

Priority Based Budgeting 3: 2016/17

Overall Equality Impact Assessment

(General Fund, HRA, Rent and Service Charges)

Equality at Stevenage Borough Council

Stevenage Borough Council as a service provider, employer and community leader is committed to achieving equal opportunities for everyone. We want to deliver services that are fair, accessible and open to everyone who needs them.

Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are an important part of the process in ensuring that our intention is translated into action. They help to ensure that decisions are made in a fair, transparent and accountable way, considering the needs and the rights of different people in the community.

Based on the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, the EqIA considers the impact on the following groups when making decisions, updating policies and starting new projects:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marital status
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation.

Although non-statutory, the Council has chosen to adopt the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion in considering the impact on people in terms of their social or economic background.

EqIAs also help the council to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). The Duty states that a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is unlawful under this Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

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Savings Proposals 2016/17

Prior to their consideration at Executive in November 2015, the savings proposals have been reviewed to determine any potential impact on Stevenage residents in terms of their protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. The majority of these have no public impact and so have not been subject to any further EqIA.

Where a negative, positive or disproportionate impact is likely, heads of service and other appropriate managers have drafted Brief or Full EqIAs. These have been summarised over the following pages and will inform the recommendations made at Executive on 11 November 2015. Action to mitigate or further analyse the impact on equality groups is identified where appropriate.

The following activity will also take place:

November 2015 – January 2016 – Consultation on individual proposals as appropriate

November 2015 – January 2016 – EqIAs finalised and Full EqIAs completed where necessary considering further evidence and consultation results

Overarching HRA Budget EqIA developed considering the collective impact of the HRA Budget on equality groups

Overarching Budget 2016/17 EqIA developed considering the collective impact of all HRA and GF Budget proposals on equality groups

January – February 2016 – Consideration of all completed EqIAs at Council

Savings Proposals 2017/18 and 2018/19

Savings proposals for subsequent years as part of the three-year priority based approach have not been reviewed at this stage to determine any potential impact on local people. These savings will be agreed in principle in the first instance, and will be subject to assessment and agreement as part of future annual Budget-setting processes. Those that are likely to affect equality groups will have EqIAs completed.



Ref	Saving proposed	Summary of impact	Possible Mitigation	Contact Officer
S4a	Delete Customer Focus Assistant post when it becomes vacant	<p>Neutral All</p> <p>One of the purposes of this post is to ensure the council treats people fairly and with respect. These are principles contained within the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>The Customer Focus Team priorities and work programme will be reviewed to ensure that the current level of service is maintained.</p>	None required.	Richard Protheroe
S18	Stop funding Grantfinder Software Licence	<p>Neutral All</p> <p>The budget in 2015/16 consists £7,700 for Grantfinder and £3,070 for Community Development general expenses. The budget traditionally has been used to support community development work through covering general expenses purchases, neighbourhood working initiatives, leaflets and specific one off activities. These can be covered through other existing budgets within the Community Development team.</p> <p>The Grantfinder funding software has been used once within the last 12 months to provide funding information to a voluntary and community sector group and therefore removal will not result in any significant impact. Funding has not been awarded from Grantfinder in the last 12 months.</p>	Voluntary Organisations and Community Groups can continue to access information on funding opportunities through Stevenage Community Action.	Richard Protheroe
S19	Reduce the Equalities budget by £500 to £1,000	<p>Neutral</p> <p>The budget was reduced from £2,000 in 2012/13 due to regular underspends in excess of £500 per year. Underspends have continued year on year, with the budget being used mostly to fund the council's diversity calendar, printing of materials and ad-hoc sponsorship for projects. The cost of the calendar has reduced significantly since bringing its production in-house.</p>	There will continue to be a budget of £1,000 available. Responsibility for equality is streamlined across all council services, with budgets used to promote equality and celebrate diversity where possible.	Richard Protheroe



