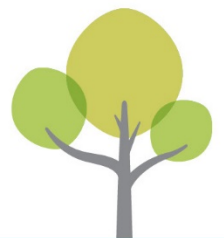


Equality Impact Assessments Toolkit

EqIA Template



You must consider the [Equality Impact Assessment Guidance](#) when completing this template.

The EDI team can provide help and advice on undertaking an EqIA and also provide overview quality assurance checks on completed EqIA documents.

EDI team contact email: edi_team@sandwell.gov.uk

Quality Control	
Title of proposal	Sandwell Tackling Poverty Plan
Directorate and Service Area	Chief Executive
Officer completing EqIA	Senior Lead Officer, Jane Alexander Strategic Policy Officer, Heather Chinner
Contact Details	Jane_Alexander@sandwell.gov.uk Heather_Chinner@sandwell.gov.uk
Other officers involved in completing this EqIA	None
Date EqIA completed	11/10/21
Date EqIA signed off or agreed by Director or Executive Director	
Name of Director or Executive Director signing off EqIA	
Date EqIA considered by Cabinet	15 November
Where the EqIA is Published (please include a link to the EqIA and send a copy of the final EqIA to the EDI team)	

Section 1.

The purpose of the project, proposal or decision required

Sandwell is the twelfth most deprived borough in the country and the cost of living crisis is being felt by and having a tangible impact on the daily lives of our residents and communities. The Sandwell Tackling Poverty Plan sets out proposals and actions for the council and its partners to work together in a co-ordinated way to address poverty in Sandwell.

The Tackling Poverty Plan is a partnership plan developed by the council and a wide range of partners including health and the voluntary and community sector. It builds upon our long-standing work to support Sandwell residents living on low incomes

Rather than repeating everything we are already doing to support people; the plan aims to identify gaps and areas for further development. This plan is not seeking to capture all the activity taking place but instead is designed to dovetail with other pieces of work such as the emerging Skills and Employment Strategy, Digital Strategy and Youth employment taskforce.

Actions in the plan are divided into 9 key areas:

- Communication
- Benefits advice
- Food
- Housing and warmth
- Debt
- Budgeting
- Employment and skills
- Digital inclusion
- Health and wellbeing

The report recommends that Cabinet:

- accept and endorse Sandwell's Tackling Poverty Plan.
- that the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Section 151 officer be authorised to agree the spending of the resources allocated to the plan outlined in this report.

Section 2.

Evidence used and considered. Include analysis of any missing data

Evidence Base

Sandwell Council declared a Cost of Living emergency in recognition of the scale of the impact that the current crisis is having on the borough.

The combination of widespread deprivation and structural weaknesses across Sandwell means that our residents and economy are especially vulnerable to the worst effects of the cost of living crisis:

- Sandwell is ranked second out of 333 local authorities on the Centre for Progressive Policy's Cost of Living Vulnerability Index;
- the borough ranks eighth across in the Index of Multiple Deprivation and second specifically on income deprivation;
- 31,000 households (23% of all households) receive help with Council Tax;
- a fifth of Sandwell households experience fuel poverty and nearly a quarter report food insecurity

We are seeing increasing evidence that residents are struggling significantly. For example, there has been a 127% increase in the number of Local Welfare Provision emergency food vouchers awarded in the first nine months of the current financial year alone, compared to the whole of 2020/21. Our foodbanks also saw a big increase in demand in 2020/21 and demand has stayed high and continued to increase in 2022/23.

Citizen's Advice Sandwell reports that their debt advisers are seeing a significant increase in the number of people who are unable to pay household bills and basic living costs. People are now borrowing to get by day to day and using credit cards and payday loans to pay bills and buy food which is putting them deeper into debt. Those who relied on the financial support of family members no longer have that safety net, as their family's finances are also affected by the rising costs of living. The causes of this range from high amounts of energy debt, council tax and rent arrears leading to an increase in eviction notices, and those struggling to get by on reduced Universal Credit payments.

Work has also been undertaken on developing ward/town level analysis of need to inform local priority setting.

[Sandwell Profile of need](#)

Food

Impact of welfare reform – households running out of money for food in the week before Universal Credit is paid. In 2022/23, 2,852 food vouchers were issued. This was an increase of 247% when compared to the 1,151 vouchers issued in 2021/22. In 2020/21 a total of 980 food vouchers were issued. The huge increase is directly linked to the cost of living crisis, with the main reason for the application given as “low income” (36%).

