

1. Introduction

This report briefly summarises how the Equality Impact Assessment on the Housing 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 3 2.5 hour meetings spread over several 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. 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. It was also agreed that the Private Sector Housing and Rural Housing Development sub-strategies would be assessed at a later date.

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 Housing 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 Housing 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 Travelling Show People were added as an additional group.

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

- Monitoring evidence where this was available, in particular the evidence from the data collected by the allocation and homelessness services, and from the Housing Registers
- Data from the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey
- Evidence from the recent Housing Market Assessment
- Analysis of need from Swaythling Housing Society, the Hampshire Zone Agent
- Information about housing needs and barriers to receiving housing services faced by particular groups, drawn from local and national organisations such as Stonewall Housing, Winchester Area Community Action, Community Action Hampshire, Hampshire County Council Adult Services and the Primary Care Trust, available research and guidance from governmental, academic and other sources.

3. Findings

The assessment team agreed that the Housing 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 any of the customer groups would be negatively impacted by the Strategy. The Housing 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 people with a mental illness, people with a learning disability, all groups within the sexuality strand, and 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 three areas: research and evidence; communications; and training. Most of these have been included in the Housing Strategy Action Plan or the action plans of the sub-strategies. However the training requirements and some action points within communications are corporate issues which will need to be picked up by the ICE group. Point 2.4 in the improvement plan does not appear in the Communications EIA and needs to be picked up corporately. Some of the research will be interlinked across Strategic Housing and Landlord Services and therefore has resource implications for both. The complete Improvement Plan is attached to this report.

4. Key Recommendations

The action points set out in the improvement plan apply to allocations and homelessness services and landlord 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 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

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

It should be noted that the Housing Strategy is a high level document. 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.

Housing Strategy Equality Impact Assessment

Improvement Plan for Housing Strategy:

Actions Required to Achieve Improvement	Responsibility		Target Date	Resource Implications	Links
	Lead	Support			
<p>1. Research and Evidence</p> <p>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</p>					
1.1 Develop greater understanding of the needs of households with specific housing needs particularly the following: mental illness; learning disability; religion and belief; and sexuality	Landlord services	Strategic Housing	2009/10	Staff time; existing resources. Research may need to be commissioned; consultancy fees	
1.2 Investigate how to better meet the needs of people with multiple or complex needs. Ensure there are no gaps in the information available and there is signposting to advice and services.	Strategic Housing	Landlord Services	2009/10	Staff time; existing resources. Research may need to be commissioned; consultancy fees	
1.3 Use evidence from the PCT and Hampshire Partnership Trust on projections of people with long term health, mental health and learning disability needs to anticipate their housing needs	Strategic Housing	Landlord Services	2009/10	Staff time: existing resources	
1.4 Undertake a review of literature on the housing needs of the following equality groups: religion and belief; sexuality; mental illness and learning disability	Strategic Housing	Landlord Services	2009/10	Staff time; existing resources.	

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Actions Required to Achieve Improvement	Responsibility		Target Date	Resource Implications	Links
	Lead	Support			
<p>1.5 Review monitoring arrangements of the needs of users of allocations and homelessness services especially with regard to the 6 equality strands and improve data collection and access to data across all services within the Council.</p> <p>Create consistency in reporting across all reports e.g. use of consistent age bands</p>	Strategic Housing	Landlord Services	2008/09	Staff time: existing resources	
<p>1.6 Improve the way that information is recorded about mental illness and/or learning disability to identify support needs both at the time of application for housing and when housing is provided</p>	Strategic Housing	Landlord Services	2008/09	Staff time: existing resources	
<p>2. Communication</p> <p>Ensure housing options are communicated effectively especially with regard to the needs of the 6 Equality groups</p>					
<p>2.1 Improve accessibility of information for people with complex or particular needs</p>	Landlord Services	Strategic Housing	2008/09	Staff time; existing resources	
<p>2.2 Increase awareness of 'easy to read' options to assist people with poor literacy or language skills and for people who do not have English as a first language</p>	Landlord Services	Strategic Housing	Date to align with Comms EIA	Staff time; existing resources	This is covered by the Communications EIA key recommendation number 4
<p>2.3 Communicate with the Youth Council, BME Steering Group and Disability Equality Reference Group to widen engagement with the 6 equality groups and invite to stakeholder events</p>	Landlord services	Strategic Housing	Date to align with Comms EIA	Staff time; existing resources	This is covered by the Communications EIA key recommendation number 3

Housing Strategy Equality Impact Assessment

Actions Required to Achieve Improvement	Responsibility		Target Date	Resource Implications	Links
	Lead	Support			
2.4 Ensure that voluntary groups funded by WCC use the 'Equality and Diversity Toolkit for the Voluntary and Community Sector' to engage with the 6 equality strands.	Corporate	TBA	TBA	Staff time	Grants EIA
3. Training Ensure officers receive training and are aware of equality and diversity issues particularly in relation to housing services					
3.1 Include training on equality in corporate training programme	Organisational Development	Training Manager	As Corporate Training Plan		In Communications EIA Key Recommendations 7 and 8
3.2 Managers to identify specific housing related training around equality and diversity	Strategic Housing/ Landlord Services		2008/09	Staff time through appraisal process and supervision	In Communications EIA Key Recommendations 7 and 8
3.3 Ensure all existing and new officers are aware of and receive training on the translation and interpretation service	Organisational Development	Training Manager & Customer Services Manager	2008/9 & ongoing	Staff time	Translation and Interpretation Policy and Guidance