Ref	Saving proposed	Summary of impact	Possible Mitigation	Contact Officer
S33	Deletion of Play Officers post for the Toddler Groups Initiative	<p>Negative</p> <p>Age There will be no Council officer support offered to the 23 Baby and Toddler groups for children up to the age of 5 in the town from the Play team. The post provides advice and support to 23 volunteer managed baby and toddler groups in Stevenage. Officers expect the more established groups to continue to provide their services without ongoing recourse to the Council.</p> <p>Disability The Council will not be able to offer advice or support beyond signposting to those residents who require specific services and or information.</p> <p>Pregnancy and Maternity The Council will not be able to offer advice or support beyond signposting to those residents who require specific services and or information and the resources to set up new groups.</p> <p>Race The Council runs a specialist group for families who have English as an additional language (AWAAZ). This provides an introduction to toddler groups and a stepping stone to other groups in the town. This group is directly run by the Play Officer and the Council will not be able to operate the group going forwards. This will affect around 20 families registered with the AWAAZ toddler group.</p> <p>Socio-economic Toddler groups provide a low charged service directly in local neighbourhoods and some users are vulnerable families in Stevenage. We know from the six years that we operated the Children's Centres in Stevenage, that a small number of these families don't engage with official organisations such as Children's Centres, and are, therefore at risk of not being signposted to support networks that are in place. The TGI officer has been able to provide toddler group volunteers with signposting information that they can offer to these families. An alternative means of providing the signposting advice will be considered.</p>	<p>Play and Children's Centres will continue to operate and provide opportunities for current TGI users to engage.</p> <p>A contingency fund of £2,000 per year has been made available to provide small grants to groups who suffer financial difficulties.</p>	Aidan Sanderson



Ref	Saving proposed	Summary of impact	Possible Mitigation	Contact Officer
S40	Phased increase in Careline charges (to recover the costs of the service)	<p>Positive The same charges will apply to all service users at the end of the phasing-in period. This will be irrespective of tenure or equality characteristics.</p> <p>Negative impact – likely</p> <p>Age People who use the Careline service do so because they have vulnerabilities relating to age, disability or both, that mean they require additional support and reassurance to maintain a good quality of life. Customer data shows that of 858 customers 83% are aged over 65.</p> <p>Disability Whilst there is no robust data to evidence this point it is possible that some users may no longer wish to use the service.</p> <p>Socio-economic The phased increase in Careline charges may require some current users to reprioritise their expenditure where they are able to do so. This service is not eligible for Housing Benefit.</p>	The council's intention is to recover the costs for providing services thereby ensuring that they are not subsidised through the rental income received from tenants or the funds received from Council Tax payers. In doing so, some people will be affected by the introduction of charges for Careline that they currently do not pay for. To reduce the impact of this change the new charges will be phased in over the next 2-3 years.	Jaine Cresser
S46	<p>Implementation of the policy for the Management of Commercial Properties for voluntary and community sector organisations (VCOs)</p> <p>NB: this Policy and EqIA were approved by Executive in</p>	<p>Negative All The consultation carried out with all VCOs currently in occupation broadly showed that there were concerns about negative impacts on their service users with protected characteristics should a graduated commercial rent and service charge be introduced. Many are drawn from parts of the population that are in severe financial difficulty. These were mostly with regard to the potential additional financial burden that could undermine the services they currently provide.</p> <p>Positive All The new policy increases accessibility to our estate and the chance of positive benefits to communities. The policy offers a transparent method</p>	<p>Visits have been carried out to all organisations currently in receipt of a rent in kind to discuss the new policy.</p> <p>The policy will launch in April 2016 for existing organisations. It has been agreed that to lessen the impact on organisations, the compliance charge can be collected monthly</p>	Keith Brown



Ref	Saving proposed	Summary of impact	Possible Mitigation	Contact Officer
	November 2014	for receiving and assessing applications and for arriving at a fair subsidy. The purpose of the policy is also to recover the cost of compliance charges that the council is required to pay for the management of commercial properties. The council will not secure surpluses under the revised arrangement.	rather than quarterly or yearly.	
CFC	Implement a fair approach to Concessions for Fees and Charges (with a new policy)	<p>Positive The aim of the policy is to provide a fair and consistent approach to concessions for services provided by the council that it has the discretion to set charges for. A principle of the policy is to recover the costs for providing such services, so that the council does not subsidise these through funds received from Council Tax payers. The same rate of concession will apply to all fees and charges where applicable.</p> <p>Socio-economic Concessions are available to those in receipt of means tested benefits. They will also need to give permission for a check to be made.</p> <p>Unequal Age Concessions available to groups and organisations whose services solely benefit children up to the age of 18 but not for older persons. This may result in a lower uptake of council services by older persons.</p> <p>Negative Disability, Religion or Belief There will no longer be any concession exclusively for disabled persons and faith groups. This may result in a lower uptake of council services by these groups.</p> <p>Socio-economic The cost to access services may be prohibitive for those with limited income, who are not in receipt of means tested benefits.</p>	<p>Some people may be affected by the removal of a concession or a reduction in their concessionary amount and therefore incur an increase in the charges they must pay for council services. To reduce the initial impact of this, we will gradually phase in the 25% concession, where necessary, by January 2018.</p> <p>Consult stakeholders affected by the new policy (January 2016)</p> <p>Targeted communication of the new policy (April 2016)</p>	Lee Myers



