Huntingdonshire District Council Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Service area	Revenues and Benefits
Date of assessment	20/09/2023
Name of policy/service to be assessed	Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS) 2024-25
Is this a new or existing policy/service?	Redesign of existing scheme
Name of manager responsible for new or amended policy/service	Katie Kelly
Names of people conducting the assessment	Katie Kelly
Step 1 – Description of new or amended policy/service	
Describe the aims; objectives and purpose of the new or amended policy/service (include how it fits in to wider aims or strategic objectives).	Our Corporate plan for 2023-2028 outlines our commitment to: • Improve the happiness and wellbeing of residents by keeping people out of crisis and helping those in crisis; and • Deliver good quality, high value-for-money services A review of the CTS scheme was listed as an action within the corporate plan in furtherance of these aims. The Council is required to review its scheme for **working age** each year. There are issues with the current scheme that need to be addressed if the system is to continue to provide effective support to low-income taxpayers and to support the Council to provide the service in an efficient manner. The main issues are as follows: • The need to assist low-income households and assist in the collection

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	of Council Tax; • The introduction of Universal Credit for working age applicants; and • The need for a simplification of the scheme In view of the problems being experienced with the current scheme, it is proposed that an alternative approach be taken from 2024/25. The approach has been to fundamentally redesign the scheme to address all of the issues with the current scheme and in particular; (a) The level of support available to the poorest households: (b) The problems with the introduction of full-service Universal Credit; and (c) The significant increase in administration costs due to the high level of changes received in respect of Universal Credit. Pension age applicants for CTS will not be affected by this change
The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations, the Council also needs to demonstrate its compliance with the Equality Duty. The Council therefore needs to understand how its decisions and activities impact on different people. An Equality Impact Assessment is the current method by which the Council can assess and keep a record of the impact of new or amended strategies, policies, functions or services. The council retains these duties even when outsourcing services or providing shared services. *Definition of Adverse Impact - occurs when a decision, practice, or Policy has a disproportionately negative effect on a protected group. Adverse Impact may be unintentional.*	
Are there any (existing) equality objectives of the new/amended policy/service	Improved support for working age applicants

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Who is intended to benefit from the new/amended policy/service and in what way?	Low income working age households who apply and qualify for Council Tax Reduction. The revised scheme will: (a) Provide more support to those on the lowest income (up to 100% of the Council Tax payable); (b) Be easier to understand and claim; and (c) Address the administration issues caused by the introduction of Universal Credit.
What are the intended outcomes of this new/amended policy/service?	Improved support for low-income households
Step 2 – Data	
What baseline **quantitative data (statistics)** do you have about the function relating to equalities groups (e.g. monitoring data on proportions of service users compared to proportions in the population), relevant to this new/amended policy/service? Huntingdonshire Statistics	Financial modelling has been conducted across the current working age caseload in order to assess any potential impacts. The current working age caseload is as follows: Total caseload: 4,121 Female: 67.8%, Male 32.2% split Age Range: 18-24 4.6% 25-34 20.5% 35-44 23.4% 45-59 36.4% 60+ 15.1 Proportion of cases with a disability premium: 43.4% Financial modelling has shown that 96% of caseload will be better off or will have no change to the levels of support awarded as a result of changes to the scheme. Around 4% may receive a reduced amount or nil

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	award. Where this occurs, the applicant may apply for additional support under the Council's Exceptional Hardship scheme.
What **qualitative data (opinions etc)** do you have on different groups (e.g. comments from previous consumer satisfaction surveys/consultation, feedback exercises, or evidence from other authorities undertaking similar work), relevant to this new/amended policy/service?	The proposals have been subject to a statutory consultation process. A public consultation ran for 7 weeks from 21st July 2023. A consultation for major preceptors ran for 4 weeks from the same date. The responses received are contained within Appendix C of the report.
Age – this refers to the protected characteristic of age. A person belonging to a particular age (for example 32-year olds) or range of ages (for example 18 to 30-year olds). Are there concerns that the new policy/service could have a differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic? Are there any concerns that the policy/service amendments could have differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic? For some services this should include consideration of impact in terms of safeguarding young people. What evidence do you have for your answer?	The proposed changes will affect working age applicants only. Pension age applicants will **not** be affected as their scheme is prescribed by Government. The majority of working age applicants will see an increase in support or maintain the same level of support. Inevitably with any change in scheme there may be some that received a reduced amount or nil award under the new scheme. Where this occurs, the applicant may apply for additional support under the Council's Exceptional Hardship scheme.
Disability – this refers the protected characteristic of disability. A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.	The proposed change to the scheme will have **no** differential impact due to disability, the proposed scheme is designed to continue to protect the disabled by disregarding disability benefits such as Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payments.

