

**REPORT TO POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 11 JUNE 2015
DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT: UPDATE**

1. Recommendations

1.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-

- 1. Note the current position in regard to discretionary housing payment expenditure; and**
- 2. Agree that an update report on Welfare Reform is brought back to this Committee in November 2015.**

2. Background

- 2.1 On 23 April 2015 Policy & Resources Committee discussed a report on discretionary housing payments for 2015/16. It was agreed that the recommendation regarding the level of awards should be re-worded to reflect the spirit of the discussion. This was delegated to the Head of Finance, the Chair, Vice Chair and opposition spokesperson to reach an agreement on the level of awards being up to 100%.
- 2.2 It was also agreed that a report on discretionary housing payments be submitted to the committee in June 2015 and that a further update report on the wider topic of Welfare Reform should be submitted in November 2015.

3. Discretionary Housing Payment Update

3.1 Recommendation 3 was re-worded as follows:

A Discretionary Housing Payment award may be:

- *100% of the shortfall between the tenants housing benefit award and eligible rent charge where the shortfall is due to the social sector size criteria*
- *Up to 100% of the shortfall between the tenant's housing benefit and rent liability arising from the benefit cap*
- *Up to 100% of the shortfall between the tenant's housing benefit and rent liability arising from the restriction on the local housing allowance rate*
- *Up to 100% of the shortfall between the tenant's housing costs element of universal credit and rent liability where the tenant has been placed in temporary accommodation as a result of being homeless*

- 3.2 The re-wording was agreed by the Chair, Vice Chair and opposition spokesperson.
- 3.3 At 20 May 2015 the Council had made discretionary housing payments totaling £86,680 and is committed to a further £456,682 in discretionary housing payment expenditure, being a total of £543,362. This is in line with current estimations for 2015/16.
- 3.4 There are currently 899 cases where an ongoing discretionary housing payment award has been made and these are broken down as follows:
- Social Sector Size Criteria 759
 - Local Housing Allowance 133
 - Benefit Cap 7
- 3.5 The average weekly award of discretionary housing payment is as follows:
- Social Sector Size Criteria £12.12
 - Local Housing Allowance £21.65
 - Benefit Cap £76.25
- 3.6 Currently those awarded discretionary housing payments because of changes to the local housing allowance rules have an end date set between August and September 2015 and will be invited to renew their discretionary housing payment application prior to the expiry date.
- 3.7 There are currently 82 discretionary housing payment applications still to be determined.
- 3.8 The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and her comments have been incorporated in the report.

4. Financial, Staffing and Equalities Implications

- 4.1 The financial implications set out in this report can be contained within the approved resources available to fund discretionary housing payments. An estimated £673,058 of funding is expected this year from the Scottish Government and the Department for Work & Pensions. In addition, Committee agreed to access the Welfare Reform reserve if resources were required above £673,058.

- 4.2 There are no staffing implications arising from this report.
- 4.3 An equalities impact assessment has been carried out and this recognises that whilst the policy prioritises certain groups (those with a disability, those at risk of homelessness, foster and kinship carers), it does so in a positive way due to their vulnerability.

Alan Wood
Director of Business Services

Prepared by: Susan Donald, Benefits Manager
Date: 21 May 2015



EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Stage 1: Title and aims of the activity (“activity” is an umbrella term covering policies, procedures, guidance and decisions).	
Service	Business Services
Section	Finance
Title of the activity etc.	Discretionary Housing Payment Policy
Aims of the activity	To help those with a shortfall between Rent and Housing Benefit and those in need of assistance with rent deposit schemes or removal costs.
Author(s) & Title(s)	Susan Donald, , ,
Stage 2: List the evidence that has been used in this assessment.	
Internal data (customer satisfaction surveys; equality monitoring data; customer complaints).	Existing DHP Policy
Internal consultation with staff and other services affected.	BMT, Benefit Policy Board, Consulted with Communities, Welfare Reform Cross Service Working Group
External consultation (partner organisations, community groups, and councils).	None
External data (census, available statistics).	DWP Guidance on the revised scheme.
Other (general information as appropriate).	None

Stage 3: Evidence Gaps.	
Are there any gaps in the information you currently hold?	No gaps at this stage but maybe once Universal Credit implemented.

