

FINANCIAL SECURITY: 2021/22 Appendix F

Overall Equality Impact Assessment of proposals

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.

Savings Proposals 2021/22

Prior to their consideration at Executive in December 2020, all savings proposals were reviewed to determine any potential impact on Stevenage residents in terms of their protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Some 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, Assistant Directors 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 20/1/2021 and 10/2/2021. Action to further analyse or mitigate the impact on equality groups is identified where appropriate.

The following activity has taken/will take place:

December 2020 – February 2021	EqIAs finalised considering further evidence as necessary
January and February 2021	Consideration of all completed EqIAs at Council meetings

Saving Ref	Saving/Income proposed	Summary of potential impact	Action	Contact Officer
FS23	CSC and Customer-Focus redesign and efficiencies.	<p>Full – Unequal Impact</p> <p>Overview Overall the proposal will not have negative impacts as we aim to maintain current service levels. Customers will still be able to access services over the telephone or access services face to face.</p> <p>If the Council failed to provide non-digital means of engaging with it, that could be to the detriment of people who do not have the skills or capabilities to engage online which may overlap with many of the protected characteristics.</p> <p>Age Research evidence from ONS data suggests that older people tend to be less digitally active, and potentially at risk of digital exclusion, although the picture is complex and social class / income can be a relevant factor too.</p> <p>If the Council stopped providing telephone or face to face support that could be to the detriment of those older people who do not have the skills or capabilities to engage online.</p> <p>Disability People with some types of disability may have difficulties using or making the most of digital technologies. These people may benefit less from enhanced digital channels.</p> <p>Socio-Economic</p>	<p>Measure the take up of digital services by different groups and use the insight to design future services.</p> <p>Ensure the customer service model supports those who cannot benefit from digital channels by providing alternatives.</p>	Ruth Luscombe/ Greg Arends

Saving Ref	Saving/Income proposed	Summary of potential impact	Action	Contact Officer
		<p>Low income, social class and social housing tenancy have been identified in some research as indicators of whether someone is likely to have the competence, confidence and capability to make the most of digital technologies.</p>		
FS25	Print Room	<p>Brief – Unequal Impact</p> <p>Overview This saving involves the closing of the print room and the putting into place of alternative arrangements including paperless committee meetings, digital alternatives and directing work through Docmail print service.</p> <p>Age Digital alternatives to printed documents may disproportionately impact on older people. Research evidence from ONS data suggests that older people tend to be less digitally active, and potentially at risk of digital exclusion, although the picture is complex and social class / income can be a relevant factor too.</p> <p>Socio-Economic Digital alternatives to printed documents may disproportionately impact some socio economic groups. Low income, social class and social housing tenancy have been identified in some research as indicators of whether someone is likely to have the competence, confidence and capability to make the most of digital technologies.</p> <p>If the Council failed to provide non-digital means of engaging</p>	Complete Full EQIA assessment.	Ruth Luscombe

Saving Ref	Saving/Income proposed	Summary of potential impact	Action	Contact Officer
		with it, that could be to the detriment of people who do not have the skills or capabilities to engage online.		
FS43	Reduce Professional Training Budget	<p>Brief – Unknown / Neutral Impact</p> <p>Overview This proposed saving involves the reduction of the professional training budget. Where possible professional qualifications would be paid for by the apprenticeship levy.</p> <p>Currently no workforce information is monitored on the take up of learning and development opportunities by protected characteristic group.</p> <p>However, learning and development opportunities are available and taken up by all staff regardless of their background. In response to the Covid pandemic more learning and development offers are available virtually.</p>	Record protected characteristics data on staff completing learning and development courses	Clare Davies/ Kirsten Frew
FS44	Reduce Graduate Training Budget.	<p>Brief – Insignificant Impact</p> <p>Overview This proposed saving involves the reduction of the graduate training budget. The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore the protected characteristics have not identified in the EQIA for reasons of anonymity.</p> <p>However, all graduates at SBC are from the National Local</p>		Clare Davies/ Kirsten Frew

Saving Ref	Saving/Income proposed	Summary of potential impact	Action	Contact Officer
		development Government Scheme and have a full learning and programme.		
FS45	Stop taking cash payments for Car Parks, depot and CSC ATM.	<p>Brief – Equal Impact</p> <p>Overview We know that Cash represented only 1.17% of payments collected last year and alternative means are available for all services. This saving proposes that the council stop collecting cash in order to support financial security.</p> <p>We do not know who pays for car parking in cash. However there are a number of alternatives, including card for car parks and phone payments for on street parking.</p> <p>Socio-Economic Those small minorities of people who may not have a bank account may be negatively impacted. Cash payments which would have been made to Customer Services can still be made via the Post Office.</p>	Keep payment options under review in response to customer feedback	Ruth Luscombe
FS19	Combine the Residents and Star Surveys	<p>Brief – Positive / Negative / Unequal Impact</p> <p>Overview This proposal suggests combining the Town-wide Resident Survey and the Council Tenant Satisfaction Survey (STAR). There are also plans to undertake other complementary community engagement activities.</p> <p>Age - Older People</p>	<p>Establish the revised Resident/STAR survey sampling/questionnaire approach</p> <p>Develop an engagement plan incorporating both the Resident/STAR survey</p>	Rob Gregory/ Katrina Shirley

Saving Ref	Saving/Income proposed	Summary of potential impact	Action	Contact Officer
		<p>It will not be possible within a combined, shorter survey to ask specific additional questions to Independent Living Scheme tenants, and the number of responses from these tenants will be lower. This may be mitigated through a separate engagement activity.</p> <p>Age - Younger People As the Resident Survey is targeted at householders, the profile of respondents is inherently older than the general resident population. By undertaking other engagement activity specifically targeted at younger people, the views of this group will be better captured.</p> <p>Sex/Age/Ethnic Origin/Disability/Marital & Working Status The surveys collect information in respect of sex, age, ethnic origin, disability, marital status and working status. This enables some analysis of the profile of tenants and residents to be undertaken and enables significant differences to be identified.</p> <p>However, all results are subject to sampling tolerances and not all differences are statistically significant. By complementing the surveys with a range of focused engagement activities, a greater diversity of views can be captured.</p> <p>Religion or Belief/Gender Reassignment /Sexual Orientation</p>	and other engagement activities	

