

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting18th April 2013

1. Title of Item/Report

Discretionary Housing Payment

2. Record of the Decision

Cabinet considered a report relating to Welfare reform changes from April 2013. In particular changes introduced size criteria rules for tenants of registered social landlords which would significantly increase demand for discretionary housing payments from tenants who could not afford to make up the shortfall between the housing benefit payment and the rent charged. Government funding had increased but it was sufficient to cover only 7% of the additional shortfalls.

Cabinet was asked to approve a new discretionary housing payment scheme which would set out the Council's priorities for such awards. This was provided to members as an appendix to the report.

It was noted that when considering applications for discretionary housing payments it was usual to make a detailed assessment of the personal circumstances of the claimant and family including consideration of income and expenditure, the level of indebtedness etc. Support and advice was tailored to the individual, and a discretionary housing payment was just one tool utilised in order to resolve the underlying housing problems on a long term basis. Such casework was time consuming and costly to provide. With the welfare reform changes the type of problems presenting would change and this "in depth" approach would be too intensive or inappropriate in a number of circumstances. Equally there were other cases where it would be unreasonable, or not in the public interest to expect a claimant to move. It was therefore proposed to "fast track" applications for DHP in these cases to allow more intensive support to be focused on those cases where it is most needed.

It was explained that expenditure on Discretionary Housing Payments would be monitored on a monthly basis and the number and types of awards would be continually scrutinised to ensure that resources were targeted to areas of most need and that there was equitable treatment of client groups. Further DWP guidance relating to DHP's was expected and there could be further legislative changes which impacted upon the

policy. It was therefore recommended that delegated authority to make amendments to the policy was approved to the Head of Housing in consultation with the lead Cabinet Member

RESOLVED that:-

1. the revised discretionary housing payment policy be approved.
2. the approach to the operation of the scheme in year 1 by the utilisation of the fast track process for certain short term cases affected by the under occupancy rules in the social rented sector be approved.
3. responsibility for approval of amendments to the policy be delegated to the Head of Housing in consultation with the lead cabinet member.

3. Reasons for the Decision

Given the number of people who were or would be affected by the changes, awarding Discretionary Housing Payments to meet all rent shortfalls was not a viable option. Careful consideration would be required to determine how best to target the funding within priority groups, whilst ensuring that each case was considered on its own individual merits. This policy had been developed to give guidance to staff responsible for making payment decisions.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

N/A

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight on Friday 26 April 2013

Proper Officer
22 April 2013