

Initial Equality Screening Assessment (Part A)

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.

Directorate: Finance and Customer Services	Service area: Finance
Lead person: Rob Mahon	Contact number: 01709 254518

1. Title:

Is this a:

☐

Strategy / Policy

☒

Service / Function

☐

Other

If other, please specify

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

On 3 February 2022 Government announced a package of support known as the Energy Bills Rebate to help households with rising energy bills, worth £9.1 billion in 2022-23. This included:

- A £150 non-repayable rebate for households in England in council tax bands A – D, known as the Council Tax Rebate.
- £144 million of discretionary funding for billing authorities to support households who are in need but are not eligible for the Council Tax Rebate, known as the Discretionary Fund.

Government released the guidance for the Council Tax Rebate and Discretionary Fund on the 23 February 2022, with the Council allocated £16.421m for the Council Tax Rebate scheme and £0.616m for the discretionary fund. For the discretionary fund the Council must design a scheme that utilises the grant funding available to provide support to households impacted by rising energy bills.

The main scheme requires the Council to design a process that will allow over 112,000 households, in bands A-D to receive a payment of £150 to the liable Council Tax payer, as at the 1st April 2022. This report sets out the Councils proposed approach to making these payments across existing Direct Debit payers and non-Direct Debit payers.

The discretionary scheme has been provided so that billing authorities can provide support to other energy bill payers who are not eligible under the terms of the core scheme. The Councils proposed scheme will split the funding equally across all households in these bands. This is estimated to generate a payment to these households of £82. Therefore, all households in the borough, liable for Council Tax will receive some level of support.

The Councils approach to the scheme delivery is considered to be as equitable as it can be. Where Council Tax payers currently pay by Direct Debit they will receive payment faster but this is only because the Council has their banking information available. For non-DD payers the Council will issue cheques, due to the delay in supply these will be issued much later in the process but this disparity cannot be avoided. In fact the payment by cheque means non-DD payers will actually receive payment at the same time as each other. With a claim based approach, they would receive the funding on a first come first served basis which would actively benefit the more digitally efficient in the borough.

The Councils approach to the discretionary scheme provides further equality as every household will receive at least some payment, it is non-discriminatory, though it is a smaller figure reflecting that residents in these banded households are likely to be more financially stable.

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, carers, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and any other relevant characteristics (for example socio-economic status, social class, income, unemployment, residential location or family background and education or skills levels).

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,		x

commissioning or procurement activities are organised, provided, located and by whom?		
Could the proposal affect the Council's workforce or employment practices?		x

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 prior to carrying out an **Equality Analysis**.

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 and use the prompts for guidance.

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

n/a

- **Key findings**

n/a

- **Actions**

n/a

Date to scope and plan your Equality Analysis:	n/a
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Date to complete your Equality Analysis:	n/a
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Lead person for your Equality Analysis (Include name and job title):	n/a
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5. Governance, ownership and approval

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

Name	Job title	Date
Judith Badger	Strategic Director – Finance and Customer Services	10/03/2022

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	10/03/2022
If relates to a Key Delegated Decision, Executive Board, Council or a Significant Operational Decision – report date and date sent for publication	
Date screening sent to Performance, Intelligence and Improvement equality@rotherham.gov.uk	