Ref	Saving proposed	Summary of impact	Possible Mitigation	Contact Officer
HS9	Increase of laundry charges for tenants in Brent Court and Harrow Court (to recover the costs of the service)	<p>Positive The council is drafting a new policy on Concessions for Fees and Charges, of which one of the principles is to recover the costs of providing the service. This includes the cost of laundry services provided for all flat blocks. Increased charges were implemented at Roundmead in 2014/15 and to date no residents have approached us with concerns or asked for support. Applying the same charges to all other flat blocks will make this service fair to all users.</p> <p>Negative Socio-economic It is possible that some people may choose not to pay the increased charges and/or seek to use alternative services elsewhere where they are available. However, it should be noted that increased charges were implemented at Roundmead in 2014/15 and to date no residents have approached us with concerns or asked for support.</p>	Mitigation is not possible, but this proposal reflects the Council's ambition to recover the costs for the services it provides.	Jaine Cresser
HS12	Charge £7.50 per property for Concessionary TV licences in sheltered housing schemes for under 75s	<p>Positive All residents aged under 75 living in sheltered housing will have to pay for a TV licence (a standard set by the TV Licensing Authority) whereas at the moment the Council is subsidising a quarter of residents. A TV Licence is not a council service and so should be paid for by residents. Applying this charge to all residents in sheltered accommodation will be fair to all.</p> <p>Negative – minimal Age, Disability and Socio-economic Tenants living in sheltered housing do so because they have additional needs that require support relating to age, disability or both. The minimum age for entry into sheltered housing is 55 years and data from Northgate shows that 94% of tenants in sheltered housing are aged 60+. Northgate data on sheltered housing tenants in relation to disability was collected some years ago and is not up to date. Affordability may be an issue for those with low incomes, but the impact is considered to be minimal since the cost is £7.50 per year.</p>	The fee is set by the TV Licencing Authority and is at a concessionary rate compared with the cost of a licence in general accommodation. The council cannot offer further mitigation, but this proposal will support the council with its ambition to apply fair charging principles for concessions.	Jaine Cresser



Ref	Saving proposed	Summary of impact	Possible Mitigation	Contact Officer
HRA	Revised Rent and Service Charge Policy	<p>Positive The aim of the policy is to provide a fair method of calculating affordable rents and service charges for all of our tenants. It also aligns with the council's proposed new Concessions for Fees and Charges Policy and the principle of recovering the cost of providing services. Applying concessions across all council services will support the council in being fair to all residents. This includes services for which service charges are payable by tenants in flat blocks and sheltered accommodation.</p> <p>Socio-economic The rent decrease will be applied across all tenancies prescribed by the Work and Welfare Reform Bill regardless of circumstances. The Government is currently planning for it to be applied for four years. Those reliant on Housing Benefit to cover their rent and HB eligible service charges represent 54% of the Council's tenants (a reduction from last year's 57%) and won't be affected by the increase in service charges. Their HB award will be recalculated.</p> <p>Negative / Unequal Age Around 2,600 properties will be subject to an increase in service charges, and approx. 800 of these are sheltered accommodation. Tenants living in sheltered housing do so because they have additional needs that require support relating to age, disability or both. The minimum age for entry into sheltered housing is 55 years and data from Northgate indicates that the proportion of tenants aged 60+ in sheltered housing, is almost three times that in all tenant housing. In relation to flat blocks, the data indicates that there is a higher proportion of people aged 18-29 years in flat blocks compared with all SBC housing.</p> <p>Disability Northgate data on tenants in relation to disability was collected a number of years ago and is not up to date. This information was also disclosed at the tenants' discretion so some tenants may not have provided it. To give some context, the data indicates that the proportion</p>	A cap has been applied to the increase in service charges of £3 per week. In some instances, applying the principle of recovering the cost of services results in an increase to service charges of more than £3. As a means of mitigating the impact on these tenants, the council will subsidise the costs that exceed the £3 cap in for those affected.	Jaine Cresser