Saving Ref	Saving/Income proposed	Summary of potential impact	Action	Contact Officer
		<p>Previous surveys have not analysed results in relation to religion, gender reassignment and sexual orientation. Plans to undertake further engagement activities will provide the opportunity to capture the views of these protected characteristic groups.</p>		
<p>HRA Rent & Service Charge</p>	<p>Rent and service charge setting for 2021/22</p>	<p><u>Overall</u></p> <p>The aim of the rent and service charge policy is to provide a fair method of calculating rents and service charges for all the Council's tenants. It also aligns with the Council's Concessions for Fees and Charges Policy and the principle of recovering the cost of providing services.</p> <p>The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups.</p> <p>Tenants benefited from four years of rent reduction from 2016-2020, so the impact of the rent increase is mitigated partially by having to use a lower base than it would have been had there not been a mandatory rent reduction (cumulative) of 1 % per annum for four years.</p> <p><u>Unequal/Negative Impact</u></p> <p>Age</p> <p>A proportion of tenants may see an increase in service charges in any given year. The majority of tenants who are charged for services live in flats and/or flexicare/independent living accommodation. Data indicates that the age profile of</p>	<p>Publish rent increase information on the website to start preparing tenants.</p> <p>The rent notification letter will offer tenants the opportunity to discuss any queries they have with staff.</p> <p>Make links to clear support and guidance on all of our communication platforms</p> <p>Prepare staff to enable them to respond effectively and empathetically with tenants.</p> <p>Consult with residents</p>	<p>Jaine Cresser/ Elizabeth Ddamulira</p>

Saving Ref	Saving/Income proposed	Summary of potential impact	Action	Contact Officer
		<p>tenants of flexicare/independent living accommodation is older than those in the general needs stock. The age profile of tenants living in general needs flats is younger than for the SBC housing stock as a whole.</p> <p>For people living in independent living/flexicare schemes, in addition to basic rent and service charges, those who pay for the support/emergency response services that are not eligible for Housing benefit may also see an increase in the overall payment due each week.</p> <p>Disability Northgate data on tenants in relation to disability was collected a number of years ago and is not up to date. However, to give some context, the data indicated that the proportion of tenants in flexicare/independent living accommodation with a disability was almost double the proportion for the whole SBC tenant population. As referred to above, most flexicare/independent living housing will be subject to service and support charges.</p> <p>The proportion of tenants living in flat blocks declaring a disability was very similar to the proportion living in all properties; therefore a disproportionate impact on these tenants is not anticipated.</p> <p>Socio Economic The rent increase will be applied across all tenancies prescribed by the Work and Welfare Reform Act and in line with the current Rent Standard Direction, regardless of socio-</p>	<p>throughout 2021/22 to establish the impact and put in place systems to mitigate this.</p>	

Saving Ref	Saving/Income proposed	Summary of potential impact	Action	Contact Officer
		<p>economic circumstances. Those who receive services for which a service charge is made will be charged the actual cost of those services.</p> <p>Those reliant on Housing Benefit (HB) and Universal Credit (UC) housing costs to cover their full rent and eligible service charges will not be affected by the increase in rent and service charges as their benefit award will be recalculated.</p> <p>The COVID19 pandemic has caused unemployment and unstable employment. Residents experiencing exceptional economic hardship who are unable to work due to a duty to self-isolate are receiving a drop in earnings.</p> <p>The policy allows for capping of service charges, subject to any legal constraints. As a means of mitigating the impact of an increase that would cause hardship, the Council may subsidise the costs.</p> <p>Support provision for this group has been increased as part of an income recovery action plan. This includes additional staffing resources.</p>		
HRA support charge	Increase contribution to support costs to £8 per week	<p>Overall This applies to residents living in independent living/flexicare housing that are in receipt of housing benefit, fairer charging, universal credit (UC) or are 2003 protected (i.e. those in the service prior to the government supporting people grant funding starting in 2003). As at 20 November 2020 this affects 595 people. The remaining residents in independent living/flexicare already pay the full charge.</p>	To ensure that the charge is explained as clearly as possible when the support charge notification is sent, there will be a FAQ sheet and details	Jaine Cresser/ Karen Long

Saving Ref	Saving/Income proposed	Summary of potential impact	Action	Contact Officer
		<p><u>Positive Impact</u></p> <p>Socio Economic Results from the STAR survey in 2018 have shown that residents identified the emergency alarm service and the supported housing officer as the 2nd and 3rd most important priority associated with living in their property. The application of the support charge will help to ensure that the Council can continue to deliver this service.</p> <p><u>Negative Impact:</u></p> <p>Age Residents of independent living and flexicare schemes who will have to pay the increased charge are predominantly older people. Conversely however, the costs are currently subsidised by the wider tenant population, who have a younger age profile and do not benefit from the service.</p> <p>Disability The residents who are charged a support charge are predominantly older and disabled people as this accommodation is for people over 55 years old or for people with a disability.</p> <p>Socio Economic The support charge is not eligible for housing benefit and could have a negative impact for those on lower incomes in terms of affordability.</p>	<p>on the website.</p> <p>Review whether any elements of the independent living service should be eligible for housing benefit.</p>	

Saving Ref	Saving/Income proposed	Summary of potential impact	Action	Contact Officer
		<p>This group of residents may also be affected by increases in Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) charges affecting the overall amount that older and disabled people can afford to pay.</p> <p>However, the introduction of the charge is considered to be fairer than under current arrangements, whereby support charge costs are subsidised by the wider tenant population who do not benefit from the service.</p> <p>Furthermore, the charge has been introduced on an incremental basis, to mitigate the impact, rather than applying the full amount of £19.65 per week in one 'hit'.</p> <p>In addition, HCC have confirmed that they will be continuing with our flexicare support contract until end March 2022, which will mean that this will help offset some of the costs that we would have had to pass on to this group of residents.</p> <p>We currently have 3 people that have made nil payment of the support charge either since the introduction of the contribution charge or since moving in. As at 20 November 2020 there are 71 people who are in arrears over £30 totalling £12,384. This is likely to increase when the new charge starts in April 2021.</p>		

Full Equality Impact Assessment

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

What is being assessed?		FS23 – Savings to Customer Service Centre and Customer Focus Service			
Lead Assessor	Ruth Luscombe			Assessment team	
Start date		End date			
When will the EqIA be reviewed?	April 2021				

Who may be affected by it?	Council customers (residents, businesses, voluntary organisations and other partners), Customer Service Centre and Customer Focus staff
What are the key aims of it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect current service levels while delivering structural savings by reducing avoidable demand and increasing self-service through digital channels. • Improve customer awareness of digital channels and encourage take up • Enable better value for money customer service and complaints handling provision • Improve consistency and transparency through adopting enhanced digital case management for complaints. • Embed insight and continuous improvement as a core part of the Customer Service model

What positive measures are in place (if any) to help fulfil our legislative duties to:					
Remove discrimination & harassment		Promote equal opportunities	A new website launched in September 2020 to meet government accessibility guidelines	Encourage good relations	Improved access channels for customers and staff, digital options available 24/7

What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	Desk research drawing on a broad range of national (Office Of National Statistics), local survey research (STAR survey 2017, 'Big Knock' 2017), MySociety.org website as well as examples from other councils (Cambridge City Council, Sutton Council)
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In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make?	<p>Overall the proposal will not have negative impacts as we aim to maintain current service levels as our customers increasingly choose to adopt digital self-service channels. Customers will still be able to access services over the telephone, or where required access services face to face by booking an appointment. This proposal has been enabled by our Connected to our Customers (CTOC) programme which has delivered a new website & digital platform, as well as an online portal for housing, and enhancements to waste processes e.g. for missed collections. An EQIA has been undertaken for this programme and will be kept under review.</p> <p>As technology evolves, (and is adopted by different communities differently) the ways in which people can be excluded or disadvantaged will change too. We will need to review our digital access solutions regularly to ensure changes in requirements are identified and potential solutions agreed on.</p>
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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		Negative impact		Unequal impact
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		Research evidence from ONS data suggests that older people tend to be less digitally active, and potentially at risk of digital exclusion, although the picture is complex and social class / income can be a relevant factor too.		X

