

**South Staffordshire Council  
Equality Impact Assessments (EIA)**

Equality Impact Assessment				
<b>1</b>	<b>Title of Function or Policy to be assessed:</b> Introduction of BECS – On-line Benefits Electronic Claim System			
<b>2</b>	<b>Date:</b> 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2008			
<b>3</b>	<b>Name of Lead Officer:</b> Tracey Richards, Revenues and Benefits Manager			
<b>4</b>	<b>EIA Team</b> Tracey Richards, Revenues and Benefits Manager Elaine Harper, Principle Benefits Officer Eric Labhart, Fraud Team Leader			
<b>5</b>	<b>Director/Head of Service/Service Manager:</b> Tracey Richards, Revenues and Benefits Manager			
<b>6</b>	<b>Existing, new or review:</b> New			
<b>7</b>	<b>Set out the aims/objectives/purposes/outcomes of the function or policy, and give a summary of the service provided:</b> Implementation of the BECS Claims National Product, which enables movement of data entry tasks away from Assessors to non-expert front office staff, trusted intermediaries and self-service by claimants or their agents, The Benefits Service is aiming to streamline the Housing and Council Tax Benefits (HB/CTB) claim submission processes, in order to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve performance</li> <li>• improve customer service</li> <li>• reduce customer error, and</li> <li>• generate efficiency savings.</li> </ul>			
<b>8</b>	<b>Linked policies, functions: Are there any other functions, policies or services which might be linked with this one for the purposes of this exercise?</b> Housing and Council Tax Benefit schemes Contracts with Registered Social Landlords for verification and receipt of claims Technology initiative to increase use and accessibility of IT systems in line with the Government's transactional agenda Data Protection – security of information received			
<b>9</b>	<b>Who is it intended to affect or benefit (the target population):</b>  Vulnerable people within the South Staffordshire Council area, living in remote areas, who may have an entitlement to support with payments of rent and/or Council Tax.			
<b>10</b>	<b>Within this table, state whether the policy or function will have a positive or negative impact across the following factors and provide any comments.</b>			
		Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Comments
	Age	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Enhancement to traditional systems, paper based claims and/or visits</b>
	Disability	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Enhancement to traditional systems, paper based claims</b>

If you have any queries or comments about Equality Impact Assessments or about the toolkit, please contact:  
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Or email: [k.smith@sstaffs.gov.uk](mailto:k.smith@sstaffs.gov.uk)

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				and/or visits
	Gender	No	No	
	Race	Yes	Yes	Access to translators will continue through traditional systems, although not significant for this area
	Religion/belief	No	No	
	Sexuality	No	No	
<b>11</b>	<p><b>What evidence do you have for the statements you have made above?</b></p> <p><b>Age and Disability</b>  <b>Positive – enabling 24/7 access to facility to establish entitlement for Housing and/or Council Tax Benefit, additional method of claiming benefit compared to traditional existing schemes. Libraries within the district, including the mobile library have internet access. Surgeries will be held in outlying areas where this facility will be accessible.</b>  <b>Negative - Within South Staffordshire area there is currently limited access to cable internet, therefore more restricted access to on-line facilities. Elderly residents may have difficulties working with new technology.</b></p> <p><b>Race</b>  <b>Positive – claimant advisors in CAB or welfare organisations will be able to assist BME customers through this method.</b>  <b>Negative – there are limited requests for support using traditional methods of claiming, but continued monitoring of the ethnic make up of the district will be undertaken.</b></p>			
	<p><b>12. From evidence given at Q.11 what actions, if any, will you need to take against each of the following equality strands:</b></p>			
	<p><b>Disability: Assurance that system meets W3C requirements. Options will remain and promoted to use traditional methods, including home visits and access to BSL translators, etc, to ensure inclusiveness of the claim process.</b></p>			
	<p><b>Race: Evaluation of movements in ethnicity would need to be undertaken to ensure that support is available locally.</b></p>			
	<p><b>Gender:</b></p>			
	<p><b>Age: Holding surgeries and encouraging take-up through local groups and communities, using new system where possible, or traditional methods if not.</b></p>			
	<p><b>Religion/belief:</b></p>			
	<p><b>Sexuality:</b></p>			

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**13. Briefly explain how the policy or function contributes to Community Cohesion by answering the following questions:**

- How will it provide equality of access to services, information and employment?
- Does it or could it celebrate diversity?
- Will it or could it promote good relationships within and between communities?
- How will it help to prevent social exclusion?
- Will it help to reintegrate those who have become excluded?
- How will it provide good quality, inclusive services?

Looking to increase income to the district for the most vulnerable residents in the area, enabling their preferred method of claiming for entitlement to Housing and/or Council Tax benefit to be used, whether tradition paper based claim, visit to the Council Offices, home based visit, or use of the electronic web based claim system. Ease of claiming will encourage claimants returning to work, with ease of access to information regarding potential entitlement if their circumstances change. By increasing individual's access to funds will help to prevent social exclusion, and improve access to affordable housing.

**14. Consultation:**

Describe what consultation has been undertaken on this function or policy, who was involved and the outcome.

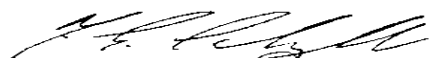
DWP funded initiative – work was jointly undertaken by several northern authorities in the development of this product, which was funded by the Department of Work and Pensions. The project is now available for use by all benefit authorities.  
Consultation with staff – staff attended an awareness session of the project to inform the decision to proceed with its purchase.  
Consultation with customers, through the Best Value survey indicated that they were dissatisfied with the claim form and the speed of processing, which helped to drive the project through improvements that can be obtained in the ease of claiming benefit and the reduced time in processing the claim.  
Registered Social Landlords and the Housing Service, through our joint working in maximising the take-up of benefit, identify this initiative as an improvement in the way that they can help our mutual customers to claim and receive their entitlement to benefit promptly.

**Director/Head of Service:**

I am satisfied with the results of this EIA

I have seen the Councils (3) Equality Schemes or Equality Action Plan and am satisfied with the contribution it can make.

**Signature of Director/Head of Service:**



**Completion of the Toolkit:**

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