

APPENDIX 1

EQUALITY IMPACT OF THE NEW FEES AND CHARGING REGIME TO BE INTRODUCED BY BUILDING CONSULTANCY IN OCTOBER 2010

The Building Regulations are a statutory function and the Council has a duty to undertake their enforcement in its area.

The revised Charging Regulations Policy described in the report to Planning Committee, dated 9 September 2010, will have the potential to generate differential charges for the Building Regulations inspection service. It is important to examine the potential for this differential to adversely affect any of the equality strands.

The key underlying principles of the new regulations are transparency fairness and 'user pays'.

The Building Regulation function is legally required to recover its costs through charges. Where costs increase due to the necessity to re-inspect poor quality or unsafe work, the person responsible for this work should be charged for the service.

There is a frequently observed and well accepted correlation between building regulation contraventions and poor quality builders. It is anticipated, therefore, that those people that employ poor quality builders will be those who will be affected by the additional charges.

It is noted that contravention activity, (resulting from building regulation contraventions), tends to be focussed on inner-city wards and thus people in these areas may be more susceptible to additional charges.

The racial make-up of these wards might point to a possible adverse effect in terms of race, but it is strongly suggested that it is the lack of disposable income, also a feature of these wards, which is the key influence.

People accepting, unrealistically low quotations, not requiring evidence of competence, poor contractual arrangements and trying to avoid VAT are frequently found to be the root of problems.

The Council has a duty to inform, consult or involve people in respect of this policy change.

As the function is Statutory and the proposed charging system is governed by Regulation, it is considered that the duty in this case is to 'inform'. This is undertaken by sending an explanatory letter to every Building Regulation applicant and reinforced by surveyors on their first visit to site. Information on the importance of choosing a good builder and the consequence of not doing so are also available on Building Consultancy's website.

In recognition of incidence of Building Regulation problems in inner-city wards, a campaign was run in the City Centre during the summer of 2009. 'Nail the Rogues' campaign was undertaken in conjunction with the Federation of Master Builders and Trading Standards.

Further opportunities to inform inner-city communities, in particular, will be taken and the impact of these measures will be monitored by analysis of the geographical distribution of additional charging invoices.

The predominantly technical nature of the services which revolves around buildings rather than people means that there is little potential for adverse impact in respect of the remaining equality strands.

It should be noted that where Building Regulation work is undertaken for the benefit of a person with a disability then no fee is payable, (the work is funded by the Council). Thus the potential for addition charges would not be relevant in this instance.

Customer satisfaction surveys are invited on all completed projects and it is anticipated that feedback on the new fees and charges will be included within these. As equality monitoring of all building regulation submissions is requested it will be possible to assess any adverse impact at the annual review of surveys which is undertaken for Quality Assurance and Customer Service Excellence purposes.