

1. Introduction

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

The assessment was undertaken by 6 officers from across the Housing Department, an external 'critical friend' (Beth Taylor who chairs the Inclusive Society Strategic Outcome Group of the Winchester District Strategic Partnership and who has wide experience of social housing and care) 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 Housing Strategy was the first Strategy to be equality impact assessed and subsequently validated. It was agreed at the scoping meeting that the whole Housing Strategy would be assessed, and that the sub-strategy/action plan on Homelessness would subsequently be assessed by the same Equality Impact group.

Initial discussions considered the range of groups and organisations consulted prior to the Strategy being drafted and the sources of evidence used to inform the content. The discussions also included the consultations and research undertaken to inform the sub-strategies. The investigation was divided up between different members of the group, with the officer responsible for writing the Homelessness Strategy undertaking most, but with all members of the group contributing, 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 Homelessness Strategy had an impact on each customer group listed. The age groups were amended to reflect how they are grouped with regard to housing need, and Domestic Abuse, Caring Responsibilities and People leaving the forces were added as additional groups.

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

- Monitoring evidence where this was available, in particular the evidence from the data collected by the homelessness services.
- Information about housing needs and barriers to receiving 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 Homelessness Strategy 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 Strategy would have a negative impact on any of the customer groups. The Homelessness Strategy 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 being discriminated against or considered to be disadvantaged by the Strategy, would receive a positive benefit. These were:

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- black or minority ethnic groups,
- people with a mental illness
- 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. They are grouped into the same three areas as the Housing Strategy Improvement Plan: research and evidence; communications; and training. Where appropriate, these 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 apply to the homelessness services. The key action points are:

- To ensure there is a robust evidence base to inform decisions on affordable housing and other housing needs.
- To ensure housing options are communicated effectively especially with regard to the needs of customers covered by the 6 Equality strands.
- To ensure officers receive training and are aware of equality and diversity issues particularly in relation to housing services.

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 more specific sub-strategies/action plans.
- 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

Eleven 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.

Improvement Plan

Service or Policy to be improved	Responsibility	Priority	Performance Measure	Year	Min Std	Target
Homelessness Strategy						
Actions Required to Achieve Improvement	Responsibility	Target Date	Resource Implications			
1. Research and Evidence Ensure there is a robust evidence base to inform decisions on affordable housing and other housing needs in order to improve access to affordable housing and housing choice						
1.1 Undertake further analysis of homelessness statistics, both by recording information and by comparing this data with general data on the most vulnerable and low income groups who present as homeless to pick up the needs of groups that the strategy is not addressing.						
1.2 Consult with and undertake research into BME groups, including people from accession states to ensure they are aware of WCC Homelessness Strategy and to highlight any particular needs						
1.3 Review national research into the links between mental health and homelessness.						

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1.4 Undertake research, through Carers Groups, into the growing number of households with a child with a learning disability, with respect to homelessness.			
1.5 Look at national research on sexuality in relation to homelessness. Investigate local support networks for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals			
1.6 Record all needs of customers, not just the primary need and report on these needs			
1.7 Undertake equality monitoring across all 6 strands of all people seeking homeless advice through homeless application, emergency accommodation, Housing Register to allocation of permanent accommodation			
1.8 Investigate whether it is appropriate to report on all monitoring data to the Joint Action Forum			
2. Communication Ensure housing options are communicated effectively especially with regard to the needs of the 6 Equality groups			
2.1 Promote the Strategy and services so that all potential customers and support agencies can easily find out about the services available			
2.2 Review working protocols to improve interagency working and promotion of the service			

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<p style="text-align: center;">3. Training</p> <p>Ensure officers receive training and are aware of equality and diversity issues particularly in relation to housing services</p>			
3.1 Identify training needs through appraisals and staff induction with particular reference to housing need and homelessness and arrange training with regard to all the equality strands.			