

Diversity impact assessment

TITLE <i>Name/description of the issue being assessed</i>	Adaptations Policy
DATE <i>Date the DIA is completed</i>	April 2016
LEAD OFFICER <i>Name and title of person responsible for carrying out the DIA.</i>	Emma Ditton

- 1 Summary description of the proposed change**
- *What is the change to policy/service/new project that is being proposed?*
 - *How does it compare with the current situation?*

It is proposed to change the existing Adaptations Policy to reflect that major adaptations will not be carried out in properties that are under occupied.

- 2 Summary of evidence used to support this assessment**
- *Eg: Feedback from consultation, performance information, service user records etc.*
 - *Eg: Comparison of service user profile with Medway Community Profile*

Over the past three financial years, on average 38 households have made an application for an adaptation to their Council property per year. This accounts for around 1% of the households in our stock.

Year	Number of valid applications	Number of approvals	% of total stock approved for adaptation
2013/14	46	40	1%
2014/15	34	33	1%
2015/16	35	34	1%

At the end of March 2016 the Council owned 3012 properties, the above table identifies that around 1% of our total stock has been approved for adaptation each year from 2013/14 to 2015/16.

From 1 April 2013 the Government introduced size limit rules into Housing Benefit for working age people renting from a local authority, a registered housing association or other registered social landlord.

This means that Council and housing association tenants who claim housing benefit get less housing benefit if the council decides they have 'spare' bedrooms.

The amount of rent that housing benefit covers is cut by:
14% if you have one 'spare' bedroom
25% if you have two or more 'spare' bedrooms

As at 02/11/2015 HRA housing had 2987 tenanted properties, analysis has

Diversity impact assessment

shown that 608 out of 2987 (20.4%) of HRA properties were under occupied.

As at 8th November 2015 218 tenants were affected by size criteria / under occupation charge. 123 of these tenants had arrears on 8th November 2015 and 92 of those who had arrears also had arrears on 6th April 2015.

This identifies that in future if any of these 218 households required a major adaptation they could potentially be impacted by changes in the policy to not adapt under occupied properties subject to the size criteria.

The number of households under occupying and affected by the size criteria has reduced from 292 in April 2013 to 218 in November 2015 showing that moving has been a popular choice amongst those affected by the size criteria.

It has been identified that since 2011 the HRA have adapted 38 properties, which were under occupied. Based on the average rents for each property type these 38 under occupying households have a potential to accrue arrears of £32,130.19 per year due to the size criteria.

The total spent on adapting the 38 properties was £278,268.31, equating to an average of £7,322.85 per property.

Changes to the policy have been brought about by the concern of spending public money on adapting properties in which tenants may not be able to sustain their tenancy. The tenant may decide to downsize after the adaptation has been complete in order to negate the financial impact of the size criteria or if a tenant falls into arrears due to the size criteria this could lead to the tenant facing possible eviction. As major adaptations tend to be very specific to individuals the council would have to pay to remove or alter the adaptation once the tenant has left.

A number of other local authorities including Swindon, East Devon and Kettering have already adopted the approach of not adapting under occupied properties affected by the size criteria.

The proposal was taken to the Customer Sounding Board on 9 December 2015 for customer consultation. The sounding Board was advertised to all of our residents and the advert highlighted that the adaptations policy was to be discussed. The group represented a cross section of our tenants and some of the attendees had received adaptations to their property or were undergoing the process. The new policy was outlined to the board and received no challenge from tenants. The policy has also been put on line for consultation and received no challenge.

Diversity impact assessment

3 What is the likely impact of the proposed change?

Is it likely to :

- *Adversely impact on one or more of the protected characteristic groups?*
- *Advance equality of opportunity for one or more of the protected characteristic groups?*
- *Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't? (insert ✓ in one or more boxes)*

Protected characteristic groups	Adverse impact	Advance equality	Foster good relations
Age	✓		
Disability	✓		
Gender reassignment			
Marriage/civil partnership			
Pregnancy/maternity			
Race			
Religion/belief			
Sex			
Sexual orientation			
Low income groups	✓		

4 Summary of the likely impacts

- *Who will be affected?*
- *How will they be affected?*

The size criteria only affects tenants that are of working age, so it is not expected that the change in this policy will directly negatively impact on older residents. However it is acknowledged that people of non working age are more likely to require an adaptation to their property. In these circumstances the council may suggest to the tenant downsizing to a smaller property, but we cannot refuse the adaptation if they meet the rest of the eligible criteria.

