

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

ACTION: WITHDRAWAL OF GRANTS TO PARISH COUNCILS	Department: RESOURCES GROUP
Person responsible for assessment: LINDA TODD Person responsible for strategy where different from above: CATHERINE WHHITEHEAD	Date of assessment: 24 TH JANUARY, 2012

Brief description of strategy, partners and those who will be affected by its delivery:

Twelve Parish Councils and one Parish Meeting are currently in receipt of an annual grant from Darlington Borough Council. The grants range from £191 to £12,966 per annum. The total annual grant allocation by the Borough Council to the Parishes is £35,118.

The assessment was undertaken to ascertain information from the Parishes on what the Grant from the Council was used for and the impact on the Parish and its residents if it was withdrawn.

The following financial saving has been identified against this proposal.

2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
£000	£000	£000	£000
£0	£35,118	£35,118	£35,118

This is on the basis that (as mentioned above) the total grant allocation by the Borough Council to Parishes is £35,118. To withdraw the grants altogether would therefore amount to this money being saved per year.

A meeting took place on 5th January which representatives from all Parish Councils were invited. Six Parish Councils were represented at the meeting (Bishopton; Heighington; Low Dinsdale; Middleton St. George, Neasham; and Sadberge). Whessoe Parish Council submitted a written response.

Specific Impacts on Individual Parishes

Bishopton – Whilst the grant provided is only small, as a result of losing the grant the Parish would possibly have to increase its precept (via Council Tax) by around 25% to cover the loss. Parishioners will be upset and ‘distressed’ by this. It was also felt that the precept for the parish was already quite high. This would potentially have a detrimental financial impact on all villagers liable for council tax, although it would not seem to affect one protected characteristic more than another.

Village Hall running costs are currently £5000. Community Groups currently use the hall and contribute around £3000 to these costs. The grant of around £1000 is also put towards the running costs. Villagers then fundraise for the remaining money.

To lose the grant could put the future of the village hall in doubt. This would therefore have an impact on community groups (third sector parties) within the parish.

It was indicated that the village could possibly cope with losing only 15% of the grant if this were to be an option.

Heighington – Whilst it was acknowledged that removing the grant would have an impact on the amount of money the Parish had to spend it was indicated that the village would simply ‘dig in’ and make up for this in other ways.

The greatest impact would be on the maintenance of the village hall which the grant helps to subsidise. The current grant also contributed to the maintenance costs of a number of facilities in Heighington (Play area, playing field, toilets, car park at playing field etc.)

Sadberge – To remove the grant would make a ‘significant difference’ to the parish’s budget and would ‘leave a large hole’. The Parish has already increased its precept. More information was requested from the Council as to whether the services being provided by the Parish Council were what statutorily need to be provided by the Borough Council. It was felt that in most cases the BC would not be legally obliged to provide most of the services which the Parish Council do.

Low Dinsdale – It was explained that a quarter of the Parish’s grant was used for maintaining playing field and the burial ground. Therefore any grant reduction would have an impact on the Parish’s ability to maintain these areas. A cumulative impact would also be felt by all parishes as another budget proposal is to remove election support for Parishes, therefore putting further strain on the budget. All Parishes were in agreement with this. It was stated that inevitably the Parish will have to raise its precept. It was further explained that whilst it is always possible to obtain grants for capital projects, grants are not available for maintenance and therefore the only option will be to increase the precept.

Neasham – The Parish stated that a big portion of its budget is taken up with public liability insurance for the 17th Century Grade II listed building. Again any reduction would have an impact on the parish’s ability to maintain services currently offered.

Middleton St George – A presentation was given on the work which its parish council has carried out over the past ten years. It was

noted that the parish grants have not increased since 2008. If the Parish grant was to be cut the parish precept would need to be raised by 62%. MSG Parish Council provides support to the village hall, community centre, youth club, water park etc. and it was felt that to lose the Parish Grant would have an impact on the ability of the parish council to support these projects. However no one project would be affected more than any of the others. One of the main impacts of a reduction in the grant would be on maintenance costs; particularly the maintenance costs of playground equipment and facilities for children could close if standards could not be maintained.