Ref	Saving proposed	Summary of impact	Possible Mitigation	Contact Officer
		<p>of tenants in sheltered housing declaring that they had a disability was almost double the proportion for the whole SBC tenant population. The proportion of tenants living in flat blocks declaring a disability was very similar to the proportion living in all properties, and so a disproportionate impact on these tenants is not anticipated.</p> <p>Socio-economic Properties exempt from this clause will have the rent increased by CPI + 1%. (Currently this is circa 95 LSSO properties and 2 shared ownership properties).</p> <p>Those who receive services for which a service charge is made will be charged the actual cost of these services. However, the increase in the charge will be capped at £3 per week. Heating charges are exempt from HB and tenants are expected to pay. Water charges are also exempt from HB and are set by the Water Authority. SBC collects the water charges on behalf of the Water Authority.</p>		



Full Equality Impact Assessment

For a policy, project, service or other decision that is new, changing or under review

What is being assessed?				PBB3: HRA and GF Budget Proposals 2016/17			
Lead Assessor	Strategic Management Board			Assessment team	Richard Protheroe Karen Griffiths Graeme Buck Aidan Sanderson Lee Myers Environmental Services Managers Elizabeth Ddamulira Karen Long Janet Hagger Katrina Shirley Jaine Cresser Emma Barron		
Start date	23/10/2015	End date	7/1/2016				
When will the EqIA be reviewed?		January 2017					

Who may be affected by it?	Residents, customers of council services, general public, all tenants (particularly older and disabled people living in sheltered schemes and residents in flat blocks with laundry services), staff, Members, voluntary and community groups, TGI Play Officer, TGI service users, Children's Centres.
What are the key aims of it?	<p>To set balanced, fair and sustainable HRA and GF Budgets for 2016/17 and thereafter. The EqIA considers the key issues and opportunities for equality groups highlighted in the following proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S4a: Delete Customer Focus Assistant post when it becomes vacant • S18: Stop funding Grantfinder Software Licence • S19: Reduce the Equalities budget by £500 to £1,000 • S33: Deletion of the Play Officers post for the Toddler Groups Initiative • S40: Increase in Careline charges • CFC: Concessions for Fees and Charges Policy • HS9: Increase of laundry charges for tenants in Brent Court and Harrow Court • HS12: Charge £7.50 per property for Concessionary TV Licenses in sheltered housing schemes for under 75s



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HRA: Rent and Service Charge Policy (the increase of service charges for flat blocks by up to £3 per week includes the new charge for pest control works in communal areas)
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What positive measures are in place (if any) to help fulfil our legislative duties to:					
Remove discrimination & harassment	The CFC policy applies to all fees and charges that the council has discretion to set. The policy sets out why and how the concessionary rates apply.	Promote equal opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The aim of the CFC policy is to provide a fair and consistent approach to concessions for services provided by the council that it has the discretion to set charges for. A principle of the policy is to recover the costs for providing such services, so that the council does not subsidise them through funds received from Council Tax payers. The same principles and rates of concession will apply to all applicable services and people who use them, irrespective of equality characteristics. All residents aged under 75 living in sheltered housing will have to pay for a TV licence (HS12) (a standard set by the TV Licensing Authority) whereas at the moment we are subsidising a quarter of them. A TV Licence is not a council service and so should be paid for by residents, to be fair to all of them. The aim of the HRA policy is to provide a fair method of calculating affordable rents and service charges for all of our tenants. 	Encourage good relations	The council, and therefore the Council Tax payer, will not subsidise commercial operators as a result of the fee being less than the service cost (CFC). Commercial operators will be required to pay the full cost of providing a service.

