

Equality Impact Assessment

Housing Standards - Improvement grants, private rented housing disrepair and tenancy relations

Directorate:	Environmental Services Consumer Protection Services
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Head of Service:	Linda Wacey
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Lead Officer:	Surjit Nashad
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Names and Roles of people carrying out the EIA:
Surjit Nashad – Housing Standards Section Manager

Section 1 - Introduction

Identify the aims of the Policy

The purpose of the services provided by the Housing Standards Section of Consumer Protection is to:

1. Administer the processing, approval and completion of renovation grants and home repairs assistance grants to dwellings;
2. Deal with complaints of disrepair and hazards to privately rented accommodation, including taking appropriate informal and formal enforcement action where necessary to protect the health and safety of the occupiers and visitors to the dwellings and
3. Provide a tenancy relations advice and intervention service to deal with cases of alleged harassment and illegal eviction relating to private sector tenants.

Most of the services are statutory and based on legislation and Government Guidance. They are delivered through close working with other Environmental Health functions such as the Pest Control and the Public Health Sections. There is also a great deal of cooperation and partnership with the Council's Building Control, Planning and Housing Departments.

This assessment does not cover Disabled Facilities Grants or Houses in Multiple Occupation.

This Section's objectives feed into Consumer Protection's aims for 2005-8:

- To provide a range of effective enforcement and regulatory services locally that protect the communities health and safety and environmental wellbeing and
- To contribute to the councils agenda in tackling anti social behaviour and crime, improving public health and quality of life through targeted projects.

In turn these feed into the Waltham Forest Community Strategy Priorities of:

- Decreasing crime and improving the safety and quality of the environment and
- Improving the health and well being of local people.

<i>What is the rational behind the policy and its delivery?</i>
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In dealing matters related to grants, disrepair and tenancy relations, the underlying service objectives are:

1. To preserve and improve the condition of the housing stock in the Borough;
2. To prevent the adverse effects of hazards on the health of occupiers of dwellings and
3. To provide appropriate guidance and advice to people who access the services.

Is the policy aimed at a particular client group?

The services are aimed at the following groups of people:

- Owner occupiers;
- Private landlords and private rented sector tenants;
- Managing and letting agents and
- Proposed purchasers and developers.

How is the policy/service delivered

Most of the services are statutory services and they are free. The services are delivered by the Housing Standards Section, who are part of the Environmental Health Group.

Upon completion, renovation grants are registered as a Local Land Charge and there are conditions relating to the occupation of the property for 5 years; if these are breached, a grant repayment may be required. If a Housing Act 2004 formal notice is served by LBWF, the relevant owner or agent will be charged £300. In addition, if someone fails to comply with a legal notice which has been served on them, then the “works-in-default” procedure may be carried out by the Housing Standards Section and a charge applied to the person or property.

Section 2 - Broad Needs Analysis of the Service Area

The services are front-line with a lot of contact with applicants, owners and tenants, via the telephone, on site, in the office and in writing.

All staff are trained in equality awareness having attended the LBWF corporate equalities training. All staff have received personal safety training and equality awareness and cultural awareness training. This awareness is kept up to date through CPD (Continuing Professional Development) and the Lead Officer is a Chartered Member of the CIEH (Chartered Institute of Environmental Health).

All staff are aware of the translation and interpretation service and use it where necessary. As a matter of course legal documents, e.g. formal notices are always accompanied by the Council's "Request for Translated Information" leaflet so that if people receiving the notice do not read English they will not be disadvantaged legally, because the leaflet will explain (in 10 different languages) where they can get further assistance.

All the relevant LBWF internal Departments, the London Fire Brigade and other external agencies are aware of the services provided. The service is promoted on the LBWF intranet and LBWF Internet.

The service continues to be promoted by holding the Customer Panel Project and via Roadshows. These enable a wide range of people to find out what work we do. A monthly newsletter is also sent to customers on the panel and articles within the Waltham Forest Magazine.

Many of the clients of the service are elderly, vulnerable or from a BEM background. General customer satisfaction consultation has not been carried out in this area. No formal consultation with any particular groups has taken place. Consultation is recommended in order to promote service user involvement, develop the service, and ensure customer needs are met.

Measures to reach the traditionally excluded groups are as above and the information held on display stalls is deliberately visual, e.g. photographs and model houses, so that those who could not read or speak English were not disadvantaged.