		<p>Older people are much less likely to use the internet than other age groups. In 2019, 47% of adults in the UK aged 75 years or over had used the internet in the last 3 months, compared to 91% of all adults.</p> <p>During Housing's 2017 'Big Knock' Tenants Survey, 77% of all respondents reported having access to the internet. (This result compares to STAR survey which indicated 74% of residents using internet at home and further 9% outside of home). Of the 23% that don't have access, 76% were over 65 years old. 48% of over 75 year olds reported to having access to the internet, which is similar to the national statistics.</p> <p>If the Council stopped providing telephone or face to face support that could be to the detriment of those older people who do not have the skills or capabilities to engage online; however this is not an aim of this proposal and we are retaining these more traditional channels.</p>	
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	

Disability e.g. physical impairment, mental ill health, learning difficulties, long-standing illness			
Positive impact	Negative impact	Unequal impact	X
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>People with some types of disability may have difficulties using or making the most of digital technologies, which may not be adapted to their needs related to their specific disability. These people may benefit less from enhanced digital channels.</p> <p>Disabled people are less likely to use the internet than people without disabilities. In 2019 78% of disabled adults (10 million) in the UK used the internet, which is a massive increase compared with 25% in 2016, but still significantly lower than the all adult rate of 95% (ONS 2019). Although disabled people are reported to be less likely to continue using the internet after they have first accessed it. The difference between internet use in disabled and non-disabled adults was greater in the older age groups.</p>		

		<p>For adults aged 75 years and over, 41% of disabled adults and 54% of non-disabled adults were recent internet users. In comparison, there was only a small difference in recent internet use for disabled and non-disabled adults in the 16 to 24 age group; 98% of disabled adults and 99% of non-disabled adults in this age group were recent internet users.</p> <p>There are a number of tools (software and hardware) available now to make that more possible, we continue through the CTOC programme to explore their feasibility and future implementation. The Council also plans to continue to provide assisted digital approaches and, where necessary for those who cannot engage digitally, more traditional channels or routes through which people with these characteristics can engage with us.</p>	
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	

Gender reassignment			
Positive impact		Negative impact	Unequal impact
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts)		
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	

Marriage or civil partnership			
Positive impact		Negative impact	Unequal impact
Please evidence the data and	Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts)		

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)	

Pregnancy & maternity			
Positive impact		Negative impact	Unequal impact
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts)		
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	Unequal impact
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts)		
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	Unequal impact

Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts)	
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	

Sex			
Positive impact		Negative impact	Unequal impact
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts)	
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	

Sexual orientation e.g. straight, lesbian / gay, bisexual			
Positive impact		Negative impact	Unequal impact
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts)	
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		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		Negative impact	Unequal impact	X
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		<p>Low income, social class and social housing tenancy have been identified in some research as indicators of whether someone is likely to have the competence, confidence and capability to make the most of digital technologies.</p> <p>People living in social housing are less likely to access the internet than people living in other housing tenures. During Housing's 2017 'Big Knock' Tenants Survey 23% of all respondents reported not having access to the internet (the same results were also received during the STAR survey).</p> <p>The evidence also suggests that people on low incomes are less likely to have digital access and basic digital skills. Nationally, 17% of people earning less than £20,000 never use the internet, as opposed to 2% of people earning more than £40,000. 44% of people without basic digital skills are on lower wages or are unemployed.</p> <p>People with any of the protected characteristics may be more vulnerable to poverty, and may therefore be at greater risk of digital exclusion, which may be exacerbated by inter-sectionality between their characteristics and their income.</p> <p>If the Council failed to provide non-digital means of engaging with it, that could be to the detriment of people who do not have the skills or capabilities to engage online.</p>		
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	

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.

Other				
please feel free to consider the potential impact on people in any other contexts				
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts)		
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:

Staff?		Residents?	
Voluntary & community sector?		Partners?	
Other stakeholders?			

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	X
	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?
Measure the take up of digital services by different groups and use the insight to design future services	Promote equal opportunities	Ruth Luscombe	From April 2021	As part of the new customer service model
Ensure the customer service model supports those who cannot benefit from digital channels by providing alternatives.	Promote equal opportunities	Ruth Luscombe	From April 2021	As part of the new customer service model

Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Ruth Luscombe

Date: 18.11.20

Brief Equality Impact Assessment

For a minor operational change / review / simple analysis

What is being assessed?	FS25 – Closing the Print Room	What are the key aims of it?	Remove the document centre staff post and put in place alternative arrangements including paperless committee meetings, digital alternatives and directing work through Docmail print service.		
Who may be affected by it?	Staff, Councillors and Customers				
Date of full EqIA on service area (planned or completed)	April 2021				
Form completed by:	Ruth Luscombe	Start date	June 2021	End date	n/a
		Review date			

What data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	ONS Data, Housing STAR and “Big Knock” Survey data	Have any information gaps been identified along the way? If so, please specify	We need to do further analysis of the documents currently printed by the Print Service and ensure a clear alternative plan in place for each. This will be reviewed in a full EQIA.
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Explain the potential positive, negative or unequal impact on the following characteristics and how likely this is:			
Age	Unequal – Digital alternatives to printed documents may disproportionately impact on older people. Research evidence from ONS data suggests that older people tend to be less digitally active, and potentially at risk of digital	Race	N/A

	<p>exclusion, although the picture is complex and social class / income can be a relevant factor too.</p> <p>Older people are much less likely to use the internet than other age groups. In 2019, 47% of adults in the UK aged 75 years or over had used the internet in the last 3 months, compared to 91% of all adults.</p> <p>During Housing's 2017 'Big Knock' Tenants Survey, 77% of all respondents reported having access to the internet. (This result compares to STAR survey which indicated 74% of residents using internet at home and further 9% outside of home). Of the 23% that don't have access, 76% were over 65 years old. 48% of over 75 year olds reported to having access to the internet, which is similar to the national statistics.</p>		
Disability	N/A	Religion or belief	N/A
Gender reassignment	N/A	Sex	N/A
Marriage or civil partnership	N/A	Sexual orientation	N/A

Pregnancy & maternity	N/A	Socio-economic ²	<p>Unequal – Digital alternatives to printed documents may disproportionately impact some socio economic groups. Low income, social class and social housing tenancy have been identified in some research as indicators of whether someone is likely to have the competence, confidence and capability to make the most of digital technologies.</p> <p>People living in social housing are less likely to access the internet than people living in other housing tenures. During Housing’s 2017 ‘Big Knock’ Tenants Survey 23% of all respondents reported not having access to the internet (the same results were also received during the STAR survey).</p> <p>The evidence also suggests that people on low incomes are less likely to have digital</p>
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²Although 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>access and basic digital skills. Nationally, 17% of people earning less than £20,000 never use the internet, as opposed to 2% of people earning more than £40,000. 44% of people without basic digital skills are on lower wages or are unemployed.</p> <p>People with any of the protected characteristics may be more vulnerable to poverty, and may therefore be at greater risk of digital exclusion, which may be exacerbated by intersectionality between their characteristics and their income.</p> <p>If the Council failed to provide non-digital means of engaging with it, that could be to the detriment of people who do not have the skills or capabilities to engage online.</p>
Other			

Where there is a likely positive impact , please explain how it will help to fulfil our legislative duties to:				
Remove discrimination & harassment		Promote equal opportunities		Encourage good relations

What further work / activity is needed as a result of this assessment?

