

Housing Advice – Interview Time allocation – Equality Impact Assessment

1. Introduction

This report summarises how the Equality Impact Assessment for Housing Advice – office based face to face interview time allocation was undertaken, its scope and the key findings.

The officers responsible for the assessment were as follows:

- Malcolm Edington – Senior Housing Options Officer
- Shakira Gearty – Housing Advice Officer
- Janette Palmer – Project Co-ordinator, Landlord Services - the group's critical friend.

One scoping and assessment session was held on 21st January 2010.

2. Scoping

At a meeting on 19.12.09 it was discussed whether the reduction in the allocated time for each Housing Advice interview from 1 hour to 50 minutes constituted a significant change in service delivery which required impact assessment.

In trying to make that judgement the impact on each customer group was being considered and therefore it was decided a formal assessment should be carried out to record this debate.

The service itself had been previously impact assessed in July 2008. The changes to interviews times were introduced shortly after in February 2009, and weren't therefore covered by the comprehensive assessment of the service.

3. Activity being assessed

The Housing Advice team operate an interview system whereby clients can agree a convenient time to discuss their housing needs, receive advice and support and information on other organisations that are best placed to assist them. This assessment is only of the interviews made by appointment and carried out face to face at the City Offices or over the telephone.

Clients will be seen in their own homes or at a mutually agreed venue if they prefer, for example - due to accessibility issues, caring responsibilities or if formal interviews are stressful. The provision of these alternatives is not covered in this assessment as they will have been considered in the July 2008 process.

4. Impact Assessment

From experience the Housing Advice team believe that 50 minutes is sufficient to provide the service required to the majority of Housing Advice clients. By reducing the previous allocation of 1 hour the service has been able to provide a quicker response to requests for housing advice interviews.

It was recognised that some clients may require longer interview times; however, this could still have been the case when 1 hour was allocated for appointments.

There are 3 key approaches the team takes to respond to clients requiring longer interview periods:-

- Double appointments - when it is known prior to interview from the information collected at initial contact stage that the client is likely to require more time they receive a longer interview slot.
- Sensible scheduling of appointments – if it is not clear, based on the information provided at the initial contact stage, that more time may be required but in the judgment of the officer an overrun is believed possible, the next appointment is kept free so it does not affect other clients or appointments are scheduled before lunch breaks etc.
- Allowing overruns – if the client is not known to the officer or their needs have not be fully communicated prior to interview and 50 minutes is not adequate, the officer would continue until the objective of the interview has been met and allow the interview to overrun.

As the new time allocation has been in operation for nearly a year, it has shown that over-runs occur infrequently and are largely a consequence of officers not being aware of needs prior to interview. This could still occur if 1 hour was allocated for an appointment – but it may be possible to reduce these occurrences by improved identification of communication needs at the time initial contact, although it is accepted that this will not always be successful.

5. Key Recommendations

- All team members check at initial point of contact whether clients have any communication or accessibility needs which may impact on the interview time allocation.
- Records are kept of those clients over running to amend approach set out in section 4 where trends are found for particular customer groups.

6. Conclusions

No detailed assessment is required.