

Somerset Equality Impact Assessment

Organisation prepared for

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Version

1

Date Completed

January 2020

Description of what is being impact assessed

Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2020 – 2050

The strategic objectives of the business plan are to: Deliver more new homes; Provide great customer service; and Improve existing homes and neighbourhood.

HRA budget setting 2020/21

The HRA budget setting report enables the council to set a balanced budget for 2020/21 that reflects SWT's HRA business plan and takes into account councillor's priorities. The report provides an overview of the finances for the HRA. It covers both HRA revenue and housing capital spending, highlighting the inter-relationships between the two.

Council housing rent setting policy from April 2020 for a period of up to 5 years

To ensure continued investment in the management, maintenance and development of council housing stock to ensure the needs of existing and potential tenants are met, and to provide enhanced support for families and communities experiencing hardship.

HRA fees and charges for 2020/2021

To increase the fees and charges from April 2020 for the HRA to ensure sufficient financial resources are in place to deliver the services.

Evidence

What data/information have you used to assess how this policy/service might impact on protected groups? Sources such as the [Office of National Statistics](#), [Somerset Intelligence Partnership](#), [Somerset's Joint Strategic Needs Analysis \(JSNA\)](#), Staff and/ or [area profiles](#), should be detailed here

Data:

Major changes in national housing finance and housing policy – 2019/20

Somerset West and Taunton's Corporate Strategy 2020 – 2024

The most current available data on our tenants and our housing stock.

(Note: Further work will continue in this area as tenant engagement resources are increased)

Who have you consulted with to assess possible impact on protected groups? If you have not consulted other people, please explain why?

Engagement:

Consultation and regular meetings with the SWT Tenants Strategic Board during 2019/20

Wider engagement with councillors in the development of the HRA Business Plan 2020–2050 throughout 2019/20

Analysis of impact on protected groups

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations with protected groups. Consider how this policy/service will achieve these aims. In the table below, using the evidence outlined above and your own understanding, detail what considerations and potential impacts against each of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Based on this information, make an assessment of the likely outcome, before you have implemented any mitigation.

Protected group	Summary of impact	Negative outcome	Neutral outcome	Positive outcome
Age	<p>People will benefit from the overall investment in council housing.</p> <p>The increased choice of affordable housing type, size and tenure provides housing options for all age groups.</p> <p>Improvements in energy efficiency will help to protect tenants, whatever their age or the hardships they experience, from fuel poverty.</p> <p>The rent setting policy and the increase to fees and charges will be applied across our housing stock. This increase in the gross rental charge for existing tenants and new tenants moving into our housing will have a neutral effect on protected groups. The cost rise to tenants is a relatively modest one and follows four years of rent reductions for tenants. The rise will enable the council to continue to provide an excellent range of services.</p> <p>Note: A total of 3,265 (58%) of our existing tenants are in receipt of help with housing costs i.e. Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.</p> <p>The impact of both investment prioritisation and improvements to service delivery need to be assessed in more detail as part of an annual planning process in order to identify more precisely the potential for both negative and positive of the business plan on this specific group.</p>	□	⊗	⊗

	Communications on any complex changes may disproportionately worry tenants in sheltered/supported housing.			
Disability	<p>People will benefit from the overall investment in council housing.</p> <p>Specific provision for a range of new adapted properties will be made to provide a housing choice for those with a disability.</p> <p>Eligible tenants will particularly benefit from the provision of disabled adaptations (major and minor) to existing council housing.</p>	☐	☐	☒
Gender reassignment	<p>People will benefit from the overall investment in council housing.</p> <p>There is not expected to be any particular negative impact on this specific group.</p>	☐	☐	☒
Marriage and civil partnership	<p>People will benefit from the overall investment in council housing.</p> <p>There is not expected to be any particular negative impact on this specific group.</p>	☐	☐	☒
Pregnancy and maternity	<p>People will benefit from the overall investment in council housing.</p> <p>Within the business plan there is potential for investment in better quality and additional family housing.</p> <p>There is not expected to be any particular negative impact on this specific group.</p>	☐	☐	☒

