

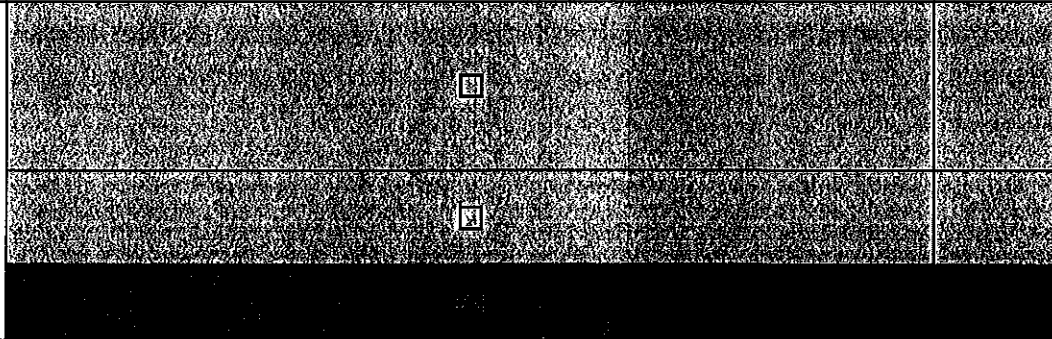
# Template for Impact Assessment Level 1: Initial screening assessment

Localised Support for Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Policy			
Subject of assessment:			
Coverage:	Service Specific	<input type="checkbox"/> Service	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Function
This is a decision relating to:	<input type="checkbox"/> Strategy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Policy	<input type="checkbox"/> Project
	<input type="checkbox"/> Process/procedure	<input type="checkbox"/> Programme	<input type="checkbox"/> Review
	<input type="checkbox"/> Organisational change	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state)	
It is a:	New approach:	Revision of an existing approach: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
It is driven by:	Legislation: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Local or corporate requirements: <input type="checkbox"/>	
Description:	<p>Insert short description, using the following as sub-headings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key aims, objectives and activities</li> </ul> <p>The purpose of the report is to specify how Middlesbrough Council will operate the revised Exceptional Hardship Policy in relation to Section 13a of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and sets out the factors which will be taken into account when deciding such applications. The revised policy will be effective from 1 April 2013 following the abolition of the national Council Tax Benefit scheme. The policy sets out how applications can be made, when applicants will receive a decision, how the Council will treat all applications together with providing details of how applicants can ask for a review of the decision if they are dissatisfied.</p>		


	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statutory drivers (set out exact reference)</li> </ul> <p>The Local Government Finance Bill abolishes the national Council Tax Benefit scheme and empowers the Local Authority to introduce additions to the existing Section 13a Policy of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to cover exceptional hardship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Differences from any previous approach</li> </ul> <p>The purpose of this report is to update the current scheme for this financial year, taking into account the impact and changes resulting from welfare reforms from 1 April 2013. Any considerations for assistance will be applied consistently throughout the full financial year. There have been no such previous approaches as prior to Local Council Tax Support being introduced, the national Council Tax Benefit scheme applied and applications for assistance due to hardship could be made through the Discretionary Housing Payment fund which is no longer the case.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key stakeholders and intended beneficiaries (internal and external as appropriate)</li> </ul> <p>All residents who are liable for Council Tax (aged over 18) and receive Local Council Tax Support could receive assistance through the Exceptional Hardship Policy. The only exception to this is those Council Tax payers who receive 100% Council Tax Support (pensioners).<sup>1</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intended outcomes.</li> </ul> <p>To present a policy for consideration by Council that has given full consideration to the impact of the proposals, has considered the risks associated with the new scheme and gives proper consideration to the Council's equality duties.</p>
<b>Live date:</b>	1 April 2013
<b>Lifespan:</b>	April 2013 – March 2016
<b>Date of next review:</b>	January 2016

Screening questions	Response			Evidence
	No	Yes	Uncertain	
<b>Human Rights</b> Could the decision impact negatively on individual Human Rights as enshrined in UK legislation?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The purpose of the Exceptional Hardship Policy is to provide a policy document which allows the most appropriate support for the borough which minimises the negative impact upon residents. Specific criteria have been put in place within the policy document, which are broadly in line with the previous Discretionary Housing Payment scheme which ended for Council Tax Benefit applicants from 1 April 2013. Any changes have been clarified in the policy document and none of the proposed changes have a negative impact on individual human rights.