Warmth

- Steep increase in the number of Local Welfare Provision fuel vouchers awarded each month, from 100+ in April and May 2022, to 200+ October and November 2022, rising to 412 in December 2022 and 337 in January 2023.
- Small decrease in home ownership.
- Higher % of social rented properties compared to rest of Black Country and UK.
- High % of households in private rented or rent free accommodation, (19%) compared to Dudley and Walsall – similar to Wolverhampton.
- Residents in rented properties have less control over energy provision and heats saving measures.
- Increase in overcrowded households.

Debt

Citizens Advice Sandwell report (June 2023):

- Demand for debt continues to increase - now at least a 2 week wait to speak to a debt advisor.
- The issues of clients having a deficit budget continues to increase, due to cost of living, rises in food cost, household bills and rises in mortgage and rental costs. Support from the wider family continues to be limited due to the financial crisis affecting them too.
- Council tax arrears and fuel debt arrears have increased from the same period last year with the demand for fuel vouchers increasing.
- 60 day Breathing space applications are still high and comparable to the same time period last year.
- The number of clients advised on Individual Voluntary Arrangements (IVAs) is now quite low because debt advisers are seeing far more clients with deficit incomes and very few clients with disposable income. (IVAs are only suitable for people with disposable income).
- More and more clients who are seeking help are arriving in crisis and are struggling with their mental health and wellbeing.

Council tenants in arrears:

- No significant changes since the cost of living crisis.
- 16-25 year olds are more likely to be in arrears when compared to other age groups.
- Those living in houses are more likely to be in arrears when compared to other property types.
- Ethnic groups are more likely to be in arrears than White British.
- 46.50% of tenants are currently in arrears compared to 43.74% at same point last year.
- Average arrears have increased slightly (£191.55 currently compared to £181.68 at same point last year).
- 20% HB customers in arrears.
- 88% of Universal Credit customers are in arrears (arrears greater than £10.00).
- 19% of self-payers are in arrears

Private Rented Sector

- Rents are increasing exponentially, way above most people's affordability, especially in the West Midlands which has seen a higher % increase than even London.
- Demand for housing is increasing with many people enquiring after 1 void in the PRS, so the landlords have their pick and obviously take the most risk-free tenants (in work, good references, fewer kids etc).
- Smaller landlords are leaving the market, due to increased mortgage rates, red tape and the fear of loss of s21. These landlords are not being replaced.

Employment and Skills

- Increasing levels of unemployment amongst those aged 50-64.
- There are currently nearly 71,000 people aged over 50 receiving Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) in the West Midlands Group, well over half of all ESA claimants.
- The employment rate for men of working age in West Midlands Group is 77% compared to one of 68% for women. This is a gap of 9.4%, compared to 12 months ago when the gap was just 6.3%.
- Over a fifth of the working age population in the West Midlands region are economically inactive, i.e., neither in work nor looking for work (22.0%).

- Youth unemployment had fallen since the pandemic but has now started to grow slowly.
- The proportion of ESA claimants with mental and behavioural disorders is increasing – up from 35% in 2010 to 50% (Jan 23). This is particularly prevalent among younger claimants: 70% of ESA claimants aged 18-24 are presenting with mental and behavioural disorders.

Digital

(based upon SCVO's survey 2023)

- The need to support residents for whom English is not their first language with language skills as an enabler to digital engagement.
- Type of digital support required: help with skills and confidence.
- Contact with family or friends, using email, text services or video calling apps, was the opportunity of greatest interest, with very many respondents saying they would value this.
- Respondents' clear support preference was for the support around digital to be offered to them by other people: taking the form of someone available to help and guide when needed, activities to build up digital experience and confidence, and skills training for getting online.
- Helpful personal guide.

Section 3.

Consultation

This timeline sets out how the plan has been developed and the consultation undertaken:

- On 13 December 2022, Sandwell council declared a Cost of Living Emergency in recognition of the scale of the impact that the current crisis is having on the borough's residents.
- 2 March 2023 – Council convened the first Cost of Living Summit - bringing together more than sixty public, private and voluntary sector partners to coordinate our efforts to support our community through this crisis
- June – September 2023 development of the Tackling Poverty Plan with a range of partners, overseen by the Resilient Residents Group
- 6 September – Cabinet workshop held on draft Tackling Poverty Plan
- 4 October – Council convened the second Cost of Living Summit, launching the Tackling Poverty Plan, with eighty partners discussing our winter plan and identifying areas where we can work together to influence national policy

As well as the above there have been ongoing consultation and engagement with a number of key individual organisations and officers of the council.

