



Report to: Cabinet

Subject: Housing and Council Tax Benefit Discretionary Housing Payment Policy

Date: 3 November 2011

Author: Head of Corporate Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report details the reasons for introducing a Discretionary Housing Payment Policy (DHP) and recommends that the policy is forwarded to Policy Review Scrutiny Committee for consultation/review.

2. INTRODUCTION

Every council that administers the benefit scheme has a responsibility to pay the right benefits to the right people at the right time. This fundamental responsibility and the legal requirements of the national benefit scheme therefore underpin all our benefit assessments. This policy is designed to help the service achieve these goals.

3. BACKGROUND

The council currently has a Discretionary Housing Payment policy that was last reviewed over 5 years ago. Since this time the economic situation is significantly different and government is putting an increased emphasis on reducing the total Housing Benefit bill. However, whilst in the short term government has announced it intends to increase the amount available to this fund, it is anticipated that a significant increase in applications for payment are likely to be made and in response to this, the council has written a revised Discretionary Housing Payment policy.

4. CURRENT POSTION

Attached at appendix 1 is the policy. The policy has been reviewed by Senior Management Team on 15 February 2011 where it was agreed that the report be forwarded for consultation/review by the Policy Scrutiny committee on 22 March 2011. Scrutiny committee established a working group to scrutinise the policy with the following scope:-

- Detailed wording of the policy
- Makeup of the decision panel
- Circumstances taken into consideration when awarding Discretionary Housing Payments
- Review process

The findings and recommendations of the working group have been incorporated within the policy which was approved by Overview Scrutiny committee on 6 September 2011.

Discretionary Housing Payments must be awarded on a case by case basis based on the individual circumstances of the claimant. The policy identifies how the Council will ensure a fair and impartial method of assessment when considering an award and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

5. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An equalities impact assessment has been completed.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Discretionary Housing Payment Policy attached at Appendix A be approved.