\* Consult the Impact Assessment further guidance appendix for details on the issues covered by each of these broad questions prior to completion.

Screening questions	Response	Evidence
<p><b>Equality</b></p> <p>Could the decision result in adverse differential impacts on groups or individuals with characteristics protected in UK equality law? Could the decision impact differently on other commonly disadvantaged groups? *</p>		<p>The Council has a duty to consider the impact of the proposed decision on relevant protected characteristics to ensure it has due regard to the public sector equality duty. The duty means the Council must have due regard when taking decisions to the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;</li> <li>(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;</li> <li>(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.</li> </ul> <p>The scheme is relevant to the age and disability protected characteristics. The Council has modelled the impact of the proposed changes to customers and assessed the various options open to it. The proposed model is based on the impact of different options on vulnerable groups within the town.</p> <p>Age (elderly) - The government have considered the situation for low income pensioners who were previously eligible for support with their council tax through council tax benefit. Unlike most other groups, pensioners cannot be expected to find work. As a result of this, low income pensioners are protected from any reduction in support as with the introduction of Local Council Tax Support by Government and could potentially receive 100% Council Tax Support from the Council. For those who do not receive 100% Support, applications will be encouraged to identify if they are experiencing any form of hardship.</p> <p>Disability - There are likely to be a number of claimants who currently receive a disability premium within other state benefit awards and the exact number of people who are disabled and potentially affected by the 20% reduction in Council Tax Support are unknown. The income which is disregarded under Council Tax Benefit is maintained under Local Council Tax Support and as the proposals are to pass an equal reduction on to every benefit claimant, this protected characteristic is not adversely affected. However, applications will be encouraged for those who are disabled and consider themselves to be experiencing hardship.</p> <p>Age (families with young children) – Families with young children are adversely affected by the changes to Council Tax Support. By extending the existing Exceptional Hardship Policy to incorporate all applicants who receive Council Tax Support, they will not be disproportionately adversely affected because they hold this protected characteristic.</p> <p>Given the above there are no concerns that the proposal could have a disproportionate adverse impact on these protected characteristics. Evidence used to inform this assessment includes analysis of current eligibility criteria, feedback from stakeholders and complaints data.</p>

Screening questions	Response	Evidence
<b>Community cohesion</b> Could the decision impact negatively on relationships between different groups, communities of interest or neighbourhoods within the town? *	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	The Policy does not discriminate against any groups and the service will be sensitive at all times to the needs of all applicants. This will have a positive impact, providing a tool to support residents in financial difficulties to remain in their homes.
<b>Middlesbrough 2020 – Our Vision</b> Could the decision impact negatively on the achievement of the vision for Middlesbrough? *	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	The adoption of this policy does not have any negative impacts on the vision for Middlesbrough. The policy intention is to assist the most vulnerable claimants who are experiencing difficulties in paying their Council Tax.
<b>Organisational management / transformation</b> Could the decision impact negatively on organisational management or the transformation of the Council's services as set out in its transformation programme? *	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	This decision will not impact negatively on any organisational or transformation services the Council has in place
<b>Next steps:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If the answer to all of the above screening questions is No then the process is completed. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If the answer of any of the questions is Yes or Uncertain, then a Level 2 Full Impact Assessment must be completed.		

<b>Assessment completed by:</b>	Martin Barker	
<b>Date:</b>	07.01.14	18   1   14