Action	Responsible officer	How will this be delivered and monitored?	Deadline
Full EQIA assessment	Ruth Luscombe	Project to be set up to review the impacts and alternatives to be put in place.	June 2021

Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Ruth Luscombe
Date: 18.11.20

Brief Equality Impact Assessment

For a minor operational change / review / simple analysis

What is being assessed?	FS43 – Reduce Training Budget during 2021-22	What are the key aims of it?	To consider the potential impact of the proposed saving of reducing the training budget for 2021/22 on all staff and particularly those under the protected characteristics.		
Who may be affected by it?					
Date of full EqIA on service area (planned or completed)					
Form completed by:	Clare Davies	Start date	November 2020	End date	Ongoing
		Review date	November 2021		

What data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	Workforce Equalities Data as of November 2020	Have any information gaps been identified along the way? If so, please specify	Currently no workforce information is held on socio-economic status of the Stevenage Borough Council workforce and therefore this cannot be assessed.
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Explain the potential positive, negative or unequal impact on the following characteristics and how likely this is:			
Age	We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities	Race	We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities
Disability	We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities	Religion or belief	We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities

Gender reassignment	Data for this protected characteristic is incomplete for the employees impacted by the proposed savings options.	Sex	We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities
Marriage or civil partnership	We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities	Sexual orientation	We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities
Pregnancy & maternity	No information is held on the pregnancy and maternity status of the employees impacted by the proposed savings.	Socio-economic ³	No information is held on the socio-economic status of the employees impacted by the proposed savings.
Other			

Where there is a likely positive impact , please explain how it will help to fulfil our legislative duties to:					
Remove discrimination & harassment	Learning and development opportunities are available and taken up by all staff regardless of their background In response to the Covid pandemic more learning and development offers	Promote equal opportunities	Access to the apprenticeship levy funded courses is available to all staff	Encourage good relations	

³Although 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.

	and moving to virtual platforms and this often reduces costs.				
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What further work / activity is needed as a result of this assessment?

Action	Responsible officer	How will this be delivered and monitored?	Deadline
Record protected characteristics data on staff completing learning and development courses	Clare Davies	Developing the HR System	April 2021

Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Clare Davies
Date: 12.11.20

Brief Equality Impact Assessment

For a minor operational change / review / simple analysis

What is being assessed?	Reduced Graduate Training Budget	What are the key aims of it?	To consider the potential impact of the proposed saving of reducing the graduate training budget for 2021/22 on all staff and particularly those under the protected characteristics.		
Who may be affected by it?					
Date of full EqIA on service area (planned or completed)					
Form completed by:	Clare Davies	Start date	November 2020	End date	Ongoing
		Review date	November 2021		

What data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	Workforce Equalities Data as of November 2020	Have any information gaps been identified along the way? If so, please specify	Currently no workforce information is held on socio-economic status of the Stevenage Borough Council workforce and therefore this cannot be assessed.
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Explain the potential positive, negative or unequal impact on the following characteristics and how likely this is:			
Age	The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore not identified. However, all graduates at SBC are from the National Local Government Scheme and have a full learning and	Race	The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore not identified.

	development programme. We also have vacant posts so they will not be disproportionately impacted.		
Disability	None of the employees impacted by the proposed savings have identified as disabled and therefore no disproportionate effects are anticipated.	Religion or belief	The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore not identified.
Gender reassignment	Data for this protected characteristic is incomplete for the employees impacted by the proposed savings options.	Sex	The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore not identified.
Marriage or civil partnership	The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore not identified.	Sexual orientation	The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore not identified.
Pregnancy & maternity	No information is held on the pregnancy and maternity status of the employees impacted by the proposed savings.	Socio-economic ⁴	No information is held on the socio-economic status of the employees impacted by the proposed savings.
Other			

Where there is a likely positive impact , please explain how it will help to fulfil our legislative duties to:					
Remove discrimination	Continue with	Promote equal	Access to the	Encourage good	

⁴Although 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.

& harassment	National Graduate Programme Development Programme and promote other learning opportunities	opportunities	apprenticeship levy funded courses	relations	
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What further work / activity is needed as a result of this assessment?

Action	Responsible officer	How will this be delivered and monitored?	Deadline

Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Clare Davies
Date: 12.11.20

Brief Equality Impact Assessment

For a minor operational change / review / simple analysis

What is being assessed?	FS45 – Removal of cash collection	What are the key aims of it?	Stop collecting cash in order to save money, as alternative payment methods are available.		
Who may be affected by it?	Residents, Businesses, Staff, Partners				
Date of full EqlA on service area (planned or completed)	N/A				
Form completed by:	Ruth Luscombe	Start date		End date	
		Review date			

What data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	Cash represented only 1.17% of payments collected last year and alternative means are available for all services.	Have any information gaps been identified along the way? If so, please specify	We do not know who pays for car parking in cash. However there are a number of alternatives available. There are health and hygiene reasons for not accepting cash during the COVID-19 pandemic – card and phone payments are available.
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Explain the potential positive, negative or unequal impact on the following characteristics and how likely this is:			
Age	N/A	Race	N/A
Disability	N/A	Religion or belief	N/A
Gender reassignment	N/A	Sex	N/A
Marriage or civil partnership	N/A	Sexual orientation	N/A

Pregnancy & maternity	N/A	Socio-economic ⁵	Unequal – That small minority of people who may not have a bank account may be negatively impacted. Cash payments which would have been made to Customer Services can still be made via the Post Office.
Other			

Where there is a likely positive impact , please explain how it will help to fulfil our legislative duties to:				
Remove discrimination & harassment		Promote equal opportunities		Encourage good relations

What further work / activity is needed as a result of this assessment?

Action	Responsible officer	How will this be delivered and monitored?	Deadline
If a negative or unequal (high or low) impact has been identified, you should assess this further in a Full EqIA	Ruth Luscombe	Keep payment options under review in response to customer feedback	April 2022

Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Ruth Luscombe

Date: 12th November 2020

⁵Although 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.

