



Equality Analysis and Impact Assessment Tool

**BLACKBURN TOWN CENTRE BUSINESS
RATES INCENTIVE SCHEME
(INCORPORATED IN THE DISCRETIONARY
RATE RELIEF POLICY)**

Guidance

Please refer to the *Impact Assessment and Human Rights Screening Guidance v1.5* which is available on the Intranet via the following link:

<http://cms.intra.blackburn.gov.uk/server.php?show=nav.3306>

If you require further assistance please contact your department's Corporate Equality & Diversity group representative. This information is available from the Corporate Policy Department.

Section 1: Initial Assessment

Please provide as much information as possible

Name of activity:	Blackburn town centre business rates incentive scheme
Manager or Sponsoring Directors Name:	Brian Bailey
Department/Directorate:	Regeneration
Service:	Property
Assessment Lead:	Andrew Bond
Telephone:	01254 588958
E-mail:	andrew.bond@blackburn.gov.uk
Who else will be involved in undertaking the equality analysis and impact assessment:	Julia Simpson
Who are you consulting with and how? Please insert any information around surveys and consultations undertaken.	<p>The consultation was launched at the NNDR Ratepayers Meeting (the exclusions list to the incentive scheme was shared), followed up with an article in the Lancashire Telegraph (http://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/10988438.Free_rates_deal_in_Blackburn_s_empty_shops/). Information was posted on the Council's website inviting feedback on the proposed scheme. A consultation leaflet was distributed to town centre premises and among wider town centre stakeholders.</p> <p>A public consultation on the proposed criteria for the scheme was undertaken for three weeks between 3rd February 2014 and 21st February 2014.</p> <p>Consultation materials included a printed and digital leaflet that was circulated widely to town centre businesses and stakeholders. Information and opportunity to comment was also provided through local media, on the Council's website and via social media. A number of presentations on the proposals were given to key stakeholder groups such as Blackburn BID and Blackburn Town Centre Partnership.</p> <p>The response rate from the consultation exercise was low, however all respondents did welcome the introduction of such a scheme. Feedback was received from 8 respondents which included the local college and the business improvement district's board and 6 local businesses.</p>
References <i>Please identify additional sources of information you have accessed to complete the EIA for example, websites; journals; reports etc.</i>	<p>Government guidance on the administration of the reoccupation relief scheme announced in the Autumn 2013 budget: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/297995/210314_Business_Rates_Reoccupation_Relief_Guidance1.pdf</p> <p>Government's guidance on retail relief: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/275589/Business_Rates_Retail_Relief_guidance.pdf</p>

	<p>Review of discretionary rate relief EIA: http://www.blackburn.gov.uk/EIA%2020132014%20Resources/RandT02%20Discretionary%20Rate%20Relief%20201314.pdf</p> <p>Localism Act 2011 Section 69 - http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/notes/division/5/4</p> <p>Council's 12 Point Plan to Revitalise Blackburn Town Centre: http://www.blackburn.gov.uk/Pages/business-rates-incentive-scheme.aspx</p>	
Implementation date:	1 st April 2014	
Type of activity:	Budget changes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Change to existing policy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Commissioning	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Decommissioning	<input type="checkbox"/>
	New policy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
How was the need for the activity identified?	<p>The Council's 12 Point Plan to Revitalise Blackburn Town Centre (2013), identified empty properties as a major issue and highlighted that if no action was taken then empty properties would continue to rise and town centre footfall would stagnate. It also noted the need to develop a more unique and better quality offer by encouraging new and creative businesses into the town centre. A Business Rates Incentive or Discount Scheme was one of the key actions proposed as part of the plan.</p> <p>Feedback from the consultation exercise included the following key suggestions for changes to the proposed criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A widening of the scheme's boundary to cover a larger area of the town centre 2. The inclusion of existing independent businesses in the eligibility criteria 3. Removal of the eligibility cap of £21,231 rateable value. <p>After reviewing these proposals, it was decided that these suggestions could not be adopted for the following reasons:</p> <p>Eligibility zone – The scheme will only operate within a designated Business Rates Incentive Scheme Zone. The zone is identified through means of a boundary line on the town centre map, it includes the areas of King William Street; New Market Street; Blakey Moor; Northgate; Town Hall Street; Sudell Cross; Richmond Terrace; Tontine Street and Victoria Street.</p> <p>The vacancy rate outside of this area is significantly lower and the properties do not appear to remain vacant for as long as those within the designated zone. A widening of the area could also mean that the available resources would be spread too thinly in order to achieve the aims of the scheme in the first instance. It is proposed that the impact of the scheme is evaluated after 12 months to review the boundary areas.</p>	

