

PART A - Initial Equality Screening Assessment

As a public authority we need to ensure that all our strategies, policies, service and functions, both current and proposed have given proper consideration to equality and diversity.

A **screening** process can help judge relevance and provide a record of both the process and decision. Screening should be a short, sharp exercise that determines relevance for all new and revised strategies, policies, services and functions.

Completed at the earliest opportunity it will help to determine:

- the relevance of proposals and decisions to equality and diversity
- whether or not equality and diversity is being/has already been considered, and
- whether or not it is necessary to carry out an Equality Analysis (Part B).

Further information is available in the Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance – see page 9.

1. Title

Title: Housing Revenue Account Rents and Services Charges Report 2023-24

Directorate: Finance & Customer Services

Service area: Finance Business Partnering – Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

Lead person: Kathleen Andrews

Contact number: Extn 55987

Is this a:

Strategy / Policy

Service / Function

Other

If other, please specify

2. Please provide a brief description of what you are screening

The impact on existing and future council tenants of increasing housing rents and service charges from April 2023. The proposed increase in housing rents is 7% from April 2023, an increase in services charges of 6% in line with the Council's policy on fees and charges and increases to District Heating Charges of 186.43% on the unit charge and 44% to 150% increase on the weekly prepayment charges (depending on property size) in 2023/24. This is a result of the significant rise in energy prices which is expected to have a detrimental impact on the direct operating costs of the district heating schemes.

3. Relevance to equality and diversity

All the Council's strategies/policies, services/functions affect service users, employees or the wider community – borough wide or more local. These will also have a greater/lesser relevance to equality and diversity.

The following questions will help you to identify how relevant your proposals are.

When considering these questions think about age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, civil partnerships and marriage, pregnancy and maternity and other socio-economic groups e.g. parents, single parents and guardians, carers, looked after children, unemployed and people on low incomes, ex-offenders, victims of domestic violence, homeless people etc.

Questions	Yes	No
Could the proposal have implications regarding the accessibility of services to the whole or wider community?		√
Could the proposal affect service users?	√	
Has there been or is there likely to be an impact on an individual or group with protected characteristics?	√	
Have there been or likely to be any public concerns regarding the proposal?	√	
Could the proposal affect how the Council's services, commissioning or procurement activities are organised, provided, located and by whom?	√	
Could the proposal affect the Council's workforce or employment practices?		√

If you have answered no to all the questions above, please explain the reason

If you have answered **no** to all the questions above please complete **sections 5 and 6**.

If you have answered **yes** to any of the above please complete **section 4**.

4. Considering the impact on equality and diversity

If you have not already done so, the impact on equality and diversity should be considered within your proposals before decisions are made.

Considering equality and diversity will help to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and take active steps to create a discrimination free society by meeting a group or individual's needs and encouraging participation.

Please provide specific details for all three areas below using the prompts for guidance and complete an Equality Analysis (Part B).

• **How have you considered equality and diversity?**

Some of the key elements of the Housing Strategy are to support housing growth, achieve and maintain properties to the decent homes standard, keeping all tenants safe, tackling fuel poverty, providing a customer focus and efficient housing repairs service and provide an effective support service for all neighbourhoods within the borough.

Under Government rent setting rules all social housing providers have had an enforced rent reduction of -1% over 4 years to the end of 2019/20. The Rent Standard is published by Government to ensure all social housing is affordable and follows the same rules and regulations in terms of setting rent. The latest advice published enables Social Housing providers to increase rent by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for inflation + 1% and that this formula is confirmed for the next 5 years. However, the Government has recently completed a consultation on a cap on rent increases to ensure social rents remain affordable for tenants and to limit growth in the welfare budget. From April 2023 the Government has set in place a cap of 7% increases on social rent. This is the maximum increase allowed for one year on dwelling rents.

The budget proposals address key issues by funding investment in Tenant Involvement Services and the housing management teams to deal with issues of ASB, financial inclusion and engaging with under-represented groups.

The proposals also contribute towards maintaining investment in housing stock which allows investment in properties to install insulation, new heating systems etc. which tackle the fuel poverty agenda and the need for tenants with disabilities to have their homes heated to a warmer temperature than non-disabled tenants.

The budget proposals responds to the needs of communities for affordable housing through supporting the target towards building 1000 new Council homes by 2026. The tenure, size and type of accommodation (including Disabled person units) has been informed by the Strategic Housing Market assessment.

The budget proposals enables continued investment of over £1m in additional resources per year into front line housing services to support the most vulnerable tenants. These tenants will have equality characteristics.

• **Key findings**

The Council currently owns circa 20,000 homes, 544 leasehold homes and 3,375 garages with a turnover from rents and other income sources approaching £89m per annum (excluding the sale of new properties). This includes approx. 1,260 properties in the Council's District Heating Scheme.

The Council is required to set a balanced self-funded Housing Revenue Account budget annually and to ensure that we have a viable Housing Service that meets the needs of

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tenants of Rotherham.	
<p>• Actions</p> <p>A key priority is the ongoing work mitigating the impact of welfare reform and general financial pressures tenants face. The Council is committed to minimising any effects of welfare reform on tenants and to do this through continuing early intervention and arrears prevention. Our efforts will continue to be in supporting tenants to continue to pay their rent; by offering additional support to vulnerable tenants to help with money, benefits and debt advice; this is being done through our Financial Inclusion team. The past year has seen the Advocacy and Appeals service transfer into the Financial Inclusion team and as such funding for Money Advice Officers to support tenants in rent arrears manage priority debts.</p> <p>Over the last few years the Housing Service has invested more into front line and general fund services, an additional £1m per year into the front line to provide more support for our most vulnerable tenants and £1.6m per year into housing support services.</p>	
Date to scope and plan your Equality Analysis:	27/10/2022
Date to complete your Equality Analysis:	30/11/2022
Lead person for your Equality Analysis (Include name and job title):	Kathleen Andrews – Finance Manager – Housing

5. Governance, ownership and approval

Please state here who has approved the actions and outcomes of the screening:

Name	Job title	Date
Gioia Morrison	Head of Finance – Adult Care, Housing and Public Health	

6. Publishing

This screening document will act as evidence that due regard to equality and diversity has been given.

If this screening relates to a **Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision** a copy of the completed document should be attached as an appendix and published alongside the relevant report.

A copy of **all** screenings should also be sent to equality@rotherham.gov.uk For record keeping purposes it will be kept on file and also published on the Council's Equality and Diversity Internet page.

Date screening completed	03/01/2023
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Report title and date	Housing Revenue Account Rent and Service Charges 2023/24
If relates to a Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision – report date and date sent for publication	23 January 2023
Date screening sent to Performance, Intelligence and Improvement equality@rotherham.gov.uk	03/01/2023