Section 4.

Summary assessment of the analysis at section 4a and the likely impact on each of the protected characteristics (if any)

Overall the proposals in this report are assessed as having a positive impact on people and groups with protected characteristics.

The overall aim of the plan is to achieve real change in residents' financial circumstances through increases in household income and reductions in household expenditure. The plan also aims to focus on preventing people who are just about managing, falling into serious poverty through proactive work to support working people.

There is also a recognition from the evidence and the experience of the partners the plan was developed with, that people will be more vulnerable and in need of support because of Intersectionality.

Section 4a - What are the potential/actual impacts of the proposal on the protected characteristics?

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
Age	P	The impact will be positive. There is a recognition that people in particular age categories are more likely to be in poverty and/or likely to suffer adversely from its impact. The Tackling Poverty Plan includes actions for supporting children, young people, older people and families. Actions include providing warm and welcoming spaces, improving access to employment and training, support, tackling isolation, digital support etc.		
Disability	P	The impact will be positive. The actions in the plan do not discriminate and are targeted at people who are likely to be facing financial difficulty and accessing appropriate support. There is a recognition that people who have a disability are more likely to be in poverty and/or likely to suffer adversely from its impact. Some of the organisations who will provide support have expertise and experience in supporting and working with people with a disability.		

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
Gender Reassignment	P	The impact will be positive. The actions in the plan do not discriminate and are targeted at people who are likely to be facing financial difficulty and accessing appropriate support.		
Marriage and civil partnership	P	The impact will be positive. The actions in the plan do not discriminate and are targeted at people who are likely to be facing financial difficulty and accessing appropriate support.		
Pregnancy and maternity	P	The impact will be positive. The actions in the plan do not discriminate and are targeted at people who are likely to be facing financial difficulty and accessing appropriate support.		
Race	P	The plan will have a positive impact on the grounds of race. The actions in the plan do not discriminate and are targeted at people who are likely to be facing financial difficulty and accessing appropriate support. Many of the organisations who will provide the support have expertise and experience in supporting vulnerable people from different communities; including language and cultural appropriate support.		
Religion or belief	P	The impact will be positive. The actions in the plan do not discriminate and are targeted at people who are likely to be facing financial difficulty and accessing appropriate support.		

Reviewed Characteristic	Impact? Positive (P) Negative (N) Neutral (Ne)	Details of impact	Actions to address negative impact or promote positive impact (use section 8 table)	Owner of action/ Timescale
		Faith groups will be encouraged to take part in the Welcoming spaces initiative		
Sex	P	The impact will be positive. The actions in the plan do not discriminate and are targeted at people who are likely to be facing financial difficulty and accessing appropriate support.		
Sexual Orientation	P	The impact will be positive. The actions in the plan do not discriminate and are targeted at people who are likely to be facing financial difficulty and accessing appropriate support.		
Could other socio-economic groups be affected?				
Carer Low income groups Veterans/Armed Forces Community Other	P	The impact will be positive. The actions in the plan do not discriminate and are targeted at people who are likely to be facing financial difficulty and accessing appropriate support. The plan includes actions addressing health and wellbeing of residents, providing support to low income groups, those experiencing social isolation and improving access to employment and skills support.		

If there are no adverse impacts or any issues of concern or you can adequately explain or justify them, then please move to Sections 6.

5. What actions can be taken to mitigate any adverse impacts?

6. Section 6: Decision or actions proposed

Having taken account of the proposals and the assessment made the decision is that no changes need to be made to the proposals in the report going to Cabinet.

7. Monitoring arrangements

The following sets out governance arrangements around the plan:

- Overall lead to rest with Leader of the Council and Chief Executive
- Resilient Residents Group to meet 3/4 times a year to oversee the continued delivery of the Tackling Poverty Plan – to be chaired by a senior director of the Council
- Task and finish groups established to implement key actions in the plan
- Progress reports to Cabinet twice a year and informal updates to the Leader on a regular basis

Establish an annual conference with partners to review progress and plan further initiatives

Measuring success of the plan will take place at three levels as set out in the plan:

1. Measuring milestones and actions in the plan
2. Measuring our overall approach/ ongoing work
3. Tracking outcomes that indicate how the big picture is evolving

Section 8 Action planning (if required)

Question no. (ref)	Action required	Lead officer/ person responsible	Target date	Progress

If you have any suggestions for improving this process, please contact EDI_Team@Sandwell.gov.uk