



PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

INDIVIDUAL DECISION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR FINANCE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

TOPIC –DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS

PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

The Access to Information Procedure Rules – Part 4, Section 22 of the Council's Constitution provides for a decision to be made by an individual member of Cabinet.

In accordance with the Procedure Rules, the Chief Operating Officer, the Chief Executive and the Chief Finance Officer are consulted together with Chairman and Vice Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any other relevant overview and scrutiny committee. In addition, all Members are notified.

If five or more Members from those informed so request, the Leader may require the matter to be referred to Cabinet for determination.

Contact Officers:

Case Officer: Jane Petty, Deputy Head of Revenues, 01962 848 460,
jpetty@winchester.gov.uk

Committee Administrator: Nancy Graham, Senior Democratic Services Officer,
01962 848 235, ngraham@winchester.gov.uk

SUMMARY

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are administered by the Council and provide financial assistance (outside of the Housing Benefit (HB) and Universal Credit (UC) regulations) to help tenants meet their housing costs.

DHPs are not payments of benefit. They are free standing payments to be made at the Council's discretion where it is considered that additional help with housing costs is needed.

DHPs can play an important role in sustaining tenancies, preventing homelessness and, where needed, enabling tenants to move to more affordable accommodation. The Council has had the ability to award DHP for several years. The Government increased the funding available to the Council for 2013/14 in order to support HB and UC claimants affected by the Welfare Reform changes. The changes include –

- Local Housing Allowance reforms (a reduction in rent levels for private sector tenants and annual uprating changed from RPI to CPI)
- Social sector size criteria limitations relating to family size and the number of bedrooms in a property
- Benefit cap (an overall limit on the amount of benefit income that a household can receive).

The Council's Discretionary Housing Payments Guidelines have been updated and amended to include Universal Credit.

Significant changes have been made to the following paragraphs:

- Key principles of the policy
- Amount and duration of DHPs

They have also been renamed the Discretionary Housing Payments Policy and Procedure – 2014/15. They are attached at Appendix A.

Under the Council's Constitution, Section 6 – The Scheme of Delegation to Officers, the Head of Revenues has delegated authority to make determinations on discretionary housing payments.

DECISION

That the Council's Discretionary Housing Payments Policy and Procedure – 2014/15 (attached at Appendix A) are approved and that the Head of Revenues be given delegated authority to amend the Policy and Procedure to reflect any legislative changes and revised guidance received from DWP.

REASON FOR THE DECISION AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The Policy and Procedure has been updated and amended to include Universal Credit.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

The Council will receive funding for Discretionary Housing Payments for 2014/15 from the DWP. The amount for 2014/15 has not yet been published by the DWP*. We are expecting it mid February. The Council has discretion to make awards above the amount received from its own resources. The level of DHP applications and awards will be monitored closely during the year to identify any budget pressure at an early stage.

The DHP funding received from the DWP for 2013/14 was £105,155. We have currently spent/committed £101,000. We have increased the original funding of £105,155 by £7,842, using some of the additional welfare reform funding we received from the DWP. We are also in the process of submitting a bid to the DWP for additional funding of £17,000.

**NB: Subsequent to the Draft Portfolio Holder Decision Notice being published, the DWP have confirmed that the Council's Discretionary Housing Payments for 2014/15 will be £101,456.*

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN ON THE DECISION

n/a

FURTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF THE DRAFT PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

n/a

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY THE DECISION MAKER OR A MEMBER OR OFFICER CONSULTED

n/a

DISPENSATION GRANTED BY THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

n/a

Approved by: (signature)

Date of Decision: 04.02.14

Councillor Stephen Godfrey– Portfolio Holder for Finance and Organisational Development