What sources of data / information are you using	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of previous spend on the General Expenses code within the Chief Executive's Unit and assessment of usage of Grantfinder over the last 12 months Equalities budget actuals 2010/11 to 2015/16 E&D Policy and Action Plan to 2016
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to inform your assessment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• TGI Budget 2014/15 Actuals• TGI Budget 2015/16 Estimate• TGI Usage data (23 groups are supported)• Online survey with TGI volunteers 2015• TGI user satisfaction comments• (TGI) officer knowledge of the service• Historical records of groups forming and collapsing since TGIs inception• Residents Survey 2015 results• Stevenage Day June 2015 consultation• Customer feedback from laundry charges survey in 2014• Consultation with Residents' Panel in 2014• Housing Census data• E&D data on residents living in the sheltered schemes• E&D data on Careline customers• Welfare Reform and Work Bill (http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/welfarereformandwork/documents.html)• DCLG Consultation on "pay to stay" (https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/pay-to-stay-high-income-social-tenants)• http://www.parliament.uk/documents/impact-assessments/IA15-006F.pdf• Rent and service charge policy to be agreed by Exec 19 January 2016• Rent account information
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In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make?	<p>(S33) The post provides advice and support to 23 volunteer managed baby and toddler groups in Stevenage. Officers expect the more established groups to continue to provide their services without ongoing recourse to the Council. A provision of £2000pa has been made available to enable small grants to be given to groups who suffer financial difficulties.</p> <p>(CFC) Those groups of people that may have been entitled to concessions previously will be affected if, as a result of the new policy, they will no longer be able to access concessionary rates for council services. Some people may also see a reduction in the amount of concession they receive. However, the new policy sets out a transparent framework for future fees, charges and concessions that will be easier for all service providers and customers to understand and use. The policy states 'Fees and charges should be set to reflect the cost of the services. Where possible there</p>
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should be no net cost to the Council.'

Residents have indicated their preference for fees and charges to be increased before service cuts or increasing council tax to help address budgetary gaps in the council in both the town-wide Residents' Survey in 2015 and at Stevenage Day 2015. This was also their first preference in the council's 2014 consultation activity to inform the Budget set for 2015/16.

The policy will apply to everyone irrespective of their equality characteristics.

(HRA) The requirement to decrease rents by 1% for the next 4 years is being considered as part of the broader HRA Business Plan review which, subject to discussion and agreement with Members, is likely to result in the reprioritisation of our remaining resources. This 1% rent reduction will result in a £12 million shortfall in the original Business Plan (Nov 14) in the first 4 years, escalating to £225 million over the 30 years of the Plan.

Most of those who receive services for which there is a service charge payable will see an increase in their weekly charge. This relates to those who live in flats predominantly, as well as sheltered accommodation. We have recognised that this may cause financial difficulty for some people hence the cap in the service charge increase of £3 per week. We will provide advice and support to help those who may have difficulty in making these payments.

The DWP's impact assessment confirms that where a tenant is not in receipt of Housing Benefit (HB) and has no service charges, they will be better off financially through the 1% rent reduction.



Evidence and impact assessment

Explain the potential impact and opportunities it could have for people in terms of the following characteristics, where applicable:

Age					
Positive impact	Concessions available to groups and organisations whose services solely benefit children up to the age of 18. (CFC) .	Negative impact	<p>There will be no council officer support offered to the 23 Baby and Toddler groups (S33) for children up to the age of 5 in the town from the Play team. A contingency fund has been set up to aid groups who require financial aid. It is possible that taking up this option could eventually result in a reduction of the number of groups offered to parents and children, an increased demand on Children's and Play Centres and a reduction in the number of new groups that are set up.</p> <p>The Budgets for 2016/17 will affect older people in a number of ways – more so than any other equality group. There will no longer be concessions exclusively for older persons based purely on age (CFC). This may result in a lower uptake of council services by this group.</p> <p>The aim of the proposed policy on charges and concessions is to be fair to all users of our services and to recover the costs of service provision. The council will not make a surplus from such charges. A direct result of the intention to be fair to all this year's HRA Budget will include an increase in charges particularly for older tenants. Many people who use the Careline service (S40) do so because they have vulnerabilities relating to age, disability or both, that mean they require additional support and reassurance to maintain a good quality of life. Customer data shows that 711 out of 858 (83%) Careline customers are over 65 years of age. Around 2,600 properties will be subject to an increase in service charges of up to £3 per week (HRA), and approx. 800 of these are sheltered accommodation. In relation to flat blocks, the data indicates that a</p>	Unequal impact	Under the new CFC policy, concessions will be available to groups and organisations whose services solely benefit children up to the age of 18 but not for older persons.



