

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

26 March 2013

Report of the Director of Finance and Transformation

Part 1- Public

Executive Non Key Decisions

1 DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS POLICY

A report asking Members to endorse a revised policy for use when considering requests for discretionary housing payments.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Members will be aware that, for a number of years, we have received funding from central Government to enable us to make discretionary housing payments (DHPs) to those recipients of housing benefit requiring **temporary**, financial assistance.
- 1.1.2 Officers within my Service consider applications – liaising with officers from Housing where necessary - and make awards as appropriate within the context of a policy framework.
- 1.1.3 It is important to note that, in the normal course of events, DHP awards are made for a short term period only in order to give claimants time to adjust their circumstances by, for instance, finding work or accessing more affordable accommodation.
- 1.1.4 The funding from Government has been substantially increased for the financial year 2013/14, in recognition of the impact that the Government's welfare reform programme will have on recipients of housing benefit. In particular, the Government has noted the impact of the social rented sector size criteria (the 'bedroom tax') and the benefit cap (due for introduction later this year).
- 1.1.5 In view of the increased funding and the additional circumstances in which the grant of a discretionary housing payment might be applicable, I believe it is timely to refresh the policy that we currently have. A revised policy is therefore attached at **[ANNEX 1]**.
- 1.1.6 A full equality impact assessment has been undertaken in respect of the revised policy.

1.2 Legal Implications

1.2.1 There is no legal requirement to have a policy but to do so is good practice.

1.3 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.3.1 The existence of a policy does not, per se, have financial or value for money considerations.

1.4 Risk Assessment

1.4.1 Without a policy there would be a risk that decisions on grants of discretionary housing payments would not be consistent.

1.5 Equality Impact Assessment

1.5.1 It is clear, and acknowledged by the Government, that the welfare reform agenda will impact on some of the groups of people with Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act. However, the ability to make discretionary housing payments will, as long as the claimant has a housing benefit entitlement, allow us to mitigate (where appropriate) the impact of the welfare changes, subject to the Government grant meeting demand for claims. Most discretionary payments will be for a short period in order to give claimants time to adjust their circumstances by, for instance, finding work or accessing more affordable accommodation.

1.6 Recommendations

1.6.1 Members are **REQUESTED** to **ENDORSE** the updated policy.

Background papers:

contact: Andrew Rosevear

Nil

Sharon Shelton

Director of Finance and Transformation

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	See paragraph 1.8.1. This Policy will help to mitigate the impacts of the welfare changes, subject to the Government grant meeting demand for claims.

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.