

Gloucester City Council

Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	3 April 2019
Subject:	Discretionary Housing Payments		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	Yes	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	Appendix A – Discretionary Housing Payments – Guidance Manual		
	Appendix B – Discretionary Housing Payments Policy		
	Appendix C – Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 Gloucester City Council have been operating a Discretionary Housing Payment scheme for a number of years. This report proposes a formal policy for that scheme which will take into account relevant changes in the Department for Work and Pension's Discretionary Housing Payment guidance and will have consideration to the Council's key objectives.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that:

- (1) The Discretionary Housing Payments policy at Appendix B is the approved policy for Gloucester City Council.
- (2) The Discretionary Housing Payment policy is effective 01 April 2019.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

3.1 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's) are additional financial assistance payments offered to claimants entitled to Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit, where a local authority considers that additional help with housing costs is justified

3.2 DHP's are not benefit payments; they are intended as a short term financial support for housing costs during periods of genuine financial hardship

- 3.3 The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001(as amended) allows such discretionary payments and the Department for Work and Pensions issues guidance on good practice for local authorities when considering DHP applications
- 3.4 An amount is allocated annually by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to each local authority to fund successful DHP applications. The amount is to be used only for DHP applications. Any of the allocated budget which remains unspent by the local authority at the end of the financial year has to be returned to the DWP
- 3.5 There are many requests upon the budget and once it is spent there is no further funding in that financial year. It is therefore imperative that Gloucester City Council ensure that the fund is directed to those households in direct need of additional support with their housing costs
- 3.6 Cabinet is being asked to approve the Discretionary Housing Payment policy as outlined in appendix B

4.0 Progress

- 4.1 The Discretionary Housing Payments policy detailed at appendix B outlines potential situations in which Discretionary Housing Payments can be awarded, however, as the scheme is discretionary the examples contained within the policy are not exhaustive. Any other costs associated with housing will be considered providing the applicant is eligible to make a DHP claim
- 4.2 As the DHP scheme has been in place for some years, there is an application form, a formal application process and the relevant software requirements to ensure that the payments are processed and recorded accurately
- 4.3 The full eligibility criteria and arrangements for administering the scheme are detailed in appendix B
- 4.4 Local advice agencies have been consulted regarding this policy and, where appropriate to do so, their comments and suggestions have helped to form the policy

5.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 Whilst Gloucester City Council has a procedure in place for operating the Discretionary Housing Payment there is currently no formal policy and this recommendation seeks to rectify that.

6.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 6.1 The policy will be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 The cost of awarding Discretionary Housing Payments is fully funded by the Department for Work and Pensions via an annual award.

Once the allocated amount is spent, any additional amount would fall to be fully funded by the local authority, hence the strict controls over the awards and weekly monitoring of the budget.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report)

8.0 Legal Implications

8.1 The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 (as amended) set out the legal framework empowering the Council to make discretionary awards to assist residents with their housing costs

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation of this report)

9.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

9.1 If the Discretionary Housing Payment policy is not approved, then City residents eligible to claim and receive DHP's will not get the same level of housing costs assistance as other people throughout the Country

10.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

10.1 None.

11.0 Other Corporate Implications

11.1 The Discretionary Housing Payment policy will provide additional support to city residents – it is primarily intended as a short term solution while people and families make attempts to better their situation. The scheme also helps prevent homelessness, supports tenancy sustainment and helps those seeking alternative accommodation to move to more affordable housing. It can also help people remain in properties which have been adapted specifically for their needs and can help our customers through personal and difficult events

11.2 Sustainability

Not applicable

11.3 Staffing & Trade Union

Not applicable

Background Documents:

Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 -

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2001/1167/contents/made>