

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 10 June 2019

Title: Discretionary Housing Payment Amended Policy 2019/2020

Report of: Tim Whelan, Director of Service Delivery

Cabinet member: Councillor Ron Maskell

Ward(s): All

Purpose of report: To review the revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy for Lewes District Council

Decision type: Key decision

Officer recommendation(s): To adopt the Revised Policy for Lewes District Council

Reasons for recommendations: To ensure that the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme is administered consistently across the district

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1 Introduction

1.1 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) have been in place since 2001 and are designed to give additional financial help to someone who gets Housing Benefit or the Housing Element of Universal Credit but are still struggling to meet their rental obligations or are unable to get accommodation. DHPs are intended to be short term help and are not meant to continuously bridge the gap between a customer's rent and the benefit they receive.

DHPs are not available to help someone pay their council tax.

1.2 Central Government allocates a contribution for Discretionary Housing Payments. Overall funding for 2019/2020 the Government covers four separate areas

- Core funding
- Local Housing Allowance
- Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy
- Benefit Cap

For 2019/2020 Lewes District Council's allocation is £209,143.

Local Authorities can top the DHP budget spend up to 2.5 times this amount from their own resources.

Customers have to apply for a DHP and supply an income and expenditure form. Consideration is given to their incomings and outgoings and a decision is made on whether or not to award a DHP.

There is an expectation that customers will reduce any unnecessary expenditure and apply for any welfare benefits they are likely to be entitled to.

2 Proposal – Main changes to the Policy

2.1 Non-dependant deductions will not be covered on an ongoing basis. If a customer has a deduction made from their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Costs because they have adults other than their partner living in their household then a deduction may be made. This is based on the income of the adult. It is expected that the non-dependant contributes the amount of the deduction to the customer in order to make up the shortfall.

2.2 When considering an award of a Discretionary Housing Payment whether there is a guarantor will be taken into account and if the landlord has insurance against rent arrears.

3 Consultation

3.1 Citizens Advice, Brighton Housing Trust, Food bank have been consulted and have raised no major concerns.

4 Scrutiny Committee

4.1 The Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7 February 2019 expressed concerns with bullet point 5 of section 4.1 of the policy.

- Whether the Landlord has insurance to cover rent arrears and if the landlord was approached regarding this, the relationship between the landlord and the tenant would be adversely affected. They are recommending adopting the policy omitting this bullet point.

5 Financial appraisal

5.1 The financial awards made under this policy are made from the contribution from Central Government. Any additional expenditure must be met by the Local Authority. In previous years both LDC and EBC have spent the allocation in full as any residue must be returned to Central Government.

6 Legal implications

6.1 The administration of Discretionary Housing payments are governed by the Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Discretionary Housing Payment Policy 2019/2020

Appendix 2 – Minute extract – Scrutiny Committee (7 February 2019)