have regular income from employment and many rely on pensions/benefits to meet living costs. In recent years increasing numbers of older people have been affected by financial hardship through reduced interest from savings.</p> <p>There is also potential positive impact for older people where support can be targeted more locally through advice and other agencies – anecdotal evidence suggests that many older people are reluctant to seek benefits or financial support until they are in extreme hardship.</p> <p>Families Those with children aged under 5 are more likely to be unemployed or work part-time hours (mostly female). Families with school-aged children are likely to have lower levels of savings than those without children.</p> <p>Younger people This group is more likely to have lower incomes and limited savings. National</p>	<p>Local evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awards for relevant Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants predominantly went to younger people. Over half go to people aged under 35 (Crisis Loans Items – 65%, Crisis Loans Living Expenses – 69%, CCG – 53%) • A small proportion of CCG awards also went to older people, 6% of awards to people aged 65+, compared with no Crisis Loans to this age group. <p>One aim of the fund is to support older people to remain in or return to their local community. Those with dependent children would also be eligible if they meet the relevant criteria. Other payment and support schemes are already available for young people in need.</p>	<p>Equality statements and monitoring to be included in policy or any relevant contract to ensure fair treatment – applies to all characteristics.</p>
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	evidence shows that younger people are less likely to find employment in the current financial climate. There are other financial impacts related to age restrictions on eligibility for other benefits.		
Disability	<p>Potential impacts where discretionary support may be needed include:</p> <p>Depending on their disability they are more likely to be unemployed and may be unable to seek employment. Disabled people are often employed in lower paid or part-time jobs which means they have limited capacity to meet extra costs. The additional costs relating to some disabilities mean that some people rely heavily on benefits, proposed changes to welfare will potentially mean more disabled people in financial hardship.</p> <p>National evidence shows that couples with a disabled child are less likely to both be in employment. They are also more likely to provide longer hours of care than parents of non-disabled children.</p> <p>People with a mental health condition or a learning disability may not seek help for financial difficulties. Tailored advice would help to ensure negative financial impacts are minimised. They may also be more vulnerable to</p>	<p>Local evidence is not available but national research in Section One suggests that disabled people were more likely to receive a CCG and had high rates of Crisis Loan support.</p> <p>The proposed scheme would include specific disability and health related costs for those meeting the relevant criteria. Mental health or learning disability may prevent people from applying or benefiting equally so the application and assessment process would allow carers and other third parties to act on behalf of an individual.</p> <p>The current Government scheme is operated by telephone, any local scheme would provide alternative communication methods as a reasonable adjustment.</p>	<p>Equality statements and monitoring to be included in policy or any relevant contract to ensure fair treatment – applies to all characteristics.</p> <p>Support in accessing the funds available through third party advice organisations to help with financial changes.</p>

	impacts on wellbeing due to financial concerns.		
Race/Ethnicity	<p>Potential impacts to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There may be specific needs relating to an individual's ethnic background – e.g. in terms of health or dietary requirements. 	<p>Current caseload data from DWP does not include ethnicity.</p> <p>Support under the proposed policy would include specific requirements related to ethnicity/race where individuals met the relevant criteria.</p>	<p>Equality statements and monitoring to be included in policy or any relevant contract to ensure fair treatment – applies to all characteristics.</p>
Religion or belief	<p>Potential impacts to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There may be impacts in relation to religion or belief. 	<p>Current caseload data from DWP does not include religion or belief.</p> <p>Support under the proposed policy would include specific requirements related to religion or belief – for example, dietary requirements, attendance at funerals where individuals met the relevant criteria.</p>	<p>Equality statements and monitoring to be included in policy or any relevant contract to ensure fair treatment – applies to all characteristics.</p>
Sexual orientation	<p>Potential impacts to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Links to homelessness for those fleeing domestic abuse (particularly young people). ○ There is very limited national and local evidence relating to financial inclusion. ○ There is evidence that some lesbian, gay and bisexual people are more likely to live alone which may have an impact on their household income levels. 	<p>Current caseload data from DWP does not include sexual orientation.</p> <p>Whilst there are no specific provisions in the proposed policy would support those fleeing domestic abuse and take into account the needs of people in same sex relationships.</p>	<p>Equality statements and monitoring to be included in policy or any relevant contract to ensure fair treatment – applies to all characteristics.</p>

<p>How will this promote positive relationships between different communities?</p> <p>This will not directly promote positive relationships between different communities. Financial inclusion does promote strong communities but financial differences can create tension. Supporting people to return to or remain in their homes may also</p>
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contribute to strong community relations.

Section three: Review and Conclusion

Summary: please provide a brief overview, including impact, changes, improvements and any gaps in evidence.

This equality impact assessment considers Durham County Council's response to national changes in administering two elements of the Social Fund. Implementation of a local scheme for discretionary payments is subject to a final decision by Council.

If Council decide to adopt a local scheme providing Daily Living Expenses and Settlement Grants from 2013/14 this will be administered and monitored in order to provide fair and equal access to those meeting the relevant criteria. The proposed policy has taken into account the specific needs of people with protected characteristics in order to prevent unintentional exclusion. The proposal also seeks to improve on current arrangements by responding to different communication needs and enabling support from carers or other third parties. There are potential positives where individuals accessing support will also have access to advice on financial management. The proposed scheme includes limitations on the number and type of application to address misuse.

If Council decide not to adopt a local scheme the level of financial hardship for some of the most vulnerable is likely to increase.

This could have direct and immediate impacts for some in relation to health and safety but there may also be other impacts:

- Health/wellbeing as a result of stress or anxiety over financial difficulties.
- Housing where people are unable to meet other costs as a result of increased council tax contributions or look to move to cheaper alternative accommodation, whilst this is relatively unlikely it is still a potential impact to be considered.
- Legal action as a result of debt can have a negative impact both in terms of additional costs and stress but also potentially in relation to employment.

Action to be taken –	Officer responsible	Target Date	In which plan will this action appear
Equality statements and monitoring to be included in policy or any relevant contract to ensure fair treatment – applies to all characteristics.	Ian Ferguson	TBA - If approved by Cabinet	
Support in accessing the funds available through third party advice organisations to help with financial changes.	Ian Ferguson	TBA - If approved by Cabinet	
When will this assessment be reviewed?	Date: April 2014		
Are there any additional assessments that need to be undertaken in relation to this assessment?	None		
Lead officer - sign off: Ian Ferguson			Date:27.11.12
Service equality representative - sign off: Bev Stobbart			Date:27.11.12

Please email your completed Impact Assessment to the Equality team - equalities@durham.gov.uk.