

# **AGENDA ITEM 15**

## **COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**19<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2013**

### **THE HEAD OF COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS**

#### **DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS POLICY**

##### **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval and agree the adoption of a new Discretionary Housing Payments Policy.

##### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That member's approve the adoption of the attached Discretionary Housing Payment Policy (Appendix A).

##### **3.0 KEY ISSUES/BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Discretionary Housing Payment fund (DHP) is a fund that Melton Borough Council has been given by the Government to help with the introduction of the new Over Occupancy (bedroom Tax) Scheme. Melton Borough Council has an allocation of £51,644 for the financial year 2013/14.
- 3.2 Melton Borough Council has been paying DHP and receiving applications since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 but we need to adopt a formal policy which is clear to customers how we are managing the process. To date we have had 15 applications with 8 cases ongoing payments (includes 4 bedroom tax cases), 5 cases are now closed as payments were to get customers through a difficult period financially and 2 new cases are being processed.
- 3.3 We are now promoting the DHP widely to people in receipt of benefit and the Melton Times ran an article on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2013 and this has seen an increase in applications and advice being requested.
- 3.4 The DHP policy that drafted is not only about giving money when customers are struggling but also allows money to be used to help people move to more suitable properties and help with other costs such as removals. This is important as we need to be flexible but also have clear criteria as to what we can and cannot fund.

##### **4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The new policy enables the Council to be able to support customers who are having difficulties due to their current housing and financial situation and enables officers to be more innovative and able to assist them through such difficult periods.
- 4.2 The development of the policy is in accordance to service objectives identified in the Communities and Neighbourhoods service plan, to support and assist vulnerable residents.

4.3 With the introduction of this new policy and additional demand placed on services due to recent legislation changes around housing benefit and the bedroom tax additional resources have been created within our existing structures that will enable us to manage the new policy and processes efficiently.

4.4 After the first six months of the new policy being adopted the service will be reviewed to determine actual impact upon existing resources and the demand/take up of this additional service by customers.

## 5.0 **FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 A budget of £51,644 has been allocated for the financial year 2013/14 to help assist customers who are experiencing financial difficulties due to their housing circumstances.

5.2 The DHP processes and administration will be managed within existing resources in the People Team (Communities and Neighbourhoods Department).

## 6.0 **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 With the introduction of this new policy the Council will be able to consistently and transparently manage the allocation and use of our Discretionary Housing Payments to customers.

## 7.0 **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

7.1 Although there is no direct link to community safety the use of such monies to alleviate hardship will indirectly impact positively upon community safety.

## 8.0 **EQUALITIES**

8.1 An equality impact assessment has been carried out which shows that the new policy has a positive impact on customers.

## 9.0 RISK

### 9.1 Probability

Very High A				
High B				
Significant C				
Low D			1,2	
Very Low E		3		
Almost Impossible F				
	IV Negligible	III Marginal	II Critical	I Catastrophic

Risk No.	Description
1	The monies allocated through the DHP fund are not sufficient.
2	Demand upon the service is greater than anticipated.
3	Take up of service is low.
4	
5	

## 10.0 CONSULTATION

10.1 Consultation has taken place with internal staff, Tenants Forum Executive Committee, Leicestershire County Council Services and partner housing organisations

## 11.0 WARDS AFFECTED

11.1 All wards.

## 12.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

12.1 No climate change implications have been identified.

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Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2013

Appendices A Discretionary Housing Policy (Draft)

Committee X Drive/Committees/2013.14/190613/HR- Discretionary Housing Payments Policy