Brief Equality Impact Assessment

For a minor operational change / review / simple analysis

What is being assessed?	<p>FS19 - Combine the Town-wide Resident Survey and the Council Tenant Satisfaction Survey (known as 'STAR'), which are now undertaken every 3 years.</p>	<p>What are the key aims of it?</p>	<p>The Town-wide survey of resident householders seeks feedback and resident perception on a range of issues and services and supports the council's priority-setting process.</p> <p>The 'STAR' survey is used across the housing sector and enables the council to assess levels of tenant and leaseholder satisfaction, to identify their priorities and to shape its services accordingly.</p> <p>The proposal is to reduce the overall cost by combining the two surveys and/or reducing the survey length/overall numbers surveyed. Additionally, there are plans to increase other community engagement activities at the co-operative neighbourhood level, which will complement the Resident and STAR surveys. These will be undertaken 'in-house' by the council's community development team, supported by other colleagues – potentially using a “big knock” approach.</p>		
Who may be affected by it?	Resident householders and council tenants				
Date of full EqlA on service area (planned or completed)	N/A				
Form completed by:	Katrina Shirley	Start date	14.11.20	End date	
		Review date	N/A		

<p>What data / information are you using to inform your assessment?</p>	<p>SBC Resident Survey Report 2017/18 SBC STAR Survey Report SBC Community Engagement Framework SBC Equality and Diversity Policy Housemark STAR guidance Local Government Association (LGA) guidance on benchmarking resident satisfaction data.</p> <p><u>General Comments:</u></p> <p><u>Resident/STAR survey responses:</u></p> <p>In conducting the surveys, the views of random samples of resident householders and tenants are canvassed. In 2017/18, the surveys resulted in the following number of responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident survey – 1067 (margin of error in results = +/- 3%) • General Needs tenants – 483 (margin of error in results = +/- 4%) • Sheltered tenants – 367 (margin of error in results = +/- 3.75) <p>Returned samples are checked for differential response rates and results are weighted to correct for this, so that the reported results are broadly representative of the population of residents and tenants.</p> <p>The number of responses achieved in 2017/18 met good practice standards and benchmarking requirements. Every effort will be made to achieve the same level of responses from residents and general needs tenants in 2021/22 through the combined survey, if the budget allows. It is unlikely that the same level of sheltered tenant responses can be achieved as in 2017/18 however. It should be noted that the combined total number people surveyed will be lower than in 2017/18, and the</p>	<p>Have any information gaps been identified along the way? If so, please specify</p>	<p>Detailed information on the size of sample/ breadth of survey questions that can be achieved within the revised budget.</p>
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range of issues consulted upon will be reduced (however, see comments below on addressing this and enhancing the approach through the use of other engagement channels).

Anonymised information on the protected characteristics of respondents is collected through the survey in respect of sex, age, ethnic origin, disability and working status. This enables some analysis of the profile of tenants and residents to be undertaken and enables significant differences in responses to be identified. It should be noted that all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant, particularly where the numbers within a particular protected characteristic group are relatively small.

SBC Community Engagement Framework

The Resident and STAR surveys are just one part of a broader approach to community engagement in Stevenage, which involves a range of ways in which the council consults with and involves residents and tenants. The Community Engagement Framework includes the following aim (which aligns with Goal 3 of the Equality & Diversity Policy):

- Providing and developing creative ways to engage with our communities, ensuring equality of opportunity in having a voice, which will be achieved by:
 - Promoting and supporting processes that engage and provide representation for communities in decision making
 - Developing more creative approaches that encourage engagement from all sections of our community, using digital and neighbourhood networks
 - Providing opportunities for our protected characteristic communities to come together in exploring the needs of minority communities, groups and organisations.

In this context, in 2021/22, a co-ordinated approach will be adopted, in

	<p>which the Resident/STAR survey will be complemented by other engagement activities at the Cooperative Neighbourhood level. This is a positive step that will enable us to reach new people in different ways, including those from protected characteristic groups.</p>		
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Explain the potential positive, negative or unequal impact on the following characteristics and how likely this is:			
Age	<p>General (potential neutral impact) In general terms, if the same number of responses from residents and general needs tenants can be achieved as in 2017/18 within the revised budget, views of differing ages can continue to be canvassed and compared through the combined Resident/STAR survey to the same level of statistical accuracy.</p> <p>Older People (potential negative impact) It will not be possible within a combined, shorter survey to ask the specific additional questions to Independent Living Scheme tenants that were asked in the STAR 2017/18 and the number of responses from these tenants will be lower. This may be mitigated through a separate engagement activity, but this will require internal resource.</p> <p>Younger People (potential positive impact) As the Resident Survey is targeted at householders, the profile of respondents is inherently older than the general resident population. By undertaking other engagement</p>	Race	<p>Potential Positive Impact In general terms, if the same number of responses from residents and tenants can be achieved as in 2017/18, views of residents and tenants from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds can continue to be canvassed and compared through the combined survey, to the same level of statistical accuracy.</p> <p>However, the Resident/STAR survey has limitations in this regard, given the generalised nature of the survey and the relatively small number of responses that can be achieved through the sample from people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.</p> <p>By undertaking more focused engagement activity with the diverse range of black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in Stevenage, their views and feedback can be better captured.</p>

	activity specifically targeted at younger people, the views of this group will be better captured.		
Disability	<p>Potential Positive Impact In general terms, if the same number of responses from residents and tenants can be achieved as in 2017/18, views of residents and tenants with disabilities can continue to be canvassed and compared through the combined survey, to the same level of statistical accuracy.</p> <p>In addition, by undertaking complementary engagement activity specifically targeted at people with disabilities, more focused consultation with this group can be achieved.</p>	Religion or belief	<p>Potential Positive Impact Previous Resident and STAR surveys have not analysed results by respondents' religion or belief and because of the general nature of the surveys and the sampling approach, it is unlikely they would be particularly effective in this regard.</p> <p>By undertaking more focused engagement activity with faith groups the views of people of different religion or beliefs can be better captured.</p>
Gender reassignment	<p>Potential Positive Impact Previous Resident and STAR surveys have not analysed results by this protected characteristic and because of the general nature of the surveys and the sampling approach, it is unlikely they would be effective in this regard.</p> <p>There is the potential to undertake more focused engagement activity to capture the views of this protected characteristic group.</p>	Sex	<p>Potential Neutral Impact In general terms, if the same number of responses from residents and tenants can be achieved as in 2017/18, views of male and female respondents can continue to be canvassed and compared through the combined Resident/STAR survey to the same level of statistical accuracy.</p>
Marriage or civil partnership	<p>Neutral Impact: In general terms, if the same number of responses from residents and tenants can be achieved as in 2017/18, views of people of</p>	Sexual orientation	<p>Potential Positive Impact: The previous Resident and STAR surveys did not analyse results in relation to this protected characteristic and more focused engagement</p>

	different marital status can continue to be canvassed and compared through the combined Resident/STAR survey to the same level of statistical accuracy.		activity may enable views to be better captured.
Pregnancy & maternity	Neutral Impact: The Resident and STAR surveys do not analyse results in relation to this protected characteristic.	Socio-economic ⁶	Potential Neutral Impact: In general terms, if the same number of responses from residents and tenants can be achieved as in 2017/18, views of respondents from differing socio-economic backgrounds can continue to be canvassed and compared through the combined Resident/STAR survey to the same level of statistical accuracy.
Other			

Where there is a likely positive impact , please explain how it will help to fulfil our legislative duties to:					
Remove discrimination & harassment	By widening the range of engagement activities, the council can better understand whether perceptions of the town and the experience of council services differ amongst people from protected	Promote equal opportunities	The proposed approach to widen the range of engagement activities will increase opportunities for people from protected characteristic groups to express their views on issues and services and better	Encourage good relations	

⁶Although 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.

	characteristic groups compared to the wider population		inform council decisions		
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What further work / activity is needed as a result of this assessment?