		<p>higher proportion of people aged 18-29 years living in flat blocks compared with all SBC housing. The minimum age for entry into sheltered housing is 55 years and data from Northgate indicates that the proportion of tenants aged 60+ in sheltered housing, is almost three times the proportion for all tenant housing. Tenants in sheltered housing who are aged under 75 will also be required to pay for their concessionary TV Licence (HS12), although the impact of this is thought to be very small as the fee is £7.50 per year, per property.</p>		
<p>Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment</p>		<p>See page 11 for HRA.</p> <p>(CFC) Concessions have previously been made available to people, for some services, on the basis of their age.</p>		
<p>What opportunities are there to mitigate the impact or promote equality?</p>	<p>(CFC) The new policy sets out a transparent framework for future fees and charges that will be easier for all service providers and customers to understand and use. Concessions will apply to older persons if they are found to be in receipt of means tested benefits. Communication will be needed to inform any affected people. A cap has been applied to the increase in service charges (HRA) of £3 per week. In some instances, applying the principle of recovering the cost of services results in an increase to service charges of more than £3. As a means of mitigating the impact on these tenants, the council will subsidise the costs that exceed the £3 cap in these circumstances.</p>		<p>What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)</p>	



Disability e.g. physical impairment, mental ill health, learning difficulties, long-standing illness				
Positive impact		Negative impact	<p>(S33) The Council will not be able to offer advice or support beyond signposting to those residents who require specific services and or information.</p> <p>(CFC) No longer any concession exclusively for disabled persons. This may result in a lower uptake of council services by this group.</p> <p>The increase in Careline charges (S40) may result in some users no longer wishing to use the service, leaving them at risk in terms of their health and wellbeing. This assessment is based on knowledge of the service and of the types of customers who use it. Robust, valid and up-to-date data relating to customers' disabilities is not available to support this.</p> <p>(HRA) Northgate data on tenants in relation to disability was collected a number of years ago and is not up to date. This information was also disclosed at the tenants' discretion so some tenants may not have provided it. To give some context, the data indicates that the proportion of tenants in sheltered housing declaring that they had a disability was almost double the proportion for the whole SBC tenant population. The proportion of tenants living in flat blocks declaring a disability was very similar to the proportion living in all properties, and so a disproportionate impact on these tenants is not anticipated.</p>	Unequal impact
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		<p>See page 11 for HRA.</p> <p>(S33) Officer knowledge of the service.</p> <p>(CFC) Concessions have previously been made available to people, for some services, on the basis of their disability.</p>		
What opportunities are there to mitigate the impact or promote equality?	<p>The new CFC policy sets out a transparent framework for future fees and charges that will be easier for all service providers and customers to understand and use. Concessions will apply to disabled people if they are found to be in receipt of means tested benefits. Communication will be needed to inform any affected people.</p>		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	



Pregnancy & maternity					
Positive impact		Negative impact	(S33) The Council will not be able to offer advice or support beyond signposting to those residents who require specific services and or information and the resources to set up new groups.	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment			(S33) The council will have no skilled human resource to undertake such tasks.		
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

Race					
Positive impact		Negative impact	(S33) The Council runs a specialist group for families who have English as an additional language (AWAAZ). This provides an introduction to toddler groups and a stepping stone to other groups in the town. This group is directly run by the Play Officer and the Council will not be able to operate the group going forwards. This will affect around 20 families registered with the AWAAZ toddler group.	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment			(S33) The council will have no skilled human resource to manage groups like AWAAZ.		
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

Religion or belief					
Positive impact		Negative impact	(CFC) No concessions will be available to faith groups in future. This may result in a lower uptake of council services by this group. However, all Stevenage residents have access to council services.	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment			(CFC) Concessions have previously been negotiated with some faith groups for some services in the past.		
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		(CFC) The new policy sets out a transparent framework for future fees and charges that will be easier for all service providers and customers to understand and use. Concessions may well be given to a faith groups if a member is found to be in receipt of means tested benefits. Communication will be needed to inform any affected people.		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	