<p>Race and ethnicity</p>	<p>People will benefit from the overall investment in council housing.</p> <p>Wider tenant participation and engagement will increase the proportion of tenants providing feedback to inform service improvements.</p> <p>Any proposed re-development of the housing stock could potentially have a negative impact on a specific group of tenants, depending upon the location.</p> <p>Communication about the business plan may not fully reach those for whom English is not their first language.</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Religion or belief</p>	<p>People will benefit from the overall investment in council housing.</p> <p>Developing and supporting staff to provide great customer service will ensure appropriate and sensitive services are delivered to the religious or belief requirements of tenants.</p> <p>There is not expected to be any particular negative impact on this specific group.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Sex</p>	<p>People will benefit from the overall investment in council housing.</p> <p>There is not expected to be any particular negative impact on this specific group.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Sexual orientation</p>	<p>People will benefit from the overall investment in council housing.</p> <p>Investment in our communities will ensure information about our services is accessible so that people can benefit from all our activities. People experiencing alarm, distress and harassment will benefit from</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	<p>investment being made into providing great customer services which will be community inclusive.</p> <p>There is not expected to be any particular negative impact on this specific group.</p>			
<p>Other, e.g. carers, veterans, homeless, low income, rurality/isolation, etc.</p>	<p>Property lettings will be allocated via the choice based lettings system - Homefinder Somerset, which has equality and diversity policies in place to ensure protected groups are not disadvantaged.</p> <p>The rent setting policy and the increase to fees and charges will be applied across our housing stock. This increase in the gross rental charge for existing tenants and new tenants moving into our housing will have a neutral effect on protected groups. The cost rise to tenants is a relatively modest one and follows four years of rent reductions for tenants. The rise will enable the council to continue to provide an excellent range of services.</p> <p>The application of rent tolerances for certain individual properties will take account of local factors and concerns, in consultation with tenants.</p> <p>To help support tenants on low incomes the housing service will continue to provide a number of initiatives to enable them to manage their finances and maximise their income:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish clear information on rent which helps tenants to manage their own finances; • Signpost tenants to a relevant benefit agency to help ensure they are maximising their income to meet their living costs; • Take action to raise the awareness of accessing a range of welfare benefits; and 	□	⊗	⊗

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the opportunity to access direct support in checking they are in receipt of the welfare benefits they are entitled to claim. <p>The impact of both investment prioritisation and improvements to service delivery need to be assessed in more detail as part of an annual planning process in order to identify more precisely the potential for both negative and positive of the business plan on this specific group.</p>			
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Negative outcomes action plan

Where you have ascertained that there will potentially be negative outcomes, you are required to mitigate the impact of these. Please detail below the actions that you intend to take.

Action taken/to be taken	Date	Person responsible	How will it be monitored?	Action complete
Communications on any complex changes may disproportionately worry tenants in sheltered/supported housing. We will communicate with all tenants to explain any significant changes affecting them and what we are investing in.	2020 - ongoing	Case Management Leads	Regular meetings and wider engagement with stakeholders.	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is potential to alienate specific ethnic groups when housing is identified for regeneration/redevelopment. We will consider re-supply of appropriate housing to meet the needs of ethnic groups as part of any future regeneration/redevelopment.	2020 - ongoing	Development and Regeneration Lead	Regular meetings and wider engagement with stakeholders.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Those for whom English is not their first language are not made fully aware of changes. We will offer translation of communication into alternative languages. We will engage	2020 - ongoing	Case Management Leads	Regular meetings and wider	<input type="checkbox"/>

with minority groups using existing tenant involvement channels.			engagement with stakeholders.	
There is potential to alienate religious or belief groups when housing is identified for regeneration/redevelopment. We will consider re-supply of appropriate housing to meet the needs of any religious or belief groups as part of any future regeneration/redevelopment scheme.	2020 - ongoing	Development and Regeneration Lead	Regular meetings and wider engagement with stakeholders.	□
<p>The rent setting policy and the increase to fees and charges will be applied across our housing stock. This increase in the gross rental charge for existing tenants and new tenants moving into in our housing will have a neutral effect on protected groups. The cost rise to tenants is a relatively modest one and follows four years of rent reductions for tenants. The rise will enable the council to continue to provide an excellent range of services.</p> <p>To help support tenants on low incomes the housing service will continue to provide a number of initiatives to enable them to manage their finances and maximise their income:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish clear information on rent which helps tenants to manage their own finances; • Signpost tenants to a relevant benefit agency to help ensure they are maximising their income to meet their living costs; • Take action to raise the awareness of accessing a range of welfare benefits; and • Provide the opportunity to access direct support in checking they are in receipt of the welfare benefits they are entitled to claim. 	2020 – ongoing	Case Management Leads	Regular meetings and wider engagement with stakeholders.	□

<p>As the report states, it is acknowledged that there may be an increase in the level of rent arrears. The proposed budgets for rental income in 2020/21 make a provision for an increase in arrears/bad debt.</p>	2020/21	Case Management Lead – Finance	Regular meetings. Annual review of the HRA financial model.	
<p>The impact of both investment prioritisation and improvements to service delivery will be assessed in more detail as part of an annual planning process in order to identify more precisely the potential for both negative and positive of the business plan.</p>	2021 – ongoing	Director of Housing	Annual review of the HRA business plan.	

If negative impacts remain, please provide an explanation below.

Completed by:	Stephen Boland
Date	7 th January 2020
Signed off by:	
Date	January 2020
Equality Lead/Manager sign off date:	
To be reviewed by: (officer name)	Stephen Boland
Review date:	31 st March 2021