

**ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
4 JANUARY 2024**

DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT POLICY 2024-2029

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -
Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider the draft Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Policy 2024-2029 before approval by Cabinet on 9 January 2024.

Summary

2. DHP is a scheme which aims to provide residents who receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, with additional financial assistance with their rental costs. The operation of the scheme is at the Council's discretion and funding is provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), so is cash limited.
3. The existing DHP Policy has been in place since April 2013 and so is due for review, although no significant changes are proposed to the existing policy.
4. The DHP Policy 2024-2029 at **Appendix 1** sets out the aims of the scheme and the priorities for awards, although all applications are decided on their own individual merits.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that :-
 - (a) Members consider the draft DHP Policy 2024-2029 at **Appendix 1** and agree its onward submission to Cabinet.

Reasons

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
 - (a) The Council is responsible for administering DHPs in accordance with the Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001.

- (b) The DWPs DHP Guidance Manual provides guidance and advice on good practice when considering payment of DHPs, including consistency of decision making and how we should publicise the scheme. The adoption of a formal DHP policy will help to demonstrate how we will achieve this.

Anthony Sandys
Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues

Background Papers

- (i) Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001
- (ii) DWPs DHP Guidance Manual

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

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|--|---|
| S17 Crime and Disorder | There are no issues |
| Health and Wellbeing | There are no issues |
| Carbon Impact and Climate Change | There is no impact in this report |
| Diversity | The DHP Policy identifies priority groups for awards, some of which will have protected characteristics |
| Wards Affected | All wards are affected but in particular, those with higher numbers of people claiming Housing Benefit and Universal Credit |
| Groups Affected | People in receipt of Housing Benefit and Universal Credit with housing costs towards rental liability |
| Budget and Policy Framework | The issues contained within this report do not represent a change to Council budget or the Council's policy framework |
| Key Decision | This is not a key decision |
| Urgent Decision | This is not an urgent decision |
| Council Plan | This report supports the Council Plan to support the most vulnerable in the borough when needed |
| Efficiency | Payments of DHP are fully funded by the DWP up to a financial limit, set annually |
| Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers | Care leavers are specifically referred to as a group with priority for DHPs |

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

7. The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 allows Councils to make payments by way of financial assistance (DHPs) to people who are entitled to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit (with housing costs towards rental liability) and appear to the Council to

require some further assistance to meet their housing costs.

8. The existing DHP Policy has been operational since April 2013 and is therefore due for review and update, although no significant changes are proposed to the existing policy.
9. The DHP Policy 2024-2029 at **Appendix 1** sets out how the Council will administer the scheme and covers the following areas:
 - (a) The main features of the DHP scheme that apply to all applications. The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 sets out the circumstances in which DHP awards may or may not be made.
 - (b) The aims of the scheme, including the priority groups for DHP awards, although all applications will be assessed on their own individual merits.
 - (c) The process for claiming a DHP, decision making and appeals.
 - (d) The factors used to decide the amount and period of a DHP award.
 - (e) Monitoring arrangements, publicising the DHP scheme and managing the budget.
10. The DWP provides an annual ringfenced grant to fund DHPs and any unspent grant must be returned to the DWP at the end of the financial year. The DWP also set an annual upper limit for DHP awards, although there is no identified budget in the MTFP to make DHP awards above the DWP grant level.
11. **Table 1** below provides details of DHP awards and expenditure each year since 2016.

Table 1: DHP awards and expenditure

| Year | Applications | Awards | Total Paid | DWP funding |
|-------------|---------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 2022-23 | 586 | 364 | £135,280 | £154,394 |
| 2021-22 | 665 | 543 | £193,239 | £217,837 |
| 2020-21 | 256 | 145 | £280,579 | £287,586 |
| 2019-20 | 604 | 366 | £195,191 | £199,553 |
| 2018-19 | 672 | 477 | £239,116 | £239,759 |
| 2017-18 | 691 | 562 | £292,799 | £293,056 |
| 2016-17 | 730 | 463 | £212,595 | £218,184 |

Financial Implications

12. The recommendation in paragraph 5 will not have any significant financial implications and therefore it is not intended to amend the budget in the MTFP.