Socio-economic¹ e.g. low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users, social value in procurement					
Positive impact	<p>(CFC) Concessions are available to those in receipt of means tested benefits. They will also need to give permission for a check to be made. The rent decrease (HRA) will be applied across all tenancies prescribed by the Work and Welfare Reform Bill regardless of circumstances. It is expected to be applied for four years. Those reliant on Housing Benefit to cover their rent and HB eligible service charges represent 54% of the Council's tenants (a reduction from last year's 57%) and</p>	Negative impact	<p>(S33) Toddler groups provide a low charged service directly in local neighbourhoods and some users are vulnerable families in Stevenage. We know from the six years that we operated the Children's Centres in Stevenage, that a small number of these families don't engage with official organisations such as Children's Centres, and are, therefore at risk of not being signposted to support networks that are in place. The TGI officer has been able to provide toddler group volunteers with signposting information that they can offer to these families. An alternative means of providing the signposting advice will be considered.</p> <p>(CFC) The cost to access services may be prohibitive for those with limited income, who are not in receipt of means tested benefits. Some properties will be exempt from the 1% rent reduction (HRA) and will see their rent increase by CPI +1% (currently this is circa 95 LSSO properties and 2 shared ownership properties). The increase in Careline charges (S40) may, subject to personal budget choices, make the service unaffordable for some of the current users. This service is not eligible for Housing Benefit. This year's HRA Budget will result in an increase in various charges for the majority of tenants living in flat blocks and sheltered accommodation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These tenants will be charged the actual cost of services for which a service charge is payable (HRA). However, we recognised that this may result in large increases for some tenants and will cap the increase to £3 per week. If the actual charge exceeds this, the council will subsidise any costs above the £3 a week increase. • Those that are aged under 75 and live in sheltered housing will have to pay their concessionary TV Licence (HS12). Affordability may be an issue for those with low incomes, but the impact is considered to be 	Unequal impact	

¹Although non-statutory, the council has chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion to consider the impact on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.



	<p>won't be affected by the increase in service charges. Their HB award will be recalculated.</p>		<p>minimal since the cost is £7.50 per year, per property.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenants living in flat blocks Brent Court, Harrow Court, High Plash and Walden End will incur increased laundry charges (HS9). It is possible that some people may choose not to pay the increased charges and/or seek to use alternative services elsewhere where they are available. However, increased charges were implemented at Roundmead in 2014/15 and to date no residents have approached us with concerns or asked for support. Charging the same costs for services to all tenants who use them, supports the council's ambition to be to all service users. 		
<p>Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment</p>	<p>See page 11 for HRA.</p> <p>(S33) We have evidence from 6 years of managing Children's Centres that some families will not engage with statutory bodies. To inform the CFC policy, a benchmarking exercise with was carried out other local authorities' concessions policies.</p>				
<p>What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?</p>	<p>(CFC) The new policy sets out a transparent framework for future fees and charges that will be easier for all service providers and customers to understand and use. Communication will be needed to inform any affected people.</p> <p>In order to move towards full cost recovery for the Careline service (S40) on an equitable basis but limit the impact on vulnerable individuals, charges will be introduced on a phased basis over a 2-3 year period.</p> <p>(HRA) A cap has been applied to the increase in service charges of £3 per week. In some instances, applying the principle of recovering the cost of services results in an increase to service charges of more than £3. As a means of mitigating the impact on these tenants, the council will subsidise the costs that exceed the £3 cap in these circumstances.</p> <p>The rent notification letter (to be sent out at the end of February) will offer tenants the opportunity to discuss any queries they have with staff. It will explain why the rent has decreased and also explain that in most instances there has been an increase in service charges. Where a property has a number of service charges they will be fully explained, with a summary of how the weekly charge has increased overall.</p> <p>Where support charges are also included (mainly but not exclusively for sheltered and flexi care schemes) separate notifications will be sent out to these residents to ensure it is clearly set out how each element of the weekly charge is made up.</p>			<p>What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)</p>	



