



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 13 JUNE 2013

DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT UPDATE REPORT

1 Recommendations

1.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1. Notes the current position on Discretionary Housing Payment applications and payments;**
- 2. Agrees to allocate £241,043 towards the permitted total for Discretionary Housing Payments (paragraph 5.3).**

2 Background

- 2.1 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) provide customers with further financial assistance when a local authority considers that help with housing costs is required. This is in addition to any welfare benefits the customer is in receipt of.
- 2.2 The regulations covering DHPs are The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001. The regulations give local authority decision-makers very broad discretion but local authorities have a duty to act fairly, reasonably and consistently.
- 2.3 Local authorities cannot exceed their overall spending limit for DHPs in accordance with Article 7 of the Discretionary Housing Payment (Grants) Order 2001.

Aberdeenshire Council Permitted Total 2013/14

UK Government Contribution	£160,695
Aberdeenshire Contribution	£241,043
Total Expenditure Limit	£401,738

- 2.4 Each case must be decided on its own merits and decision-making must be consistent throughout the year.
- 2.5 The level of award may cover all or part of a shortfall in rent or assist with the cost of taking up a tenancy for example rent deposits or removal expenses.
- 2.6 The introduction of the social sector size criteria means that 1,106 tenants in the social rented sector who previously received housing benefit are now experiencing a shortfall of 14% or 25% depending on whether they are under-occupying their accommodation by one or two plus bedrooms.
- 2.7 The total reduction in housing benefit arising from the social sector size criteria is estimated at £700,000 for 2013/14.

- 2.8 The Benefits Policy Board agreed a revised Discretionary Housing Payments Policy in order to provide a decision-making framework. A copy of the Policy is contained within the Appendix to this report.

3 Statistics

- 3.1 In 2012/13 Aberdeenshire Council received 138 applications for Discretionary Housing Payments and made 53 awards totalling £20,601.97.
- 3.2 Between 1 April and 28 May 2013 Aberdeenshire Council received 290 applications for Discretionary Housing Payments and has made 207 awards resulting in committed expenditure totalling £39,456.04.
- 3.3 It is anticipated that applications will continue to increase following the roll out of the Benefit Cap and as the financial pressures of the size criteria begin to affect households across Aberdeenshire. A monthly limit of £33,000 has been set to ensure as far as possible that funds are available throughout the year, but once the full allocation is used up, no additional funds can be applied as mentioned in paragraph 2.3.

4 Equalities, Staffing and Financial Implications

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 There are no specific staffing implications at this time but the workload and performance of the team is being monitored.
- 4.3 Due to the increased awareness of the DHP and the marked increase in applications, it is proposed to vire £241,043 from the Community Culture & Tourism reserve to the Benefits budget in 2013/14 and to include this in future budgets.
- 4.4 The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and is in agreement with the report.

Alan Wood
Head of Finance

Report prepared by Susan Donald, Benefits Manager
23 May 2013
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EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Stage 1: Title and aims of the activity (“activity” is an umbrella term covering policies, procedures, guidance and decisions).	
Service	Corporate 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 Housing & Social Work, Universal Credit Cross Service Steering 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 cash 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	Corporate 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: Kristi Seiler Position: Project Officer (Welfare Reform) Date: 01 April 2013 Signature:	Name: Audrey Morris Position: Project Officer (Welfare Reform) Date: 01 April 2013 Signature:
		Name: Position: Date: Signature:	Name: Position: Date: Signature:
	4) Consultation with Service Manager	Name: Susan Donald Date: 01 April 2013	
	5) Authorisation by Director or Head of Service	Name: Alan Wood Position: Head of Service Date:	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:	