Action	Responsible officer	How will this be delivered and monitored?	Deadline
Establish the revised Resident/STAR survey sampling/questionnaire approach	Corporate Policy & Business Support Manager	C&N Service Plan	February 2021
Develop an engagement plan incorporating both the Resident/STAR survey and other engagement activities	Community Development Manager	C&N Service Plan	February 2021

Approved by Assistant Director/ Strategic Director: Rob Gregory

Date: 16/11/20

Full Equality Impact Assessment

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

What is being assessed?		HRA: Rent and Service Charge 2021/22	
Lead Assessor	Jaine Cresser		Assessment team
Start date	December 2020	End date	Jan 2022
When will the EqIA be reviewed?	Jan 2022		Elizabeth Ddamulira

Who may be affected by it?	All tenants
What are the key aims of it?	<p>To increase the rent on dwellings from week commencing 5 April 2021 by 1.5%, which is an average increase of £1.46 for social rents, £2.38 for affordable rents and £1.80 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week (based on a 52 week year). This has been calculated using the rent formula CPI +1% in line with government policy and the Council's Rent and Service Charge Policy.</p> <p>The Council's Rent and Service Charge Policy provides a framework for setting our rents and service charges within legislative requirements. The rent and service charge income underpins the delivery of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan's key housing objectives to deliver effective services, to invest in its properties to ensure homes are of a modern standard and to provide new social housing to rent. The policy was revised in December 2019.</p> <p>The revisions aimed to ensure that the policy complied with the government's direction on the Rent Standard 2019 and to clarify the Council's position in relation to service charge increases and affordable rents. A further aim this year is to mitigate the impact of COVID 19 on our customers and their ability to pay rent and service charges. Key elements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase rents on social rent and affordable rent properties by up to CPI+1% each year from 2020, for a period of at least five years.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the rents for all excluded properties by CPI +1%, e.g. LSSO • Set the rent for a proportion of new build homes at affordable rents. • Set the rent where adaptations or extensions have resulted in the property being increased in size (for example, an additional bedroom), in accordance with the formula rent as detailed in the policy. • Further to the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, charge the rent payable by new tenants of existing social rent housing at the higher of the formula rent (i.e. the 'social rent rate'), or the actual rent (i.e. the 'assumed rent rate') as at 8th July 2015, with the appropriate rent increase applied in line with the current Rent Standard Direction (February 2019). • Charge actual costs for service charges but with the provision to apply a cap, subject to any legal constraints, on affordability grounds where appropriate. • Mitigation of COVID19 impact
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What positive measures are in place (if any) to help fulfil our legislative duties to:					
Remove discrimination & harassment		Promote equal opportunities	The aim of the Rent & Service Charge Policy is to provide a fair method of calculating rents and service charges for all of our tenants. It also aligns with the council's Concessions for Fees and Charges Policy, and the principle of recovering the cost of providing services.	Encourage good relations	

What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing, February 2019 • Direction on the Rent Standard, 2019 • Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 • Housing and Planning Act 2016 • Rent and service charge policy agreed by Exec December 2019 and recommended to Council in January 2020
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent account information • Housing System data • Specialist Support service data
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<p>In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make?</p>	<p>Approval to increase rents by CPI + 1% for 5 years from 2020/21 required a revision of HRA Budget plans priorities. The HRA Business Plan was agreed at the December 2019 Executive Meeting.</p> <p>The average rent increase for 2021/2022 is (Adjusted Limited Basic 2020) + 1.5% (General stock) and + 1.5% (LSSO stock).</p> <p>When calculating rents and service charges accounts, consideration will be taken of the need to balance any increase in the combined rent and service charge with the potential financial impact on customers. This relates to 37% of homes to which a service charge applies, which are predominantly flats as well as flexicare/independent living accommodation. The Council must recover the actual cost of providing the service and service charge costs will increase with inflationary pressures and changes in usage.</p> <p>The impact of the 2021/22 rent increase and service charges is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 306 homes or 4% receive a rent and service charge reduction; • 7,578 homes or 96% of households will receive a weekly rent and service charge increase of less than £3.50 (based on 52 weeks). • There are only 5 properties with an increase of more than £5.00. <p>We had 6,799 general social rented properties, 36 affordable rent properties, 832 flexicare and independent living accommodation and 85 LSSOs as at November 2020. The setting of a proportion of new build lets at affordable rents will contribute positively to increasing the supply of new homes in Stevenage. All target groups will benefit given the need for affordable housing is common across all socio-economic and minority groups. The current low supply of new affordable housing and the high cost of the private rented sector in Stevenage have impacted adversely on those groups whose</p>
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	<p>incomes are average or below average.</p> <p>This also further supports work with people who need help to live independently at home and those at risk of homelessness, through wider housing options, continued provision of support, and financial assistance for adaptations and more homelessness preventative programmes respectively.</p> <p>Any groups that are potentially disadvantaged are still expected to be able to benefit from a council property set at a social rent.</p> <p>Tenants benefited from four years of rent reduction from 2016-2020 so the impact of the rent increase is mitigated partially by having to use a lower base than it would have been had there not been a mandatory rent reduction (cumulative) of 1 % for the four year period.</p>
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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		Negative impact		Unequal impact	<p>The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups. A proportion of tenants may see an increase in service charges in any given year. The majority of tenants who are charged for services live in flats and/or flexicare/independent living accommodation.</p> <p>Tenants living in flexicare/independent living housing do so because they have additional needs that require support relating to age, disability or both. The minimum age for entry into flexicare/independent living housing is 55 years and data from Northgate indicates that the proportion of tenants aged 60+ in flexicare/independent living housing, is almost three</p>

				<p>times the proportion for all tenant housing.</p> <p>People living in independent living/flexicare schemes who also pay for the support/emergency response services (that are not eligible for Housing benefit) on top of rent and service charges, may see an increase in the overall payment due each week.</p> <p>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>The below table illustrates the age groups that have been affected by Covid19 in terms of their employment since April 2020.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Age</th> <th>19 and under</th> <th>20-29</th> <th>30-39</th> <th>40-49</th> <th>50-59</th> <th>60+</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Furlough</td> <td>0</td> <td>26</td> <td>76</td> <td>55</td> <td>54</td> <td>28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Retention</td> <td>0</td> <td>4</td> <td>30</td> <td>20</td> <td>18</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Redundancy</td> <td>0</td> <td>2</td> <td>6</td> <td>7</td> <td>9</td> <td>4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Age	19 and under	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Furlough	0	26	76	55	54	28	Retention	0	4	30	20	18	5	Redundancy	0	2	6	7	9	4
Age	19 and under	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+																										
Furlough	0	26	76	55	54	28																										
Retention	0	4	30	20	18	5																										
Redundancy	0	2	6	7	9	4																										
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment			See section above on data sources.																													
What opportunities are there to mitigate the impact?	Ongoing consultation will take place with residents in 2021/22 to establish the impact of the rent & service charge increase. Please also refer to the mitigations outlined in the socio-economic section below, most of which will also apply to this protected characteristic group.			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)																												