	To ensure that this is explained as clearly as possible there will be a FAQ sheet and details on the website. The Housing Management Board has agreed the content of the letters, which were subsequently approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder.		
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Gender reassignment, Marriage or civil partnership, Sex, Sexual orientation N/A			
Positive impact	Negative impact	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment			
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	

Other			
please feel free to consider the potential impact on people in any other contexts			
Positive impact	Negative impact	Unequal impact	
			(HRA) Those in properties that are exempt from the 1% rent decrease will have their rent increased by CPI +1%. Service charges will also reflect actual charges (increase capped at £3 per week). The overall impact for most of those in flat blocks and sheltered accommodation will be an increase in combined rent and service charges, whereas all other eligible tenants will see a decrease in the rent.
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	See page 11 for HRA. (S18) The Grantfinder funding software has been used once within the last 12 months to provide funding information to a voluntary and community sector group and therefore removal will not result in any significant impact. Funding has not been awarded from Grantfinder in the last 12 months. Voluntary Organisations and Community Groups can access information on funding opportunities through Stevenage Community Action. (S19) The Equalities budget was reduced from £2,000 in 2012/13 due to regular underspends in excess of £500 per year. Underspends have continued year on year, with the budget being used mostly to fund the council's diversity calendar, printing of materials and ad-hoc sponsorship for projects. The cost of the calendar has reduced significantly since bringing its production in-house.		
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	



What are the findings of any consultation with:

Residents?	<p>(S33) A consultation process will be carried out with the post holder and other members of staff in Children's Services and Community Development.</p> <p>(CFC) The 2015 Residents Survey identifies 'Increase income from fees and charges' as one of the preferred ways to help balance the Councils budget ahead of Council Tax increases or cutting services.</p> <p>(HRA) In the Residents' Survey 2015, 54% of tenants said they had felt the impact of government cuts to public services compared with 43% of all respondents. 'Increase income from fees and charges' was the second priority of all respondents (and tenants). 'Selling our services where possible' was the first priority and the council is investigating opportunities to do more of this.</p>
Staff?	
Partners?	
Voluntary & community sector?	<p>(S33) A consultation with toddler group leaders will be carried out.</p>
Other stakeholders?	<p>(S33) A consultation with Children's Centres will be carried out.</p> <p>(HS12) The sheltered and flexicare housing focus group were consulted on 14th December 2015 with regards to charging all residents eligible for the £7.50 per year concessionary TV licence. All agreed that this should go ahead.</p> <p>(HRA) Housing Management Board was consulted in Dec 2015 and was supportive of the rent and service charge proposals.</p>

Overall conclusion & future activity

Explain the overall findings of the assessment and reasons for outcome (please choose one):		
1. No inequality, inclusion issues or opportunities to further improve have been identified		
Negative / unequal impact, barriers to inclusion or improvement opportunities identified	2a. Adjustments made	
	2b. Continue as planned	<p>The future viability of the HRA Business Plan will be reliant in part upon us being able to recover the cost of service provision where it's possible to do so in line with the Council's broader ambition in this regard.</p> <p>Pending the results of the TGI proposal consultations.</p> <p>The CFC policy will help the council to take a rigorous approach to ensure greater</p>



		consistency and fairness in the application of concessions, and greater transparency on the extent to which service costs are covered by fees and charges.
	2c. Stop and remove	

Detail the actions that are needed as a result of this assessment and how they will help to remove discrimination & harassment, promote equal opportunities and / or encourage good relations :				
Action	Will this help to remove, promote and / or encourage?	Responsible officer	Deadline	How will this be embedded as business as usual?
(S33) Consult the postholder, affected staff, toddler groups and Children's Centres	N/A	Graeme Buck	March 2016	
(S40) Develop a Full EqIA that covers all supported housing services and further considers the impact using available Careline user data, Housing Census profiling and other relevant information.	Remove and promote	Karen Long	Dec 2016	As part of service review
(CFC) Consult stakeholders affected by new policy	All	Heads of Service	March 2016	
(CFC) Targeted communication of new policy	To promote and encourage	Communications Team and the appropriate Heads of Service	April 2016	All fees, charges and concessions should be reviewed on an annual basis as part of the council's Budget setting process.

Approved by Matt Partridge on behalf of Strategic Management Board
Date: 7 January 2016