

1. Introduction

This report briefly summarises how the Equality Impact Assessment on the Housing Advice/Homelessness Service was undertaken, its scope and the key findings.

The assessment was undertaken by 5 officers from across the Strategic Housing Department, a 'critical friend' from Landlord Services, two members of TACT (Tenants And Council Together) and facilitated by the council's Equality & Inclusion Consultant. In addition to two 2 hour training sessions, the assessment required two 2.5 hour meetings spread over a number of weeks, some time for members of the team to check or research some points that arose and time to complete the forms.

2. Process

The group outlined above first undertook an equality impact assessment of the new Scheme of Allocations for Choice Based Lettings, for which a separate report has been written. It was agreed at the scoping meeting of the Housing Advice/Homelessness Service that the whole Service would be assessed.

Initial discussions considered the advice service provided to people presenting with housing difficulties in particular the ways in which the service is accessed and the means by which it is provided, varying from face to face contact in the office or elsewhere to advice via email or fax. The group considered the range of advice given depending on the issues and needs presented by the household and the options available with regard to accommodation. Most of the information was provided by officers from the Housing Advice/Homelessness Service, but with all members of the group contributing to the discussion and assessment, and with one person being responsible for completing the paperwork.

The whole Team used the questions and table in Template 1 of the EIA Guidance Manual to consider whether the Housing Advice Service had an impact on each customer group listed. The age groups were amended to reflect how they are grouped with regard to housing need. Domestic Abuse and Caring Responsibilities were added as additional groups, whilst Unemployed People were omitted.

In deciding if a customer group would or might be disadvantaged by the Housing Advice Service, we based our conclusions on the following:

- Monitoring evidence where this was available, in particular the evidence from the data collected by the Housing Advice/Homelessness services.
- Information about housing needs and barriers to receiving Housing Advice /Homelessness services faced by particular groups, drawn from local and national organisations such as Stonewall Housing, Winchester Area Community Action, Citizens Advice Bureau and the Trinity Centre, and available research and guidance from governmental, academic and other sources.

3. Findings

The assessment team agreed that the Housing Advice/Homelessness Service was relevant to all the customer groups, as accommodation is a fundamental requirement for everyone. The team did not find any evidence to suggest that the Service would have a negative impact on any of the customer groups. The Housing Advice/Homelessness Service was considered to have a positive impact on most groups. However, it was acknowledged that there was insufficient evidence to decide if some groups, whilst not

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being discriminated against or considered to be disadvantaged by the Service, would receive a positive benefit. These were:

- black or minority ethnic groups,
- people with a learning disability
- all groups within the sexuality strand
- all groups within the religion and belief equality strand.

The team concluded that a detailed assessment was not required, but a number of actions would form the improvement plan. The actions are grouped into the following areas: equality monitoring; access to and promotion of the service; research; and training. Some of the actions have been included in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. The complete Improvement Plan is attached to this report.

4. Key Recommendations

The action points set out in the improvement plan predominantly apply to the Housing Advice/Homelessness services. However a few cut across other housing services. It is therefore important that all the housing services within Winchester City Council consider the action plans of their Equality Impact Assessments together. The key action points are:

- To undertake equality monitoring across 5 equality strands
- To improve access to the Service and promote the Service to all groups
- To undertake research to improve understanding of needs and the provision of services to meet those needs
- To ensure officers receive training and are aware of equality and diversity issues particularly in relation to Housing Advice/Homelessness Service.

5. Monitoring

- Each action point has a named lead officer and a target date for completion
- The longer term actions will be included in Business or Service Plans or the Homelessness Strategy action plan
- The Improvement Plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis and reported to senior officers within the council.

6. Conclusions.

6.1 Detailed Assessment

No detailed assessments are required.

6.2 Improvement Plan

Thirteen Key Actions were identified to address the issues that arose during the assessment. These are summarised in the table below.

Equality Impact Assessments have been undertaken across a raft of services within Housing and there will be actions that cut across services. The Housing Equality Group (HEG) will review how these actions will be delivered once the programme of assessments has been completed in August/September 2008.