Disability				
Positive impact		Negative impact	Unequal impact	The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups. Northgate data on tenants in relation to disability was collected a number of years ago and is not up to date. This information

					<p>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 flexicare/independent living housing declaring that they had a disability was almost double the proportion for the whole SBC tenant population.</p> <p>The proportion of tenants living in flat blocks declaring a disability was very similar to the proportion living in all properties; therefore a disproportionate impact on these tenants is not anticipated.</p>
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment				See section above on data sources.	
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?				What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	

Gender reassignment, Marriage or civil partnership, Pregnancy & maternity, Race, Religion or belief, 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)	

Socio-economic⁷					
e.g. low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users					
Positive impact		Negative impact	The rent increase will be applied across all tenancies prescribed by the Work and Welfare Reform Act and in line with the current Rent	Unequal impact	

⁷Although 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>Standard Direction (February 2019) regardless of circumstances. This will be applied for at least the next 4 years. Those reliant on Housing Benefit (HB) and Universal Credit (UC) Housing costs to cover their full rent and eligible service charges won't be affected by the increase in rent and service charges as their benefit award will be recalculated.</p> <p>The number of bids on the new build properties let at affordable rents are similar to the number received for new build let at social rents. There is a mixture of employed and unemployed applicants. Applicants in receipt of benefits are not excluded or unfairly treated.</p> <p>Those who receive services for which a service charge is made will be charged the actual cost of those services. Heating charges are exempt from HB and tenants are expected to pay this. 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> <p>The COVID19 pandemic has caused unemployment and unstable employment. So for example we have 249 residents as at 16 December 2020 who are furloughed, on job retention or have been made redundant.</p> <p>Residents experiencing exceptional economic hardship who are unable to work due to a duty</p>		
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			to self-isolate are receiving a drop in earnings.		
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		See section above on data sources			
What opportunities are there to mitigate the impact and promote equality and inclusion?	<p>The policy allows for capping of service charges, subject to any legal constraints. As a means of mitigating the impact of an increase that would cause hardship, the council may subsidise the costs.</p> <p>Rent increase information will be published on our website early February 2021 to start preparing tenants.</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 increased and also explain any 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 independent living 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>To ensure that this is explained as clearly as possible there will be a FAQ sheet and details on the website and hard copies available for those who need them.</p> <p>The policy states that the Council will have regard to the Local Housing Allowance when setting affordable rents. If affordable rents are set at this level, HB/ UC housing cost will cover the rent in full for those tenants who are entitled to the maximum amount of housing benefit. Setting at the Local Housing Allowance will also benefit tenants who are, for example on a low wage or zero hour contracts and where partial housing benefit can be paid.</p> <p>For those moving into Affordable Rent (AR) properties a comprehensive</p>	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

	<p>affordability assessment is carried out prior to offer to ensure that the tenancy is sustainable.</p> <p>The implementation of the policy in respect of AR will be kept under review by the Housing Development Executive Committee and should adverse impacts be identified this will inform future decision making in this regard.</p> <p>Support provision for this group has been increased as part of an income recovery action plan, to ensure that tenants can pay through sustainable arrangements to maintain payments towards rent and service charges. Additional staffing resources have been secured to continue work to target and support UC cases to maximise income collection and minimise the level of arrears for this group of tenants.</p> <p>We will make links to clear support and guidance on all of our communication platforms.</p> <p>We will prepare staff to enable them to respond effectively and empathetically with tenants.</p>		
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Other				
please feel free to consider the potential impact on people in any other contexts				
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment				
What opportunities are there to mitigate the impact?				What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)

What are the findings of any consultation with:

Residents?	Planned consultation with residents during 2020/21 regarding the impact of the new rent policy was postponed to 2021/22 due to COVID19. This will be the second year of increase since the rent reduction regime was introduced and consultation will enable us to establish the impact and put in place systems to mitigate this accordingly.	Staff?	
Voluntary & community sector?		Partners?	
Other stakeholders?	<p>Housing Management Advisory Board (HMAB) was consulted in November 2019 and was supportive of the policy to charge service charges at actual costs but with the provision in the policy to cap any increases if this would cause hardship.</p> <p>In terms of affordable rents, HMAB broadly supported this policy. There are still some concerns about the affordability of such schemes and the position if tenants lost employment/were on a low wage. The rent would be covered in full for those tenants entitled to full HB/UC housing costs due to the rent being set at the LHA level. Also those in low paid employment may be entitled to partial HB/ UC housing costs. Thorough affordability assessments will be carried out.</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 upon us being able to recover the costs of service provision where it's possible to do so.</p> <p>Only a proportion of new builds will be at affordable rent in line with the</p>

		<p>revised HRA Budget plan. The proposal to offer a mix of new build rents at affordable rent levels and at social rent levels would result in additional income to the HRA over 30 years which makes a significant contribution to the sustainability of the plan and the Council's ability to build new homes and to deliver other housing priorities.</p> <p>There are plans to build 240 social rented and 270 affordable rented houses over the first 5 years of the revised Business Plan. The policy and the aim is for a 50/50 split, but due to the timing of delivery on schemes the weighting is slightly biased towards affordable, but it evens out over the whole 30 year plan. So far 243 new builds have been delivered by the Council and 295 are under construction.</p> <p>This means that there will be a total of approximately 4% of council homes at affordable rent at the end of the 5 year period. The majority of annual lettings (i.e. of new build and re-let properties) would continue to be at a social rent level and it is estimated that after 30 years the vast majority of council property rents (an estimated 88%) will be set at the social rent rate, subject to any changes in legislation or Government guidance.</p>
	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?
Consultation with residents to establish the impact of the rent increase	Remove discrimination and promote equal opportunities	Elizabeth Ddamulira	March 2022	Systems will be put in place to mitigate impacts

Approved by Assistant Director (Housing and Investment): Jaine Cresser

Date: 16 December 2020

Full Equality Impact Assessment

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

What is being assessed?		Support Charge increase by £2 from £6 to £8			
Lead Assessor	Kelly Holland			Assessment team	Kelly Holland Karen Long
Start date	10 November 2020	End date	9 November 2021		
When will the EqIA be reviewed?	8 November 2021				

Who may be affected by it?	Residents living in independent living/flexicare housing that are in receipt of housing benefit, fairer charging, universal credit (UC) or 2003 protected (i.e. those in the service prior to the government supporting people grant funding starting in 2003). As at 20 November 2020 this affects 595 people. The remaining residents in independent living/flexicare already pay the full charge.
What are the key aims of it?	To contribute to the recovery of costs for providing the support/emergency response service to people living in independent living/flexicare schemes that historically have not had to pay anything towards the cost as we received housing related support funding from Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). The support/alarm service is not eligible for housing benefit, but in order to be able to continue this service to residents we needed to introduce the initial weekly contribution of £2.00 in 2018/19, £4 in 2019/20, £6 in 2020/21 and propose to increase this to £8.00 in 2021/22. The total cost of the support/alarm service will be £19.65 per week so Stevenage Borough Council will still be subsidising £11.65 per week. This option has the support of the housing portfolio holder.

