



Report to Cabinet

Subject: Recommendations of the Discretionary Housing and Council Tax Payments Policy Scrutiny Review.

Date: 3rd November 2011

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To inform Cabinet Members of the recommendations of the Discretionary Housing and Council Tax Policy review of July 2011.

2. BACKGROUND

Members are reminded that part of the remit of Scrutiny is to deal with wider service or policy issues through the establishment of working groups, which take an in depth view of Council policies and plans as directed by the Overview Scrutiny Committee, and make recommendations to Cabinet accordingly. In accordance with the Scrutiny Improvement Plan 2010, a review is commissioned when:

- There is added value that this work will bring to the core priorities of the Council
- It is likely to make a difference if a working group undertake this work
- It is likely to lead to improved performance
- It is likely that the working group's recommendations will improve the lives of the residents of Gedling Borough
- It will increase Member awareness of important issues

3. DISCRETIONARY HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX POLICY SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Policy Review Scrutiny Committee was asked to appoint a working group to review the Council's Discretionary Housing and Council Tax Policy. There had been a policy in place for about 10 years however revision was needed due to the advent of local housing allowance payments, and the move to reduce Housing Benefit paid to the 30th percentile.

Members focused upon:

- The detailed wording of the policy
- The makeup of the decision panel
- The circumstances taken into consideration when awarding DHP
- The review process.

4. FINDINGS

Members made the following suggestions for amendments:

- Clarify and standardise the eligibility criteria throughout the Policy, giving more examples
- Provide more detail on what is taken into account when the Panel considers an application
- Specify how the scheme is promoted through partners
- Improve the definitions of what constitutes a 'vulnerable person'

- Include signposting to alternative advice to applicants on correspondence
- More guidance is needed on the circumstances whereby backdated payments are made
- Where assets and capital are taken into account, include a disregard of assets needed to secure employment
- Engage with Gedling Homes and other agencies to assess and continuously review demand, including any seasonal spikes in demand, in order to deploy the budget to best effect

5. AGREED ACTIONS

The suggestions of the working group were taken into account in the re drafting of the Policy, and a final draft circulated to the group for their approval, before its' submission to Cabinet.

6. RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet Members are asked to consider this report in conjunction with the amended Discretionary Housing and Council Tax policy, also on this agenda, and to respond to the recommendations made to the Chair of the Overview Scrutiny Committee.