



CABINET

16TH JUNE 2016

AGENDA ITEM (9)

DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT POLICY

Accountable Member	Councillor Lynden Stowe Leader of the Council
Accountable Officer	Jon Dearing Group Manager 01285 623304 jon.dearing@cotswold.gov.uk

Purpose of Report	To propose an amended Discretionary Housing Payment Policy
Recommendation	That the revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy be adopted subject to officers not exceeding the budget provided by the Department of Work and Pensions.
Reason for Recommendation	To assist more customers who are impacted by the new welfare reform changes through discretionary housing payments

Ward(s) Affected	Not applicable
Key Decision	No
Recommendation to Council	None

Financial Implications	Discretionary Housing Payment awards are fully funded by a grant allocation from the Department of Work and Pensions set at £89,634. The Council could decide to top-up the contribution by up to 150%, of this allocation but this would need to be met from local taxpayers and has not been budgeted for in 2016/17.
Legal and Human Rights Implications	None
Environmental and Sustainability Implications	None
Human Resource Implications	None. This Policy will be delivered using existing resources
Key Risks	There is a risk of spending over the Governments allocation which would impact on local taxpayers. There is also a reputational risk if the Discretionary Housing Payment fund is not administered within the best practice guidelines

Equalities Analysis	Not applicable
Related Decisions	None
Background Documents	None
Appendices	Appendix 'A' - Revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy
Performance Management Follow Up	The Revenues and Housing Support Service will closely monitor the number and financial level of sanctions
Options for Joint Working	The responsibility for ensuring the Policy is adhered to sits within the Revenues and Housing Support Service, which is already a shared service. Key Officers from both sites will have responsibility in ensuring the application process is adhered to and that all expenditure is tightly monitored.

Background Information	
<p>1. The Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme is not a benefit, but is an additional source of income that people in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit can apply for to assist them with housing costs.</p> <p>2. Each year, the Government makes a contribution to this 'pot' of money. The Council can also use its own local taxpayer funds to top-up the Government's contribution by an additional 150%.</p> <p>3. The Government's contributions are ring-fenced for the purpose of DHPs only; therefore any contribution funds not paid out during the financial year are returned to the Government.</p> <p>4. DHP funding has increased year-on-year since 2011/2012 to assist with the transition of changes within the Welfare Reform Act, for example the Social Size Criteria Rules (Bedroom Tax), and the Local Housing Allowance (LHA).</p> <p>5. During the autumn, a further significant change will be coming in through Welfare Reform, namely, a lower benefit cap.</p> <p>6. Currently, the maximum amount of benefit people can receive before the cap is implemented is:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £350 per week for single people without children; • £500 per week for single parents; • £500 per week for couples, whether they have children or not. <p>7. Following the proposed changes, the new maximum amount of benefit people can receive before the Cap is implemented will be:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £257.69 per week for single people without children; • £384.62 per week for single parents; • £384.62 per week for couples, whether they have children or not. <p>8. Early indications show that the new cap will affect approximately 53 households within the Cotswold District.</p>	

9. To help the Council manage the impact of this change, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has given additional guidance on how it has distributed its contribution of the DHP funding and this is incorporated into the revised policy as attached at **Appendix 'A'**.

10. The Council has been allocated a sum of £89,634 for Discretionary Housing Payments, of which 27% is attributed to the Benefit Cap, both in terms of current levels and the new levels to be introduced in the autumn.

11. The current DHP policy has been restrictive in awarding any additional payments to those customers who have seen their benefits reduce under the benefit cap rules. To ensure that the Council considers such requests, the policy has been amended to reflect this. The revised policy also includes Universal Credit.

(END)