



North West Leicestershire District Council

Housing Advice & Options Equality Impact Assessment

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Name of the policy or service being assessed: **Housing Advice and Options (includes Homelessness prevention/Housing Applications/Allocations Policy) - Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013**

Service Area: **Housing Futures**

Date Impact Assessment completed: **17 June 2008**

Is this a policy or service? **Policy** **Service** **Procedure**

Is this a new or existing policy or function? **New** **Existing**

Names and roles of the people carrying out the Impact Assessment:

1. Members of the Housing Futures Forum carried out this assessment at their meeting on 17 June 2008. As well as staff from the Council's Housing Advice Team, there were representatives from social service, East Midlands Housing Association, HMP, CAB, NWL Homelessness Project, probation, NWL Domestic Violence Outreach Project, NWLCVS, REACT Furniture Scheme.

[It should be noted that the Council is moving towards the introduction of a Choice Based Lettings scheme from 2010. As part of the preparation we will be reviewing the current allocations policy in consultation with residents later this year with a view to replacing the current points based system with a streamlined Banding system from April 2009. Accordingly, the application forms and allocations policy have not been included in this EIA since a bespoke EIA will be undertaken as part of the consultation process later this year].

Head of Service: Chris Lambert

Signature



Date: June 2008

PART 1

AIMS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

Identifying the aims of the policy

What is the policy? What is the aim, objective, or purpose of the policy?

The policy being reviewed is the new Homelessness Strategy for the district for the 5 year period 2008-2013. The strategy must set out the local authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are or will be available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so.

Rationale behind the policy and its delivery

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 all housing authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their district. The first strategy was required and published in July 2003 and inline with the government requirement to renew the strategy at least every 5 years, a new strategy has recently been developed in consultation with other partner organisations within all sectors, whose work helps to prevent homelessness and/or meet the needs of homeless people in the district e.g. housing providers (such as housing associations and private landlords) as well as other statutory bodies such as social services, the probation service, the health service and the wide range of organisations in the private and voluntary sectors whose work helps prevent homelessness or meet the needs of people who have experienced homelessness.

Who is affected by the policy? Who is intended to benefit from it and how?

Who are the main stakeholders in relation to this policy? - *The community at large - anyone needing housing advice and/or anyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness. Other main stakeholders include the partner organisations referred to in the section above,*

What outcomes would other stakeholders want from this policy? – *in addition to provision of temporary/permanent accommodation, the provision of support and advice would be equally important for stakeholders*

Are there any groups, who might be expected to benefit from the intended outcomes but which do not? – *the legislation, gives some groups are given a higher priority over other groups as far as being owed the main housing duty to accommodate them. However, the advice/support side of the service is available to all groups.*

Policy Priorities:

(How does the policy fit in with the council's wider aims? Include Corporate and Local Strategic Partnership Priorities)

This strategy sits within a hierarchy of local plans from the Community Strategy, down through the Council plans and the Housing Strategy. The four priorities identified in the Housing Strategy, all having a direct impact on homelessness in the district, are:

- Increasing the supply of affordable housing
- Improving standards in the private sector
- Improving services and standards for council tenants
- Housing and support for vulnerable people.

Our Homelessness Strategy has clear links to the Community Strategy and the Council's priorities for the next three years. Children and young people and safer communities feature highly in both, and the delivery of affordable housing is a priority for the Community Strategy.

Within the Local Area Agreement (LAA) housing is a cross cutting theme and the homelessness aspects of this relate to the children and young people and safer communities blocks. Two indicators directly linked to homelessness have been agreed as stretch targets within the LAA and these are:

Target 4 – Children and Young People: the number of 16 and 17 year olds for which decisions are taken in relation to homelessness as a result of family breakdown and published as part of the quarterly P1E homelessness statistics – stretch target to reduce to 100 by year three. An aspiration of the LAA is to replicate successful pilots to all areas of Leicestershire including the establishment of multi agency support networks to young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness

Target 7 – Safer Communities: the number of reported domestic violence incidents – stretch target to increase reported incidents to 6187 in year three, increasing by 5% each year prior to this

How does the policy relate to other policies and practices within the council? - In developing and delivering this strategy we will have regard to several other corporate policies that link into the homelessness prevention and housing advice agenda - the Private Sector renewal strategy; the Empty Homes strategy; Corporate Fair Debt Policy; Social Inclusion Strategy ; Community Safety Strategy to name but a few

What factors/forces could contribute/detract from the outcomes? - Close partnership working between all agencies is essential for the delivery of the outcomes – this is a district wide strategy not just a corporate strategy. It may be possible to identify commonalities between the new district/borough strategies that have been developed this year and in doing so, agree for certain authorities to lead on a particular priority and then share the results with each other.

The 'fall-out' from the current economic climate could detract from the outcomes in that resources may have to be focussed on simply dealing with the expected increase in homelessness declarations. We anticipate an increase in repossession cases which will mean more families presenting as homeless which, in the continued absence of any temporary accommodation (other than B & B) will put a severely strain on our budget.

Failure to bring on line sufficient temp accommodation in the next 2 years will inhibit our ability to ensure no 16-17 year olds are placed in B & B by 2010

How the policy is implemented

Is the service/policy provided solely by one service or in conjunction with another service or through a Partnership?

If external partners are involved - what are the measures in place to ensure that they comply with the Council's Equal Opportunities policy?

The strategy will be delivered through partnership working with both internal and external parties, all of whom are represented on the multi-agency Housing Futures Forum that meets approximately every 6-8 weeks and will be monitoring the delivery and progress of the new strategy.

Internally colleagues in private sector housing, Housing benefits and the allocations service are key partners.