Stage 4: Measures to fill the evidence gaps.		
What measures will be taken to fill the information gaps before the activity is implemented? These should be included in the action plan at the back of this form.	Measures:	Timescale:

Stage 5: Are there potential impacts on protected groups? Please complete for each protected group by inserting "yes" in the applicable box/boxes below.				
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unknown
Age – Younger	✓			
Age – Older			✓	
Disability	✓			
Race – (includes Gypsy Travellers)			✓	
Religion or Belief			✓	
Gender – male/female			✓	
Pregnancy and maternity	✓			
Sexual orientation – (includes Lesbian/ Gay/Bisexual)			✓	
Gender reassignment – (includes Transgender)				✓
Marriage and Civil Partnership			✓	

Stage 6: What are the positive and negative impacts?

Impacts.	Positive (describe the impact for each of the protected characteristics affected)	Negative (describe the impact for each of the protected characteristics affected)
Please detail the potential positive and/or negative impacts on those with protected characteristics you have highlighted above. Detail the impacts and describe those affected.	Disability – health and adaptations	
	Age – Transitions to adult life	
	Pregnancy – effect on bedrooms	

Stage 7: Have any of the affected groups been consulted?

If yes, please give details of how this was done and what the results were. If no, how have you ensured that you can make an informed decision about mitigating steps?	No – Fund is budget limited.
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Stage 8: What mitigating steps will be taken to remove or reduce negative impacts?

These should be included in any action plan at the back of this form.	Mitigating Steps	Timescale

Stage 9: What steps can be taken to promote good relations between various groups?

These should be included in the action plan.	Invite all groups to training and awareness sessions.
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Stage 10: How does the policy/activity create opportunities for advancing equality of opportunity?

Regular monitoring and review of policy annually

Stage 11: What equality monitoring arrangements will be put in place?

These should be included in any action plan (for example customer satisfaction questionnaires).

Reviewing all applications for first three months and 5% checks for remaining 9 months.

Stage 12: What is the outcome of the Assessment?

Please complete the appropriate box/boxes	1	No negative impacts have been identified –please explain.
	There is no negative impact in the policy in relation to specific groups. See below	
	2	Negative Impacts have been identified, these can be mitigated - please explain. * Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen.
	Pot of money runs out before end of month – closer monitoring of the budget.	
	3	The activity will have negative impacts which cannot be mitigated fully – please explain. * Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen
	Applicants seeking help or alternative accommodation but not resolved due to circumstances out with their control i.e looking for cheaper/smaller accommodation or seeking debt advice. First come first served.	

* Stage 13: Set out the justification that the activity can and should go ahead despite the negative impact.

The positive impact far outweighs the negative impact. The negative impacts are usually external factors out with the policy.

Stage 14: Sign off and authorisation.			
Sign off and authorisation.	1) Service and Team	Business Services – Finance - Benefits	
	2) Title of Policy/Activity	Discretionary Housing Policy (if appropriate)	
	3) Authors: I/We have completed the equality impact assessment for this policy/activity.	Name: Susan Donald Position: Benefits Manager Date: 09 April 2015 Signature:	Name: Position: Date: Signature:
		Name: Position: Date: Signature:	Name: Position: Date: Signature:
	4) Consultation with Service Manager	Name: Date:	
	5) Authorisation by Director or Head of Service	Name: Alan Wood Position: Head of Service Date: 9 April 2015	Name: Position: Date:
	6) If the EIA relates to a matter that has to go before a Committee, Committee report author sends the Committee Report and this form, and any supporting assessment documents, to the Officers responsible for monitoring and the Committee Officer of the relevant Committee. e.g. Social Work and Housing Committee.	Date:	
7) EIA author sends a copy of the finalised form to: eia@abdnshire	Date:		
(Equalities team to complete) Has the completed form been published on the website? YES/NO			Date:

