

Argyll and Bute Council: Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment

Section 1: About the proposal

Title of Proposal

REVENUE AND BENEFITS SERVICES

Intended outcome of proposal

The proposals are focussed on a number of intended outcomes as follows;

- Generate more income for the Council in local taxes and sundry debt revenue collection
- Improve efficiency of working practices to ensure that decisions to award benefits, discounts, exemptions or reliefs are made as quickly and as accurately as possible
- Re-profile income budgets to closely align them with developing policy funding from Department of Works and Pensions (DWP), Scottish Government (SG) and UK government (UKG)
- Organisational restructure of the service to enhance the level of resilience in staffing ensuring that the service can be more agile and dynamic and can react quickly to demands of the Council and Scottish government in terms of welfare provision.

Description of proposal

1. Revenues staff to be on top of reviews of Council Tax discounts and exemptions and NDR reliefs to ensure that;
 - a. The taxbase is accurate and up to date
 - b. All local tax income is charged accurately ensuring that where properties are due to receive a levy they do receive a levy and likewise when they are due a Single Person Discount (SPD) they receive a SPD.
 - c. Civil penalties will be levied to customers who do not respond to reviews on time.
 - d. Two new trainee posts will be recruited to in order to support this work.
2. Benefits processing time to reduce to target and equivalent to the national average in terms of speed and accuracy of processing
3. Proactive recovery of sundry debt to maximise income recovered from Debtors. To do this 2 temporary members of staff will be employed to support this work.
4. All DWP new burdens income to be fully allowed for in budgets
5. An element of generic working to be introduced across Benefits to ensure that all Benefit Assessors are able to process both standard benefit applications and crisis type welfare payments.
6. A central support unit will be setup to gather knowledge and intelligence from routine processes and monitor and report performance of the service as a whole, making sure that nothing is missed, that staff are compliant with standard processes and that wasteful practices are driven out.

Business Outcome(s) / Corporate Outcome(s) to which the proposal contributes

Corporate Outcomes;
People live active healthier and independent lives and our economy is diverse and thriving


Business Outcomes
BO115 We Are Efficient And Cost Effective. BO110 We Support Businesses, Employment And Development Opportunities.

Lead officer details:

Name of lead officer	Fergus Walker
Job title	Revenue and Benefits Manager
Department	Chief Executives Unit

Appropriate officer details:

Name of appropriate officer	Anne Blue
Job title	Head of Financial Services
Department	Chief Executives Unit

Sign off of EqSEIA	
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Date of sign off	09/02/2023
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Who will deliver the proposal?

Fergus Walker, Revenues and Benefits Manager.

Section 2: Evidence used in the course of carrying out EqSEIA

Consultation / engagement

Plans have been drawn up after consultation and engagement with external industry expert and with all staff from within the service. Additionally Executive Leadership Team, and the Budget Working Group have been consulted.

Data

We have analysed data from the Council's core Revenues and Benefits system, Civica OPENRevenues, Electronic Document Management Systems, Civica Workforce 360 and the Council's staff holiday, booking system. Data from complaints, reconsideration of decisions and appeals has been collated and used for the purpose of the review

Other information

There is very little change in these proposals from an EQSEIA perspective we are simply going to do more of what we have done before but more efficiently, effectively and making absolutely sure that our vision to pay and collect as much as we are enabled too, removing barriers and making the process more customer friendly will be embedded within the service.

As plans are further developed through the implementation phases of the project plan the EQSEIA will be reviewed.

Gaps in evidence

Data from complaints, reconsideration of decisions and appeals has been collated and used for the purpose of the review but there has been no proactive consultation with customers. However it is widely understood that customers want the right benefit paid at the right time and their Council Tax and/or Non-Domestic Rates bills to be accurate and up-to-date with all the relevant discounts and exemptions.

As plans are further developed through the implementation phases of the changes the EQSEIA will be reviewed.

Section 3: Impact of proposal

Impact on service users:

	Negative	No impact	Positive	Don't know
Protected characteristics:				
Age		X		
Disability		X		
Ethnicity		X		
Sex		X		
Gender reassignment		X		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		X		
Pregnancy and Maternity		X		
Religion		X		
Sexual Orientation		X		
Fairer Scotland Duty:				
Mainland rural population		X		
Island populations		X		
Low income		X		
Low wealth		X		
Material deprivation		X		
Area deprivation		X		
Socio-economic background		X		
Communities of place		X		
Communities of interest		X		

If you have identified any impacts on service users, explain what these will be.

N/A

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If any 'don't know's have been identified, at what point will impacts on these groups become identifiable?
N/A

Impact on service deliverers (including employees, volunteers etc):

	Negative	No impact	Positive	Don't know
Protected characteristics:				
Age		x		
Disability		x		
Ethnicity		x		
Sex		x		
Gender reassignment		x		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		x		
Pregnancy and Maternity		x		
Religion		x		
Sexual Orientation		x		
Fairer Scotland Duty:				
Mainland rural population		x		
Island populations		x		
Low income		x		
Low wealth		x		
Material deprivation		x		
Area deprivation		x		
Socio-economic background		x		
Communities of place		x		
Communities of interest		x		

If you have identified any impacts on service deliverers, explain what these will be.
N/A

If any 'don't know's have been identified, at what point will impacts on these groups become identifiable?
N/A

How has 'due regard' been given to any negative impacts that have been identified?

There may be a negative reaction from some taxpayers with extra properties who find themselves being levied a double charge for Council Tax and may complain. They will have stator appeals rights that they can exercise if they feel that the decision is wrong. Their characteristics are not linked to any particular group or category.

As plans are further developed through the implementation phases of the changes the EQSEIA will be reviewed.

Section 4: Interdependencies

Is this proposal likely to have any knock-on effects for any other activities carried out by or on behalf of the council?

No, maybe more complaints to deal with internally and appeals to the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service.

Details of knock-on effects identified

More complaints to deal with internally and appeals to the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service where taxpayers are not happy having to pay extra Council Tax charges.

Section 5: Monitoring and review

How will you monitor and evaluate the equality impacts of your proposal?

We will review and monitor complaint volumes, volumes of reconsideration requests and appeals too.

As plans for change are developed further we will review and update the EQSEIA.