

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: Revision of District Heating Charges 2023-24

Directorate: ACH & PH

Service area: Housing Services

Lead person: Paul Elliott

Contact number: 22494

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 decreasing District heating charges from 20.68 p per kwh to 15.94p per kwh in 2023/24 (back dated to 3 April 2023). This is a result of the energy prices beginning to stabilise which will reduce the cost of operating 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.

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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?		X
Could the proposal affect service users?	X	
Has there been or is there likely to be an impact on an individual or group with protected characteristics?	X	
Have there been or likely to be any public concerns regarding the proposal?	X	
Could the proposal affect how the Council's services, commissioning or procurement activities are organised, provided, located and by whom?		X
Could the proposal affect the Council's workforce or employment practices?		X

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

District heating charges are charged direct to service users and not the wider community.

District heating charges are not an employment matter.

District heating are fixed assets and the proposal will not affect location, who provides the service of procurement of utilities.

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 about tackling fuel poverty, providing a customer focus and efficient housing repairs service and provide an effective support service for all neighbourhoods within the borough.

The proposal is to reduce the price of District heating from 20.68 pence per kwh to 15.64 pence per kwh. This will mean service users who need or wish to maintain their homes at a higher temperature, for instance those with disabilities, elderly or with young children, will benefit more from the proposals as District heating is priced per unit. As they use more units they will see a bigger cost savings.

The proposal will result in a District heating bill for an average user being the equivalent of that of an average gas bill as the price of a bill will be matched to the Ofgem price cap of c£2,000 per annum, thus ensuring equity across District heating and non District heating residents.

• **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 £94m 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 tenants of Rotherham.

The recent reduction and stabilisation in energy costs as meant a review in the pricing of District heating can take place albeit it with the Council still operating at a deficit. The reduction will bring pricing in line with the predicted Ofgem Price Cap of c£2,000 per year from Quarter 3. Whilst many tenants will still be in fuel poverty even after the price reduction, support will continue to be targeted at those in most need.

Customers which require their homes to be a higher temperature will proportionately benefit greater from the proposals as the price is based on per kwh so the more heat that is used the greater the cost saving will be. Groups most likely to benefit are disabled, elderly and those with low incomes.

These same groups will benefit from government support such as cost of living payments and disability payments to help with the increased cost of living, pensioners will also receive assistance via a winter fuel payment of up to £500.

• **Actions**

A key priority is the ongoing work mitigating the impact of the general financial pressures tenants face as a result of the increasing cost of living. The Council is committed to minimising any effects of 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

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pay their rent (including District heating); by offering additional support to vulnerable tenants to help with money, benefits, and debt advice; this is being done through our Financial Inclusion team.

A bid has also been made to government to fund a review of the efficiency of the District heating network. If this is successful it will identify improvements that are necessary to improve efficiency and in turn reduce costs for residents.

The Council are also operating an Energy Crisis support scheme which will pay £250 for eligible households on a first come first served basis. It is anticipated this scheme will close at the end May 2023.

Date to scope and plan your Equality Analysis:	09/05/2023
Date to complete your Equality Analysis:	23/05/2023
Lead person for your Equality Analysis (Include name and job title):	Paul Elliott, Head of Service – Business and Commercial

5. Governance, ownership and approval

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

Name	Job title	Date
James Clark	AD for Housing	23.05.23

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	9 May 2023
Report title and date	Revision of District heating 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	19 June 2023 (Cabinet) 19 July 2023 (Council)
Date screening sent to Performance, Intelligence and Improvement equality@rotherham.gov.uk	23/05/2023