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Are there concerns that the new policy/service could have a differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic. Are there any concerns that the policy/service amendments could have differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic? What evidence do you have for your answer?	The scheme will also further protect disabled applicants as it will provide a further income disregard per week which will reduce the level of income taken into account when calculating any support. If a reduction in support occurs as a result of changes to the scheme, the applicant may apply for additional support under the Council's Exceptional Hardship scheme.
Gender reassignment – gender reassignment discrimination occurs when a person is treated differently because they are trans*. Are there concerns that the new policy/service could have a differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic. Are there any concerns that the policy/service amendments could have differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic? What evidence do you have for your answer? *although the term gender reassignment and transsexual is in the Equality Act 2010, it is accepted that the preferred term is trans.	The proposed change to the scheme will have **no** differential impact due to gender or gender reassignment.
Marriage and civil partnership in the workplace; this refers the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership which is a union between a man and a woman or between a same-sex couple. Civil partnership is between partners of the same sex. Discrimination is when a person is treated differently at work because a person is married or in a civil partnership. Are there concerns that the new policy/service could have a differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic.	The proposed change to the scheme will have **no** differential impact due to marriage or civil partnership

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Are there any concerns that the policy/service amendments could have differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic? What evidence do you have for your answer?	
Are there concerns that the function could have a differential impact in terms of **pregnancy and maternity** in the workplace (e.g. pregnant or breast-feeding women). Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding. Are there concerns that the new policy/service could have a differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic. Are there any concerns that the policy/service amendments could have differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic? What evidence do you have for your answer?	The proposed change to the scheme will have **no** differential impact due to pregnancy or maternity
Race – this refers to the protected characteristic of race. It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins. Gypsy/Travellers are distinct group within this category Are there concerns that the new policy/service could have a differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic.	The proposed change to the scheme will have **no** differential impact due to race

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Are there any concerns that the policy/service amendments could have differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic? What evidence do you have for your answer?	
Religion and Belief in the workplace - refers to any religion, including a lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief. Are there concerns that the new policy/service could have a differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic. Are there any concerns that the policy/service amendments could have differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic? What evidence do you have for your answer?	The proposed change to the scheme will have **no** differential impact due to religion or belief
Sex - this refers to the protected characteristic of sex which can mean either male or female, or a group of people like men or boys, or women or girls. Are there concerns that the new policy/service could have a differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic. Are there any concerns that the policy/service amendments could have differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic? What evidence do you have for your answer?	The proposed change to the scheme will have **no** differential impact due to sex.

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Sexual orientation – this relates to whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes. Are there concerns that the new policy/service could have a differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic. Are there any concerns that the policy/service amendments could have differential impact on individuals with this protected characteristic? What evidence do you have for your answer?	The proposed change to the scheme will have **no** differential impact due to sexual orientation
Are there concerns that the function could have a differential impact on **part time/full time** employees? What evidence do you have for your answer?	The proposed change to the scheme will have **no** differential impact due to part-time or full-time employees. The scheme treats earnings in the same way irrespective of hours worked.
Are there concerns that the function could have a differential impact in terms of specific characteristics of Huntingdonshire e.g. **Rural isolation**	The proposed change to the scheme will have **no** differential impact for any other reasons and in summary is more generous to working age applicants.

Findings
Pension age applicants will not be affected as their scheme is prescribed by Central Government. Other measures undertaken to mitigate any potential negative impact on other protected groups include consulting the public about the proposed changes and asking for their views on the proposals, the disregard of disability benefits and implementation of the Council's CTS Exceptional Hardship scheme.

Council Tax Support is widely publicised on the Council's website, through information with Council Tax bills, and via signposting by officers. The Council has good links with independent debt advice agencies across the district, some of which fed into the consultation, to where customers that may be struggling financially would be signposted for support.

Recommendations
It is recommended that the EIA is approved