

## Equality Impact Assessment: *Housing Rents and Service Charges 2020-21*

The Equality Act 2010 includes a general duty which requires public authorities, in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- **Eliminate discrimination**, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
- **Advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- **Foster good relations** between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not

In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

Authorities which fail to carry out equality impact assessments risk making poor and unfair decisions which may discriminate against particular groups and worsen inequality.

<b>Committee name and date:</b>	<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Decisions being recommended:</b>	<b>People with protected characteristics potentially impacted by the decisions to be made:</b>
Executive Committee 14 <sup>th</sup> January 2020	Housing Rents and Service Charges 2020-21	That Executive approves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rents of Council dwellings are increased by 2.7% from 1 April 2020</li> </ul>	See below

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garage rents are increased by 2.7% from 1 April 2020</li> <li>• Service Charges will remain at their existing levels, with the exception of charges specified in paragraph 12.3, from 1 April 2020</li> </ul>	
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**Factors to consider in the assessment:** For each of the groups below, an assessment has been made on whether the proposed decision will have a **positive, negative or neutral impact**. This must be noted in the table below alongside brief details of why this conclusion has been reached and notes of any mitigation proposed. Where the impact is negative, a **high, medium or low assessment** is given. The assessment rates the impact of the policy based on the current situation (i.e. disregarding any actions planned to be carried out in future).

**High impact** – a significant potential impact, risk of exposure, history of complaints, no mitigating measures in place etc.

**Medium impact** – some potential impact exists, some mitigating measures are in place, poor evidence

**Low impact** – almost no relevancy to the process, e.g. an area that is very much legislation led and where the Council has very little discretion

Protected characteristic/ area of interest	Positive or Negative Impact	High, Medium or Low Impact	Reason
<b>Race and ethnicity</b> (including Gypsies and Travellers; migrant workers; asylum seekers).	<b>Neutral</b>		<p>Every year the Council reviews the rents and service charges that apply to its housing and garage stock. This is to take account of inflation and any other financial factors in order to ensure we have the income to deliver a high quality housing service to all tenants and garage renters.</p> <p>As a local authority we must observe government legislation and guidance when it comes to levying rents. As the report states, in October 2017, the government announced its intention to set a long term rent policy in respect of annual rent increases on both social rent and affordable rent properties of up to CPI plus 1% from 2020, for a period of 5 years.</p>

		<p>Prior to this we had been obliged to reduce rents by 1% per year for the last four years.</p> <p>Following government policy we intend to increase rents by CPI plus 1%, which equates to 2.7% for 2020/21.</p> <p>Service charges fall outside the policy but we intend to increase them in line with rent rises except where specified in the report (paragraph 12.3).</p> <p>Increasing rent and service charges by the amounts specified will have a neutral effect on protected groups. The cost rise to residents itself is a relatively modest one and follows four years of rent <b>reductions</b> for tenants.</p> <p>The rise will enable the Council to continue to provide an excellent range of services, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Repairing and improving our housing stock of almost 5,000 properties</li><li>• Building a significant number of new affordable homes (500 over the next ten years)</li><li>• Letting the properties</li><li>• Managing the tenancies, including dealing with anti-social behaviour complaints</li><li>• Managing the estates in which the properties are located</li></ul> <p>all of which would be compromised if we did not levy the proposed rent and service charge rises.</p> <p>The rise will also help the Housing Service contribute towards the Council's corporate plan, in particular to the objectives of providing value-for-money services, leading a well-run council and building great neighbourhoods.</p>
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			<p>No group is discriminated against in the allocation of council housing (or in renting garages from the Council). All groups benefit equally. It could be argued that a group such as those with a disability will tend to have a lower average income than non-disabled people and therefore will be disproportionately adversely affected by any rent rise. However people on low incomes and/or with high rents will (if they fulfil the conditions) qualify for housing benefit (now Universal Credit) and will therefore be insulated from negative financial effects.</p> <p>As the report states it is acknowledged that there may be an increase in the level of rent arrears as a result of the shift to Universal Credit, however that risk is being mitigated by the Council working closely with Citizens Advice to provide advice and support services to Universal Credit claimants. While the proposed budget for rental income in 2020/21 has made an estimated £100k provision for an increase in arrears,</p> <p>Even with the proposed rent and service charge increases Exeter City Council rents are among the lowest in the city. For example last year the average rent for a two bedroom property in the private sector was £179. For Exeter City Council social rent it was £77.</p>
<p><b>Disability:</b> as defined by the Equality Act – a person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse impact on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.</p>	<p><b>Negative</b></p>	<p><b>Low</b></p>	<p>See above</p> <p>As has been stated, disabled adults are more likely to be living in low-income households than non-disabled adults. Additionally, disabled people are more likely to not be working, and where they are working, are more likely to be earning less than non-disabled people. It is evident therefore the increase in rents is likely to specifically impact this protected characteristic.</p> <p>However we believe that as the rises proposed are modest; the welfare benefit system should be able to protect people; and we can provide advice, help and support both from ourselves and through working with Citizens Advice, any impact will be low.</p>

<b>Sex/Gender</b>	<b>Neutral</b>		See box 1 above
<b>Gender reassignment</b>	<b>Neutral</b>		See box 1 above
<b>Religion and belief</b> (includes no belief, some philosophical beliefs such as Buddhism and sects within religions).	<b>Neutral</b>		See box 1 above
<b>Sexual orientation</b> (including heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual).	<b>Neutral</b>		See box 1 above
<b>Age</b> (children and young people aged 0-24; adults aged 25-50; younger older people aged 51-75/80; older people 81+; frail older people; people living with age related conditions. The age categories are for illustration only as overriding consideration should be given to needs).	<b>Neutral/positive</b>		There will be a small positive effect on those older tenants living in our older persons' accommodation as their service charge for the Older Persons' Property Services Officers will be reduced.
<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b> including new and breast feeding mothers	<b>Neutral</b>		See first box above
<b>Marriage and civil partnership status</b>	<b>Neutral</b>		See first box above
<b><u>Actions identified that will mitigate any negative impacts and/or promote inclusion</u></b>			

**Officer:**

**Date:**