

Policy and Resources Committee

29th March 2017

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

Discretionary Housing Payments

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Director or Head of Service	Stephen McGinnes, Director of Mid Kent Services
Lead Officer and Report Author	Liz Norris, Business Support Manager
Classification	Non-exempt
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to the final decision-maker:

1. That the Committee approve the Discretionary Housing Payment Policy held as appendix A.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	29th March 2017

Discretionary Housing Payments

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council receives an annual grant from the Department for Work and Pensions to provide additional financial help in the form of a discretionary housing payment (DHP) to households in receipt of housing benefit.
 - 1.2 The purpose of the report is to formalise the policy for making such awards.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council is provided with an annual discretionary housing payment grant by the Department for Work and Pensions in order to provide additional financial support to that awarded through the housing benefit scheme.
- 2.2 Discretionary Housing Payments operate outside of the main benefit system but for ease of administration are normally paid alongside housing benefit. The payments are limited to providing support with housing related costs for residents in receipt of housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit. Support is restricted to those within the rental sector and cannot support home owners.
- 2.3 The budget available to Maidstone BC in 2017/2018 is £325,633.
- 2.4 Whilst this represents a significant budget, demand for DHP is high, with support targeted to help those households affected by welfare reform or who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 2.5 The policy sets out the council's aims in operating the DHP scheme and types of situations that it will prioritise:
 - Help alleviate poverty
 - Encourage employment
 - Prevent homelessness
 - Support vulnerable households
 - Provide support at a time of crisis

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The council could operate a scheme without adopting a policy. However, given the demand and value of awards it is considered important that the council makes clear its approach and priorities for awards.
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4. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 4.1 The policy was produced in consultation with the multi agency welfare reform group that it hosts, with representation from voluntary sector, social landlords, Job Centre Plus, Kent County Council and MBC housing team.
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5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 5.1 The availability of DHP is promoted through the customer services team, housing team, registered social landlords, private sector landlords and local advice agencies.
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6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Administration of DHP supports low income households to reduce the number of households at risk of becoming homeless.	S McGinnes MKS Director
Risk Management	No impact	S McGinnes MKS Director
Financial	A grant of £325,633 is provided by the Department of Work and Pensions for the award of DHP. The grant is ring-fenced with any unspent funds returned at the end of the year. The council receives an annual grant for the administration of housing benefit and DHP.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	The Revenues and Benefits Team are staffed to administer the DHP scheme.	S McGinnes, MKS Director
Legal	The administration of DHP is provided through the Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001. Government Guidance states that decisions must be made in accordance	Interim Deputy Head of Legal

	with ordinary principles of good decision making, i.e. administrative law. In particular, councils have a duty to act fairly, reasonably and consistently. Each case must be decided on its own merits, and decision making should be consistent throughout the year.	
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	Equality impact assessment provided as appendix B.	[Policy & Information Manager]
Environmental/Sustainable Development	No impact	S McGinnes MKS Director
Community Safety	No impact	S McGinnes MKS Director
Human Rights Act	No impact	S McGinnes MKS Director
Procurement	No impact	S McGinnes MKS Director
Asset Management	No impact	S McGinnes MKS Director

7. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Discretionary Housing Payment Policy
- Appendix II: Equality Impact Assessment

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None