	<p>Support for existing and larger businesses – the scheme has been specifically designed to address issues of empty properties, to encourage new businesses in the town centre and to provide a period of time for those businesses to establish their trade and become sustainable. Expanding the scheme to existing businesses would not support this objective.</p> <p>The majority of established independent businesses in the town centre are already eligible for the small business rates discount and will also benefit from a number of initiatives announced in the Autumn Statement (2013). Lifting the cap would only be of benefit if the scheme were to incorporate existing businesses.</p> <p>Discretionary exclusions – the local exclusions list is consistent with the guidance produced by national government, as well incorporating local public health concerns. The local list also includes business such as amusement arcades and shisha cafes as such businesses can have a detrimental impact on the health of residents such as obesity; gambling addiction; smoking related diseases. The Council is making a concerted effort to improve the health and wellbeing of its residents through its Health & Wellbeing Board, the strategy that it launched in 2012 which promote healthy neighbourhoods and encourages residents to make healthy lifestyle choices to prevent health issues in the future, hence it would be in contradiction with such activity to include businesses which can contribute to worse health outcomes for some of our residents and will not contribute towards achieving the aims of the incentive scheme. Further information on health related activity can be found here: http://www.blackburn.gov.uk/Pages/Health-and-wellbeing-board.aspx</p> <p>Excluded uses include betting shops; off licences; night time takeaways; shisha cafes and licensed premises (which do not sign up to local initiatives aimed at raising standards and enforcing public protection). These exclusions are subject to a degree of discretion by council officers administering the scheme and will be enforced on a case by case basis. This is to ensure that some uses that might be deemed beneficial to the area are not excluded without consideration.</p> <p>The council also offers an appeal process for any business which is not satisfied by the decision made regarding their eligibility to the discretionary rate relief scheme.</p>
<p>What is the activity looking to achieve?</p>	<p>The aim of the scheme is to help address the issue of empty properties and high street decline within the town centre, by encouraging the re-use of unoccupied properties, both Council and privately owned. The scheme aims to reduce the number of empty properties and to increase the diversity of the town centre offer.</p> <p>The zone has been identified based on its higher than average concentration of empty properties within the selected boundary (27%), there are 60 vacant properties within the zone. This area is also the focus of the town centre’s 12 point plan, which seeks to revitalise the town through a number of creativity led initiatives including the use of empty properties for pop-up shops, galleries and hosting temporary events. It is believed that the boundary of the business rates incentives scheme will directly contribute to the successful delivery of</p>

	these initiatives.																				
What are the aims and objectives?	To re-occupy empty properties that have a negative effect on the high street and to maintain town centre footfall by improving and diversifying the town centre offer. It is hoped that the scheme, alongside a number of other initiatives including grants, business advice and support, and marketing will provide the additional incentive needed to attract new or expanding businesses into the town centre.																				
Services currently provided:	Section 69 of the Localism Act 2011 allows local authorities to grant discretionary rate relief; this is subject to the condition that the local authority may only grant relief if it would be reasonable to do so having regard to the interests of local council tax payers. The Discretionary Rate Relief policy currently deals with rate relief to charities and voluntary organisations; this is being amended to include the Government's retail relief and reoccupation relief scheme and the Council's own regeneration relief efforts such as this business rates incentive scheme.																				
Recommendations following change in service: <i>Please outline recommendations that have been identified for implementation following a review of the activity.</i>	Recommend the implementation of the Blackburn Business Rates Incentive Scheme at 100% discount for new and expanding businesses occupying an empty property within the identified zone for a period of 12 months from 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015.																				
Who does the policy or decision being made impact upon?*	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Carers or family</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Indirectly</td> </tr> <tr> <td>General Public**</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> No</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Indirectly</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Partner organisations</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Indirectly</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Service Users</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Indirectly</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Staff</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Indirectly</td> </tr> </table>	Carers or family	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Indirectly	General Public**	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Indirectly	Partner organisations	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Indirectly	Service Users	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Indirectly	Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Indirectly
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Signature and Date:																					

** Businesses which are situated within the boundary lines, which when assessed as to whether or not they meet the eligibility criteria (which is outlined in the Council's business rates relief policy) will be impacted by this scheme. The scheme offers an appeal process to any business which is not satisfied by the decision made by the scheme administrators.

*If no impact is identified on any of the groups a full EIA may not be required. Please contact your departmental Corporate Equality & Diversity representative for further information.

Section 4: Monitoring and Review

Monitoring guidance

The responsibility for establishing and maintaining the monitoring arrangements of the EIA action plan lies with the service completing the EIA. These arrangements should be built into the performance management framework.

Monitoring arrangements for the completion of Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken by the Corporate Equality & Diversity Group and the oversight of the consequent action plans will be undertaken by the Management Accountability Framework.

If applicable, where will the departmental action plan be monitored?

GUIDANCE
For example, Service Management Team; Service Leadership Team; Programme Area Meeting.

N/A

Reviewing guidance
 The responsibility for establishing and maintaining the review arrangements of the Impact Assessment and the action plan lies with the service completing the Impact Assessment.

Date of the next review of the Impact Assessment?

It should be reviewed at least every three years to meet legislative requirements

The policy will be reviewed in 12 months, and the EIA will be reviewed accordingly.

How often will the EIA action plan be reviewed?

E.g. Quarterly as part of MAF

N/A

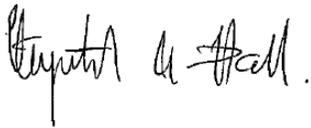
Who will carry out this review?

Signature of Equality Impact Assessment lead officer:



Date Completed: 29th April 2014

Signature of Head of Service / Directorate Lead:



Date Completed: 29th April 2014

This signature signifies the acceptance of the responsibility and ownership of the EIA and the resulting action plan (if applicable).

Signature of Cohesion and Equalities Manager, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council:



Date received: 29th April 2014

This signature signifies the acceptance of the responsibility to publish the completed EIA as per the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.