Form 3. Improvement Plan

Service or Policy to be improved	Responsibility	Priority	Performance Measure	Year	Min Std	Target
Housing Advice						
Actions Required to Achieve Improvement	Responsibility	Target Date	Resource Implications			
1. Equality Monitoring						
1.1 Undertake equality monitoring across all 5 strands of all people seeking housing advice through to a possible Homeless application and Housing Register to allocation of permanent accommodation	All Staff		<p>Currently collecting information on 5 equality strands.</p> <p>The Housing Advice team are collecting the information and have identified possible mechanisms to record and store the information.</p> <p>Staff time, setting up a database and possible staff training.</p> <p>Proposed target date depends on IM&T availability, training dates and available funds.</p>			
1.2 Investigate which strands have fewer people accessing the service	Team Leader and Housing Advice Team		<p>New team leader as of December 2008. Implications will be team leader's time, planning and priorities. Cooperation from a variety of agencies and departments will be required.</p>			
1.3 Consider recording unemployment status on Housing Register application and Housing Advice initial enquiry, under reason for homelessness	Housing Needs Team	<p>April 2009 (Live date)</p> <p>June 2009</p>	<p>Information now being collected and recorded with the implementation of Hampshire Homechoice.</p> <p>Secondary homelessness reason to be recorded electronically and evidenced through paper work. IM&T to be consulted, staff time and resources. Link and share information with LSP.</p>			
2. Access to and promotion of the						

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Service			
2.1 Improve the Homelessness and Housing Advice pages on the WCC website to make them more user friendly	Web Champion Housing Needs Support Officer		Staff training, staff time and research. Web champion already assigned.
2.2 Promote the range of options available for accessing the advice service particularly the email contact option and availability of free internet access at City offices / Local offices and libraries	All Staff		Staff to continue to give out business cards with contact details at initial assessment. Amend and update our leaflets. Resource implications only. Eleanor Hodge to provide literature in order to promote these services.
2.3 Investigate 'talking news' as a means of advertising the service	Housing Advice Team		Decision already made on 3 leaflets to put forward. Further arrangements to be made. Staff time and liaison with communications.
2.4 Review the list of agencies and groups, including small informal groups such as befriending groups, church groups and the Women's Institute, that are aware of the service to map omissions and gaps in the service	Housing Advice Team		Staff time, resources and research. Homelessness strategy action plan addressing gaps in service. Continued developments in place for making contact with other agencies.
2.5 Review working protocols to improve interagency working and promotion of the service	Housing Advice Team		Staff time. Ongoing implementation and development of new and current joint working protocols.
2.6 Promote the service internally by way of City Voice, continue to invite new staff members from CSC for basic training. Liaise with other relevant departments to raise awareness of the service	Housing Advice Team		Develop relevant literature. Submit information to City Voice. Distribute business cards internally. Staff and further planning required. Time constraints within competing demands.
3. Research			

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3.1 Consider national research on links between mental health and homelessness	Ian Barrett		Ian Barrett to Identify the links and present most recent publications and statistics for the Housing Advice Team's consideration to further inform the service.
3.2 Undertake research through Carers Groups into the growing number of households that include a person with a learning disability, with respect to housing advice	Team Leader Housing Advice		Staff time and resources. Research required in identifying if a person's learning disability within a family has an affect on access to housing advice service. Possible site visits to other agencies.
4. Training			
4.1 Flag up the need for specialised training on the range of issues dealt with by officers, in regards to the equality strands in particular mental health, LGBT and domestic abuse.	Team Leader Housing Advice or Housing Options Manager		Mental health training attended by staff. Others are awaiting training in 2009. Sexual orientation training has been arranged for all staff in January 2009. Training needs have been identified and training options are currently being explored. DV training available through external agencies to frontline staff including CSC.

Please send the completed form to the ICE Group

Summarise improvements here and amend service or business plan as necessary. If urgent improvements are necessary – for instance, if you have discovered illegal discrimination - this should be done outside the normal planning timetable. “Quick fixes” can be implemented straight away if they have no or minor resource implications and do not require approval or built into the normal service planning cycle.

The Prioritisation Criteria used at stage may be useful here to give an overall priority and to prioritise individual actions. In either case you may need to add additional criteria such as cost, timescale, ease of implementation, etc.