

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Cabinet                      **DATE:** 14<sup>th</sup> March 2016

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**WARD(S):** All

**PORTFOLIO:** Councillor Anderson; Commissioner for Finance & Strategy

### **PART I** **KEY DECISION**

#### **WELFARE POLICIES**

1    **Purpose of Report**

To provide a revised Council policy in respect of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) for 2016-17.

2    **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Cabinet is requested to resolve that the policy for Discretionary Housing Payments as set out in Appendix A be approved.

3.   **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

This report supports the 5 Year Plan through support to housing outcome and adults outcomes (2 and 6) through the use of the Discretionary Housing Payments funding streams.

4    **Other Implications**

(a)    Financial

The Council proposes to maintain spend within the respective budget and levels set for this budget so as not to put any additional pressure on the Council's general fund budget.

The Council received an allocation for DHP that is £151,823k more than the current financial year.

(b)    Risk Management

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigating action</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
Legal	Scheme has been in place for period of time	

Property		
Human Rights		
Health and Safety		
Employment Issues		
Equalities Issues		
Community Support		
Communications		Ensuring that those eligible receive DHP
Community Safety		
Financial	Risk that due to welfare reforms, the Government grant will not be sufficient to meet demand – previously, SBC have spent close to the grant allowed.	
Timetable for delivery		
Project Capacity		
Other	The scheme is in many cases reactionary to the Government welfare reforms so risks remain over how and when these reforms will occur	

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

A completed EIA is attached at Appendix B.

**5 Supporting Information**

- 5.1 The Discretionary Hardship Payments policy is included in appendix A.
- 5.2 Discretionary Hardship Payments within Housing Benefits have been available for a number of years but have been at a reasonably low level, however with the introduction of the Welfare Reform agenda they have taken a much higher profile and government has awarded higher grants
- 5.3 The grant for 2016-17 is £581k which is £151k higher than 2015-16.
- 5.4 Previous years grants are listed below

Year	Amount
2014-15	£672,479
2015-16	£429,112
2016-17	£580,935

- 5.5 The intention by Government was for this to assist in respect of the welfare reforms such as the bedroom tax, benefit cap etc.
- 5.6 The Welfare Reform agenda has continued to grow and it has been announced that the benefit cap will reduce again in 2016-17, and the DHP grant has been increased in line with these changes. However at this time we do not know when in 2016-17 the revised cap will come into effect in Slough, it is expected to be autumn 2016 but this is still to be confirmed.
- 5.7 The Department of work and Pensions suggests that the award of the DHP grant to Customers should in the following region

Allocation	% Amount
Core Funding*	13%
Local Housing Allowance shortfall	20%
Spare Room Subsidy Shortfall	40%
Benefit Cap Shortfall	27%

\*Core funding is the amount awarded before welfare reform to council's for exception circumstances not listed

- 5.8 The government grant allocation allows Council's to "top-up" the amount of spend available from their own funds and this is limited to Slough to a total £1,452,338, however it is not our intention to make any additional payments . It is intended that spend will remain in line with the government grant allocation.
- 5.9 The DHP policy was re-written in 2015-16 and the changes for the financial year 2016-17 are to ensure that the policy remains in line with the legislation and core principals adopted by the Welfare Reform agenda and Slough Borough Council.
- 5.10 The changes relate to
- The introduction of Universal Credit in Slough in September 2015
  - The reduction in the Benefit Cap expected in 2016-17
  - The ability to take claims for DHP electronically and via the telephone in exceptional circumstances

## 6 **Comments of Other Committees**

n/a

7 **Conclusion**

That members are requested to review and approve these policies

8 **Appendices Attached**

'A' - DHP policy

'B' - Equality Impact Assessment

9 **Background Papers**

None