This policy may have a negative impact on disabled council tenants who have a need for substantial adaptations, but are currently occupying their property and are affected by the size criteria. This may result in households either needing to down size before these are installed at a more appropriate property or the tenants funding the adaptations themselves. It may also negatively impact on Low income groups who require major adaptations and are affected by the size criteria and cannot afford to pay for the adaptation themselves. In all cases the Council will use its discretion and judge the

Diversity impact assessment

situation on its individual merit.

The policy could foster good relations by ensuring tenants are matched to properties that best suit their needs. It also makes best use of the housing stock so that larger properties can be freed up for those households in need.

5 What actions can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impacts, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations?

- *Are there alternative providers?*
- *What alternative ways can the Council provide the service?*
- *Can demand for services be managed differently?*

In order to mitigate the negative impacts of this policy the following actions will be implemented

- If an adaptation is refused Medway Council tenants may be able to organise their own adaptations at their own expense. The Council will only refuse permission with good reason.
- We will ensure that households whom are under occupying their properties and wanting to transfer are given a high priority in HomeChoice.
- Households that downsize may be eligible for the down sizing incentives.
- We will provide households with support in transferring to different properties. The HRA will introduce a new Housing Support Assistant (Move Maker) in 2016 into the structure that will help to support vulnerable tenants that wish to move and/or downsize their property. The support will include help with removals and assistance with claiming incentive payments.
- If the applicant is required to make a financial contribution to the adaptation works but cannot afford it they can apply for discretionary social care funding. This is a loan (which is subject to its' own terms and conditions of eligibility) for the works that are agreed to be 'necessary and appropriate' and 'reasonable and practical' under the legislation
- If a tenant's home is not suitable for adaptations or they are not eligible for assistance, Medway Council will give advice on alternative solutions.
- Applicants have the right to appeal decisions made on adaptation decisions using the Medway Council complaints procedure.
- In cases where the Council refuse to carry out works as a result of under occupation, it will make a reasonable offer of suitable alternative accommodation. Applicants may also be eligible for a financial incentive for downsizing through the Tenant Incentive Scheme.

6 Action plan

- *Actions to mitigate adverse impact, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations and/or obtain new evidence*

Ensure households who are under occupying are identified at the earliest opportunity.

Housing
Manager

Ongoing

Diversity impact assessment

Introduce role of Housing Support Assistant (Move Maker)	Housing Manager	Ongoing
Publicise the tenant incentive scheme in Housing Matters	Policy and Partnership Manager	May 2016

7 The recommendation by the lead officer should be stated below. This may be:

- to proceed with the change, implementing action plan if appropriate
- consider alternatives
- gather further evidence

If the recommendation is to proceed with the change and there are no actions that can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impact, it is important to state why.

It is recommended to complete the items in the action plan and proceed with the change to the Adaptations Policy.

8 Authorisation

The authorising officer is consenting that:

- the recommendation can be implemented
- sufficient evidence has been obtained and appropriate mitigation is planned
- the Action Plan will be incorporated into service plan and monitored

Assistant Director

Date

Contact your Performance and Intelligence hub for advice on completing this assessment

RCC: phone 2443 email: annamarie.lawrence@medway.gov.uk
 C&A: (Children's Social Care) contact your normal P&I contact
 C&A (all other areas): phone 1481 email: paddy.cahill@medway.gov.uk
 BSD: phone 2472/1490 email: corppi@medway.gov.uk
 PH: phone 2636 email: david.whiting@medway.gov.uk

Send completed assessment to the Corporate Performance & Intelligence Hub (CPI) for web publication (corppi@medway.gov.uk)