The service has not been subject to any complaints regarding equality issues.

There is no additional equalities monitoring information that this service needs to collect.

Section 3 - Data collection and analysis

The service user includes :

- Any person who is an owner/occupier;
- Any person who is a tenant and who rents a property from a private landlord in the Borough;
- Any person who is a neighbour and who suffers from a problem associated with a privately rented property;
- Any person who causes a nuisance to a neighbour and
- Any private rented tenant who has encountered harassment or illegal eviction relating their accommodation.

The service is mostly reactive to customer demand. The Service receives approx. 450 complaints per year. The Council does not accept any new applications for improvement grants but is dealing with clearing the backlog of existing applications, approx. 90 in total.

The service contributes to a couple of BVPI's – numbers 64 and 213.

Currently the mix of officers available within the Housing Standards Section is 5 female officers and 8 male officers.

Section 4 - Consultation

As outlined above in section 2, consultation is ongoing in the form of customer panels and a rolling series of customer surveys is being undertaken in the service.

Section 5 - Assessment

The impacts of the service are positive for both the properties and the health of people who live in the Borough. The services are delivered by professional staff, who work to statutory duties and within the scope of LBWF policies and procedures.

In regulating hazards in privately rented properties, owners and agents who are regulated against may feel that they have been adversely impacted upon. However there are no other ways in which the service could be provided that would achieve these aims without adverse impact. Ultimately, when working within the legislative framework, people have a right to legal redress should they feel that a decision was unfairly/unlawfully taken; this can be via an appeal process or the Council's Complaints system.

The service contributes to better community cohesion by dealing with property defects, eyesores, nuisances and other disputes between neighbours and landlords/tenants in a fair and professional manner. This assists in eliminating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities. This also works towards the council's Community Cohesion Strategy which seeks to build a sense of belonging of Communities by promoting knowledge and understanding; it also aids in diffusing social tension and conflict.

There are no groups other than those already considered, that might be adversely affected by the policy.

Section 6 - Adverse Impact

Following a sensitive, fair and professional procedure is essential to minimize any adverse impacts upon those involved in the service.

Section 7 - Monitoring and Review of policy

The service provided by the Housing Standards Section is reviewed as part of the whole Service Plan every year. The plan is reviewed monthly at management meetings, and implementation of the plan is effected through 1:1s and Staff Appraisals. Results of any Customer surveys are part of the monitoring process. Local and national performance indicators are also used for monitoring and again these are reviewed monthly.

Section 8 - Conclusions and Recommendations

The services provided by the Housing Standards Section do comply with equalities legislation, including the duty to promote race equalities.

The main areas requiring further attention are:

- Continued input to Customer Panels in the form of stalls with leaflets and high visual content for those who cannot read or speak English well;
- To develop, publish and distribute service leaflets concerning the Service areas;
- Continued input to Customer Panel Newsletter and Waltham Forest Magazine to keep customers informed of our work;
- To obtain further information concerning service users, e.g. monitoring forms to be sent out when service requests are made;
- Continued attendance at relevant meetings with other LBWF Departments and external agencies to enable a more efficient and effective service to customers and
- To ensure CPD training of all staff to enable a sensitive, fair and professional service to customers.

The results of this EIA, as with all Consumer Protection's EIA's will feed into the performance planning process of the service and

The service will be monitored through the usual service monitoring arrangements.

For recommendations please see the attached improvement plan.

Section 9 - Publish the Results

We have a statutory specific duty to publish the results of our EIA, consultation and monitoring. The improvement plan and the list of consultations need to put on the Council website.

Housing Standards - Improvement grants, private rented housing disrepair and tenancy relations – Equalities Impact Assessment Improvement Plan

Item	Action Area	Actions required	Lead Officer	Time Scale	Notes
1	To develop, publish and distribute service leaflets concerning the Service areas	Review existing leaflet information and make recommendations for changes Publish and distribute appropriate leaflets	Section Manager Section Manager	September 2007 January 2008	
2	To obtain further information concerning service users, e.g. monitoring forms to be sent out when service requests are made	Implement a customer survey monitoring system	Section Manager	December 2007	
3	To ensure CPD training of all staff to enable a sensitive, fair and professional service to customers	Arrange relevant training, monitor service delivery and investigate any complaints received	Section Manager	March 2008	