



## **FULL COUNCIL REPORT**

Date Written	24 <sup>th</sup> November 2015
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Service Area	Corporate Benefits Section
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	27th January 2016

*To: Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen*

## **DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT SCHEME**

### **1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To update the existing Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Policy for Merthyr Tydfil to enable a more consistent approach to applications. The updated policy is based on a framework that is currently being adopted among the majority of Local Authorities within Wales. See appendix 1 which outlines the changes in the updated policy.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S) that**

2.1 The updated Discretionary Housing Payments policy outlined in the report be approved.

### **3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

3.1 The use of Discretionary Housing Payments have increased substantially over the past few years as Central Government have implemented a number of Welfare Reforms which has reduced the amount of Housing Benefit which customers receive. In 2011/12 the DHP allocation to the Council from the Department for Work and Pensions was approximately £13,000. This has increased since then and for the current financial year 2015/16 is £138,154.

3.2 DHP's are paid from a cash limited budget and are intended to help people meet housing costs normally where there is a shortfall between their Housing Benefit, or Housing element of Universal Credit and their rental liability. It is not possible to make an award in every case where there is a shortfall.

- 3.3 The policy is a way of helping to decide priorities for payment. In recent years, the Council has fully spent its DHP allocation by the end of the financial year with no requirement for any additional funds required from the Local Authority.
- 3.4 The objectives of the updated policy are to give applicants a fair and consistent decision, to maximise the use of the DHP budget, to give greater priority to help those who are making efforts to help themselves and to support those who have done all they can to manage the situation they are in.
- 3.5 The updated policy will help to prevent negative outcomes such as homelessness which is likely to involve further hardship for the council as well as additional and avoidable costs for the council.
- 3.6 Appendix 1 of this report sets out the key changes in the updated policy:

Financial assessment  
Priority groups  
Ability to manage the situation  
Avoid further cost and hardship  
Priority setting  
Awards

- 3.7 In order to meet the objectives of the framework it would be insufficient to make awards to certain broad categories of people (e.g. disabled people and lone parents). It is necessary to define which people in these and other categories should as a rule have the most priority (see appendix 2)

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 4.1 The budget provided for DHP's is set annually by the Department of Work and Pensions. It is proposed , as in previous years, to manage the Council's spend on DHP to the grant provided by DWP with no additional funds from the Local Authority budget.

#### **5.0 SINGLE INTEGRATED PLAN AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT SUMMARY**

- 5.1 The Welfare Reform Project Manager and the Benefits Section have worked in conjunction with WLGA, other local authorities and Welsh Government to develop a framework which will be operated in Wales. Adoption of the framework will provide greater transparency across Wales and ensure that awards are fair and consistent and will prioritise those in greatest need. The processing of these Discretionary Housing payments falls within the corporate theme of Organisation and ensuring that applicants are treated in a fair and consistent manner. The actual payments will benefit the strategic themes of the Single Integrated Plan and consequently the implementation of this framework links across all of the areas in the Plan.

## 6.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form has been prepared for the purpose of this report. It has been found that a full assessment is not required at this time. The form can be accessed on the Council's website/intranet via the 'Equality Impact Assessment' link.

**ELLIS COOPER**  
**CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF PLACE AND**  
**TRANSFORMATION**

**COUNCILLOR PHIL WILLIAMS CABINET**  
**MEMBER FOR GOVERNANCE AND**  
**CORORATE SERVICES**

<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>		
<b>Title of Document(s)</b>	<b>Document(s) Date</b>	<b>Document Location</b>
Updated Discretionary Housing Payment policy	January 2016	
<b>Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?</b>		<b>No</b>

***Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.***