Externally, we have Service level agreements with key agencies such as East Midlands Housing association, NWL Homelessness Project, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Homestart (NWL). The SLA requires the partner organisation to provide the services taking into account the religious, social, language, cultural and emotional needs of the service users and ensure that non-discriminatory practices will be employed and also requires the provider to have an Equal Opportunities Policy and Procedures which will be applied to these services, ensuring that it takes into account the diversity of the population in the area.

Additionally, the SLA requires that the organisation is deemed to have knowledge of the Council's Strategic Priorities and Equal Opportunities Policy and will comply with the same to the satisfaction of the Council.

SLAs are monitored by nominated grant officers on a quarterly basis

Users and beneficiaries are:

(Indicate profile by target groups and assess relevance to policy aims and objectives e.g. Workforce to reflect the Community).

Anyone can access this service for advice on housing options. However, based on the legislative framework relating to homelessness, only the groups set out in the legislation who fulfil certain other criteria will be owed the main homelessness duty

Action needed:

(Include short-term measures to be taken to provide a baseline where no or little information is available)

Bespoke customer care standards for those accessing the service – see Action Plan

PART 2			
ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT			
	From the evidence available Identify how the groups are reflected in the take up of the service	From the evidence does the policy have an actual or potential negative impact	If there is an adverse impact, can it be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity
Race	This information is not currently recorded in a consistent manner	No	N/A
Gender	This information is not currently recorded in a consistent manner	No	N/A
Disability	This information is not currently recorded in a consistent manner	Depending upon the nature and severity of any disability, the refuge and Durban House may not be suitable for the applicant having an adverse impact	No
Age	This information is not currently recorded in a consistent manner	No	N/A
Religion/Belief	Not known – this information is not recorded consistently	Do not believe so	N/A
Sexual Orientation	Not known – this information is not currently recorded	Do not believe so	N/A
Other groups	None identified	No	No

PART 3: PROCESS OF POLICY OR SERVICE DELIVERY AND MONITORING

The Process of Service Delivery (In particular look at the arrangements for the service being provided).

Operation Times

When is the service provided - are there seasonal issues; are there barriers to the service based on the time and delivery of the service which may affect the target groups?

The council's service is based in Coalville and at present the council's own housing advisors rarely do home visits. This means there may well be accessibility issues for those living in the more remote areas of the district which will also have cost implications. The service is minimal during Xmas and New Year due to seasonal closures and skeleton staff. This may adversely impact on those approaching the service as a result of domestic violence – occurrences of which are often significantly higher at this time of year.

The full service is only available between 8.45am and 5pm Mon – Fri with a minimal out of hours service at all other times. However as stated above, this not advertised

Methods of communication to the public (external) and internally

What methods do you use to communicate this service? Include review and assessment of methods, media, translations, interpretation etc, bearing in mind the extent to which these media forms are accessible to all sections of the community

Externally:

A suite of 5 leaflets and the website. The out of hours service is not advertised and the leaflets are not currently available in any other language than English although we do use language line if a translator is required. We have also submitted articles to the local press to raise awareness

Internally:

Via the intranet and briefings

Future Monitoring and Consultation

How and when will the policy be monitored?

Identify areas for future consultation and any barriers to participation in consultation with proposals to overcome these.

The strategy action plan will be monitored by the Housing Futures Forum and through Priority 3: *'improved customer service standards and joined up working'* we will look to increase customer satisfaction with the Housing Futures service through

development of service standards and by monitoring satisfaction; Improve inter-agency working through development of a data sharing protocol and common assessment process and will Involve customers in all aspects of service delivery and provide them with information.

PART 4

MEASURES TO REDUCE DISPROPORTIONATE OR ADVERSE IMPACT – POSITIVE IMPACT

Specify measures that can be taken to remove or minimise the disproportionate impact or adverse effect identified at the end of Part 3. If none were identified in Part 3, identify how disproportionate impact or adverse effect could be avoided in the future. (Consider measures to reduce any adverse impact and better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity).

RACE:

Introduce common monitoring and respond accordingly

GENDER:

Introduce common monitoring and respond accordingly

DISABILITY:

Introduce common monitoring and respond accordingly

AGE:

Introduce common monitoring and respond accordingly

RELIGION/BELIEF:

Introduce common monitoring and respond accordingly

SEXUAL ORIENTATION:

Introduce common monitoring and respond accordingly

PART 5 – ACTION PLAN

Recommendation	Key activity	Responsible Officer	Milestones	Progress	Date of completion
Increase customer satisfaction with the Housing Futures service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new service standards for homelessness customers • Carry out customer satisfaction survey • Develop online feedback system for customers • Develop a framework to deal with the outcome of the survey 	<p>LA/ customers</p> <p>LA/ stakeholders</p> <p>LA</p> <p>LA/ stakeholders</p>	<p>Draft by Dec 08 Consult by July 09 Implement Dec 09</p> <p>Survey set up by Mar 09 Baseline survey Aug 09 Annual surveys in Aug</p> <p>System in place</p> <p>Framework in place</p>		

Recommendation	Key activity	Responsible Officer	Milestones	Progress	Date of completion
Develop information and referral systems to facilitate inter-agency working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a working group of all stakeholders to develop information and referral system • Develop data sharing protocol • Develop common assessment tool • Implement system 	LA/ stakeholders Project group Project group LA/ stakeholders	First meeting Oct 09 Report back Mar 10 Draft by Dec 10 Agencies signed up Draft by Oct 10 Agencies signed up System implemented		
Customers involved in all aspects of service delivery and information available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore models of customer involvement • Hold workshop with stakeholders to develop model • Implement 	LA LA/ stakeholders LA	Research complete Workshop held System in place		