

Appendix C –

Discretionary Housing Payments Policy Consultation

Response of the Task & Finish Group

In its report to Scrutiny in June 2014, the Task & Finish Group was concerned it was unable to evidence original approval of the Council's DHP policy. It therefore recommended it would be timely for the Council to re-approve the policy with particular clarification of the Council's objectives for the use of DHPs.

The T&F Group welcomes publication of the draft policy document and the clarity it gives to the Council's approach.

The Group acknowledges that the use of DHPs is intended to provide short term assistance. It supports the policy of enabling people to meet their rent shortfall whilst they look at alternative solutions.

The Group strongly supports the policy objectives set out on page 5 of the draft policy. The policy should be based on meeting need and providing support to tenants as flexibly as possible.

In its original review, the T&F Group considered at length whether DLA should be excluded from the income calculation. On balance it felt that whilst DLA should continue to be included, it considered that this should form a key aspect of the 6 month review to assess its impact.

Whilst the draft policy recommends DLA continues to be included, a recent Tribunal hearing has ruled that it should be excluded. Given the Group's previous discussion of the issue, it welcomes the clarity now provided by the Tribunal decision and supports the exclusion of DLA from the income calculation.

However, whilst the policy is quite rightly based on consistent decision making throughout the year, the Group recognises that exclusion could place additional pressure on the DHP budget resulting in it being exhausted before year end with needs still unmet. In the event of this, the Group asks that the Council considers providing additional funding to ensure this need is met.

The Group previously acknowledged the need to support private tenants through the use of DHPs. It supports the need to publicise this to private tenants as much as possible.

Given the wider Welfare Reform agenda, the Group supports the need, as set out in the draft, to keep the policy under review to ensure it is relevant and fit for purpose.

The Group is concerned at the approach of a number of RSLs seeking rent in advance and the impact this may have on the use of DHPs.

In looking at alternative solutions, opportunities for work are an important element. The Group strongly supports the section on “Support into Work.” It asks that there is a co-ordinated approach across the Council to support tenants into work and that it keeps this issue under review to maximise the opportunities to work.

In acknowledging there is no right of appeal to an independent Tribunal, to ensure consistency it is important there is a review process. The suggestion for a 2 stage review is therefore welcomed which will not only given consistency but will also build confidence in the decision making process.

Obviously, the T&F Group has specifically focussed here on the draft policy and will be reporting separately to Scrutiny in June on the follow up review of its recommendations.

The draft policy is a key element of this and the Group is grateful for the opportunity to have been able to consider a response to it.

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