Impact on residents:

- Parish will struggle with the upkeep of repairs, maintenance and replacement of play and sports equipment.
- It will not be able to maintain the Nature Reserve at the water park where it has been working with the school children throughout 2010/11.
- It will not be able to fulfil its obligation to work on the Conservation Area at Middleton One Row.
- It could lose its village community centre which is the only meeting place in Middleton St. George as the parish had to step in to help when it was nearly sold for housing development when it lost its previous grant from DBC. This is used by Brownies, Rainbows, Age UK. Keep Fit, Junior Karate, Local History Group Wildlife Group, Elections and any other village meeting facility required

The Parish feels it gives exceptionally good value for £12,000 and requests this grant be retained.

Whessoe – provided a document for consideration of income and expenditure. It believed that the Parish Grant (23% of all income) was an important source of income to enable the Parish Council to meet its financial commitments. Around half of the Parish's expenditure was spent on grounds and building maintenance. The Parish would have to increase its precept by 128% if the grant was cut as ongoing problems with the floor in the Parish Hall had lost a valuable stream of rental income.

General Impacts for all Parishes

Should the grant payable to parish councils be cut the general impacts would be:

- Possible need to increase parish precepts across the board – possible impact on low paid/elderly?
- General effect on parishes ability to maintain open areas – no specific impacts mentioned in relation to residents but rather may

have an effect on the aesthetics of communities

- Some parishes use the grant to subsidise village halls and other projects used by community groups. Cuts to the grant could potentially mean closure for such facilities which would have an effect on those community groups (third party) and communities as a whole.

There are possible cumulative impacts due to further budget proposals to cut electoral support and re-charge for elections. Further last year's budget cuts saw the withdrawal of all democratic support to Parish Councils.

All Parishes indicated that the grants were also used to 'showcase' their Villages which was of benefit to DBC as a whole.

Introduction

This is a generic document that will require interpretation in particular circumstances. If, after reading the guidance, you require further information on how to implement the assessment, please contact Peter Roberts, Social Enterprise Development Manager 01325 388713

Q.1 Is your strategy and the actions it proposes accessible to everyone within the community? Bear in mind any economic, social, environmental, physical, intellectual, cultural, linguistic, technological or other barriers.

Issue	Yes	No	If yes, what evidence do you have to demonstrate this?	If no, what do you plan to do to remove barriers to access?
Equality Act 2010 Protected characteristics:				
Age	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Disability	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Gender reassignment	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Pregnancy and Maternity	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Race	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Religion or belief	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Sex	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Sexual orientation	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Marriage and Civil Partnership	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Local Priorities:				

Issue	Yes	No	If yes, what evidence do you have to demonstrate this?	If no, what do you plan to do to remove barriers to access?
Geographical impacts	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Carers	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Young People leaving care	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Gypsies & Travellers	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Refugees & Asylum Seekers	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
Unemployed or low income	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	
People with spent criminal convictions	✓		Parish Councils assist all groups within their Parishes	

Q.2 (a) For whatever reason, does your strategy and the actions it proposes treat any group differently from others?

Yes	
No	✓

If you have answered 'yes', please specify those individuals or groups affected and whether the impact has the potential to be adverse.

(b) What needs to be done to prevent any potentially adverse impact?

The Council needs to continue to work with Parish Council closely to provide any support which the Parish Council's may need.

Q.3 (a) Does your strategy promote equality? (e.g. does it contain actions that demonstrate a consideration of community cohesion and the needs of the members of Darlington’s diverse communities)

Yes	
No	✓

If you have answered ‘yes’, please give examples of how equality is promoted.

Q.4 In the past three years, have you consulted with any of the following groups regarding the development of your strategy?

Group	Yes	No	If yes, please summarise evidence (Who? When? What were the outcomes?)	If no, are you satisfied that the strategy has no impact on this group?
Age	✓		<p>Consultation events have taken place as part of the 2011/2012 MTFP budget consultation events, these include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public consultation events specifically targeted for disabled, young people and older people • Town Crier publications • Online forums • Talking Together Events • Staffing road shows and internal communications to employees • Attendance at local community groups and action groups (i.e. DAD) • Meeting with Parish Councillors to gauge the impact of the proposals upon Parish Councils and their parishioners. 	