What positive measures are in place (if any) to help fulfil our legislative duties to:					
Remove discrimination & harassment	This will remove discrimination against other residents that pay the full cost for not being in receipt of housing benefit or fairer charging.	Promote equal opportunities	This also aligns to the Council's aim to be financially sufficient and recover costs of services where possible.	Encourage good relations	

What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data of those on full/partial housing, fairer charging, universal credit or those that are protected due to supporting people implementation in 2003. • Age profile of independent/flexicare housing tenants
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In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make?	We currently have 3 people that have made nil payment of the support charge either since the introduction of the contribution charge or from moving in. The majority of people do not pay through direct debit and pay through a payment card. This is not always a regular payment and historically it took a lot of effort by the Support Services team to get people to pay £6. As at 20 November 2020 we have 71 people who are in arrears over £30 totalling £12,384. This is likely to increase especially when the new charge starts in April 2021. Following the housing and investment business unit review the management of the support charge income has transferred to Income Services in line with other income collection functions.
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Evidence and impact assessment

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

Age

Negative impact

The residents that are charged a support charge are predominantly older and disabled people as this accommodation is for people over 55 years old or for people with a disability.

Conversely however, the costs are currently subsidised by the wider tenant population, who have a younger age profile and do not benefit from the service.

Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment

Age profile of independent/flexicare housing residents

What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?

What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)

Disability

e.g. physical impairment, mental ill health, learning difficulties, long-standing illness

Unequal impact

The residents that are charged a support charge are predominantly older and disabled people as this accommodation is for people over 55 years old or for people with a disability.

Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment

Northgate report on disability profile for independent/flexicare residents and also whole population living in SBC properties.

What opportunities are

What do you still need

Northgate data on tenants relating to

there to promote equality and inclusion?		to find out? Include in actions (last page)	tenants with disability was collected a number of years ago and is not up to date. This information was also disclosed at the tenant's discretion so some tenants may not have provided it. We have introduced a support services module on Northgate whereby we will be able to collate more data on disability and this will inform future EQIAs. Northgate are in the process of getting the reports set up so we are able to extract this information in the future.
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Gender reassignment 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)	

Marriage or civil partnership 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)	
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Pregnancy & maternity – 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)	

Race – 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)	

Religion or belief – 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)	

Sex – 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)	

Sexual orientation – N/A e.g. straight, lesbian / gay, bisexual			
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)	

Socio-economic⁸

e.g. low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users, social value in procurement

Positive Impact:

Results from the STAR survey in 2018 have shown that residents identified the emergency alarm service and the supported housing officer as the 2nd and 3rd most important priority associated with living in their property. The application of the support charge will help to ensure that the Council can continue to deliver this service.

In January 2018 we held drop in sessions at each scheme for residents to come and discuss the charge and for us to explain what it is for. We had a lot of positive comments with the majority understanding the need to pay towards the service. Some residents recognised that housing associations had withdrawn the emergency service and scheme manager and didn't want this to happen to them. One person wanted to pay more.

HCC have confirmed that they will be continuing with our flexicare support contract until end March 2022 which will mean that this will help offset some of the costs that we would have had to pass on to this group of residents.

Negative Impact:

The support charge is not eligible for housing benefit and could have a negative impact for those on lower incomes in terms of affordability. However, of 103 residents where we had to chase payment following 2018's introduction of the £2 weekly contribution only one resident said they couldn't afford it and was referred to the welfare benefit and debt advisors. We have not had any indication to suggest that residents can't afford the current charge. If anyone is struggling with money we will refer them to the welfare benefit and debt advisors for support.

This group of residents may also be affected by increases in Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) affecting the overall amount that older and disabled people can afford to pay. (We have not had notification of what the charges will be for 2021/22):

- HCC charge for some of their community based adult social care services that they used to provide for free. This has

⁸Although 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.

impacted on many people over 60 in the independent living/flexicare schemes as they are in receipt of some care due to their age/medical conditions. The low care band in flexicare doubled in 2018 and this had an impact on residents being able to afford care and HCC had received a number of complaints.

However, the introduction of the charge is considered to be fairer than current arrangements, whereby support charge costs are subsidised by the wider tenant population who do not benefit from the service.

Furthermore, the charge has been introduced on an incremental basis, to mitigate the impact, rather than applying the full amount of £19.65 per week in one 'hit'.

During 2021/22, officers will also review whether any elements of the independent living service should in fact be eligible for housing benefit. This will be reflected in the charges from April 2022 due to the fees and charges timeline.

Communication

The support charge notification letter will go out in February 2021 to all residents living in independent living and flexicare properties.

To ensure that this is explained as clearly as possible there will be a FAQ sheet and details on the website.

HMAB will agree and /or make recommendations for the content of the letters in January 2021, with the portfolio holder signing off the final letters.

Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment

- Comments from drop in sessions held in January 2018.
- A copy of charges for community based care from HCC in 2018
- Spreadsheet detailing those who hadn't paid any weekly contribution since the introduction of the charge or since they moved in.

What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	We have clearly explained what the support charge covers and the reasons for charging The notification letters will offer customers the opportunity to discuss their concerns with staff and get support in applying for any relevant benefits.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	
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Other – N/A					
please feel free to consider the potential impact on people in any other contexts					
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)			

What are the findings of any consultation with:

Staff?	None	Residents?	Results from the STAR survey in 2018 have shown that residents identified the emergency alarm service and the support housing officer as the 2 nd and 3 rd most important priority associated with living in their property. In January 2018 we held drop in sessions at each scheme for residents to come and discuss the charge and for us to explain
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			what it is for. We had a lot of positive comments with the majority understanding the need to pay towards the service. Some residents recognised that housing associations had withdrawn the emergency service and scheme manager and didn't want it to happen to them. One person wanted to pay more.
Voluntary & community sector?		Partners?	
Other stakeholders?			

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	The future viability of the support and alarm service in independent/flexicare living is reliant upon us being able to recover the cost of service provision where it is possible to do so. Results from the STAR survey support the value of the service from residents by them rating the emergency alarm and supported housing officer as their 2 nd and 3 rd priority (behind the repairs to their property).
	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?
Review whether any elements of the independent living service should be eligible for housing benefit	This is to ensure fair charging of service.	Karen Long	June 2021	

Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Jaine Cresser Assistant Director (Housing and Investment)
Date: 18/12/20