

# Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Initial Screening Form



Screening determines whether the policy has any relevance for equality, ie is there any impact on one or more of the 9 protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. These are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership\*
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief (including lack of belief)
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

<p><b>1. Policy/service/function title</b></p>	<p>Rent and Service Charge Policy</p>
<p><b>2. Lead officer (responsible for the policy/service/function)</b></p>	<p>Robert Longfoot, Tenant Services Corporate Manager</p>
<p><b>3. Is this a new or existing policy/service/function?</b></p>	<p>New policy covering an existing function</p>
<p><b>4. What exactly is proposed? (Describe the policy/service/ function and the changes that are being planned?)</b></p>	<p>The Policy, once adopted, will ensure that Babergh &amp; Mid Suffolk Councils (BMSDC) comply with current legislation, recognised best practice, the requirements of the Housing Regulator, and our tenancy agreements.</p> <p>The policy proposes to enhance and expand the charging for services to tenants, to maximise income for the Councils and ensure that service charging is fair and transparent to all tenants.</p>
<p><b>5. Why? (Give reasons why these changes are being introduced)</b></p>	<p>Where a service is not fully accounted for in a service charge to the tenant receiving the service, the service is funded (partly or in full) by the general rent pool. Changing this approach, to charge for services only to tenants who receive them is referred to as 'de-pooling'.</p> <p>It is generally considered to be inequitable to fund or to subsidise the cost of services from the general rent pool, and fairer to charge the cost of services to those tenants who benefit directly, referred to as 'de-pooling'. De-pooling service charges will free-</p>

	<p>up limited funds of within the HRA budgets which are currently subsidising services to meet changes in national housing policy which benefit all tenants. Exemptions to this rule could be made if its application meant that a service became unaffordable, as could be the case with some support services. In these cases, the service charges would be pooled across multiple locations.</p> <p>The policy proposes that in future Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximise income by charging for services where possible</li> <li>• Charge tenants for services in a fairer and more transparent way for services which they receive</li> <li>• Create opportunities for the provision of new and improved services</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. How will it be implemented? (Describe the decision making process, timescales, process for implementation)</b></p>	<p>1.1 Once the Policy is approved we will set about bringing the policy to life in revised service charging methodologies. This is a complex undertaking and it is intended that this assessment and recovery of costs will be developed as a project over the next 1-4 years. We are aware that large scale introduction of additional service charging could become a matter of concern for tenants. Residents will always be consulted before any new services are introduced, or existing services changed, that will lead to an increased or additional service charge. It is proposed that we will implement changes in two stages;</p> <p>1.1.1 (1) Review the setting of service charges in sheltered and temporary accommodation and propose amendments at full Council in the normal manner ahead of rent increase in April 2023.</p> <p>1.2 (2) Build the foundations for de-pooling service charges in general needs accommodation, and improving service charge setting in leasehold accommodation, and produce an implementation plan to be signed off by Council prior to implementation.</p>

7. Is there potential for differential impact (negative or positive) on any of the protected characteristics?

Yes

Whilst the service charges will not be (and are not currently) set differently relating to any individuals' characteristics however they will vary between different accommodation types, where members of protected groups may be in a higher proportion e.g. a higher proportion of older tenants in sheltered housing and in general needs accommodation.

Following approval of the Policy, a substantial piece of work is required to calculate how we will 'de-pool' the service charges and apply charges in a fair and affordable way for tenants and leaseholders.

As per the briefing, the proposal is to...

- (1) Review the setting of service charges in sheltered and temporary accommodation and propose amendments at full Council in the normal manner ahead of rent increase in April 2023.
- (2) Build the foundations for de-pooling service charges in general needs accommodation, and improving service charge setting in leasehold accommodation, and produce an implementation plan to be signed off by Council prior to implementation.

Changing the way service charges are calculated and implementing service charges in new settings will have a financial impact on our tenants. De-pooling will result in differing outcomes for tenants, for example:

1. Changing the way sheltered housing and temporary accommodation services are charged for (de-pooling) will result in tenants paying either less, the same, or more for services provided at their scheme only. Regardless of the outcome, the result will be more equitable.
2. Tenants in general needs who do not currently pay a service charge will pay more when service charging is implemented in addition to their rental charge.

In preparing recommendations for Council approval, we will undertake an EQIA review of who will be charged and what the impact may be on any person or group with a protected characteristic.

	This review will form part of a later recommendation not Council.
<b>8.</b> Is there the possibility of <b>discriminating unlawfully</b> , directly or indirectly, against people from any protected characteristic?	No
<b>9.</b> Could there be an effect on <b>relations between certain groups</b> ?	No
<b>10.</b> Does the policy explicitly involve, or <b>focus on a particular equalities group</b> , i.e. because they have particular needs?	No

If the answers are 'no' to questions 7-10 then there is no need to proceed to a full impact assessment and this form should then be signed off as appropriate.

If 'yes' then a full impact assessment must be completed.

Authors signature



Date of completion 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Any queries concerning the completion of this form should be addressed to the Equality and Diversity Lead.

\* Public sector duty does not apply to marriage and civil partnership.