Group	Yes	No	If yes, please summarise evidence (Who? When? What were the outcomes?)	If no, are you satisfied that the strategy has no impact on this group?
Disability	✓		Please refer to detail above.	
Gender reassignment	✓		Please refer to detail above.	
Pregnancy and Maternity	✓		Please refer to detail above.	
Race	✓		Please refer to detail above.	
Religion or belief	✓		Please refer to detail above.	
Sex	✓		Please refer to detail above.	
Sexual orientation	✓		Please refer to detail above.	
Marriage and Civil Partnership	✓		Please refer to detail above.	
Geographical impacts	✓		As well as referring to the detail above a meeting/ consultation event has also been held with representatives of the respective Parish Councils.	
Carers	✓		Please refer to detail above.	
Young people leaving care	✓		Please refer to detail above.	
Gypsies & Travellers	✓		Please refer to detail above.	
Refugees & asylum seekers	✓		Please refer to detail above.	
Unemployed or low waged	✓		Please refer to detail above.	

Group	Yes	No	If yes, please summarise evidence (Who? When? What were the outcomes?)	If no, are you satisfied that the strategy has no impact on this group?
People with spent criminal convictions	✓		Please refer to detail above.	

Guidance and Definitions

The Equality Act 2010 combined over 100 pieces of legislation into one Act and introduces nine protected characteristics for which due regard is required in ensuring discrimination is prevented. These are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership. The Public Sector Equality Duty came into force on April 5th, 2011.

The following definitions and information will be useful in determining impacts of strategies, actions or services on specific groups.

Age:

Having a particular age (e.g. 32 year-olds) or being within an age group (e.g. 18-30 year olds). Discrimination on the grounds of age under the Equality Act 2010 applies from the age of 18 years.

Disability:

Physical or mental impairment and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Gender Reassignment:

A process which is undertaken under medical supervision for the purposes of reassigning a person's sex by changing physiological or other characteristics of sex, and includes any part of such a process.

The Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999 outlaw direct discrimination against transsexuals on the grounds of "gender reassignment".

Transgender: An individual, who appears as, wishes to be considered as or has undergone surgery to become a member of the opposite sex.

Transsexual: An individual who believes that their apparent gender is not their actual gender and may seek gender reassignment surgery to alter their body to meet their belief. Transsexuals may appear similar to transvestites, but have a different intent.

Transvestite: An individual who wears the clothing of the opposite gender to express their feminine/masculine side, or for relaxation. Also known as cross-dressing.

For the purposes of completing the impact assessment, consideration ought to be given, in the first instance for example, to the arrangements made (or which could be made/agreed upon), regarding the use of toilets and any other gender specific facilities.

Pregnancy and Maternity:

Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant. Maternity is the period after giving birth. It is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, including as a result of breastfeeding.

Race: includes colour, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic origin or national origins.

Religion or Belief:

Religion means any religion including a reference to a lack of religion. Belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live it for it to be included.

This area presents, perhaps, the greatest difficulty in terms of providing a definition, not least because of the close links/overlaps in some instances with culture and race/ethnicity.

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 ban discrimination in employment and vocational training on grounds of religion or belief. Under the regulations, religion is defined as being 'any religion, religious belief, or similar philosophical belief'. This does not include any philosophical or political belief unless that belief is similar to a religious belief. Courts and tribunals may consider a number of factors when deciding what is a 'religion or belief' (e.g. collective worship, clear belief system, profound belief affecting way of life or view of the world)'.

For the purposes of completing the impact assessment, consideration ought to be given to a range of factors, examples of which are set out below. It is recognised, however, that whilst knowledge of the central tenets of those religions most likely to be encountered would help ensure that appropriate provision is made with regard to the delivery of and access to services, such knowledge might not necessarily be held.

- Is provision made, when dealing with customers, for them to be dealt with, if requested, by persons of the same sex?

- Does the way in which your service is delivered restrict access to certain religious groups that have days of religious observance restricting or preventing them accessing services on those days?
- Is your service delivered in locations or environments that might preclude or restrict access to certain religious groups?

Sex: Man or woman.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 ensured that no person is treated less favourably because of his or her gender or because he or she is married.

Sexual Orientation: Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards

- Persons of the same sex (lesbians and gay men)
- Persons of the opposite sex (heterosexuals)
- Persons of the same sex and opposite sex (Bisexuals).

It does not cover sexual practices such as sado-masochism and paedophilia.

The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 ban discrimination in employment and vocational training on grounds of sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is defined as an orientation towards:

Marriage or Civil Partnership: Discrimination on grounds a persons marital status or civil partnership is illegal under the Equality Act 2010.