

Summary Fair Treatment Assessment (FTA)

Area for Assessment:		
Name of service or function etc	Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) Policy	
Which Service does this affect?	Resources	
Is this a new, existing or revised function?	Revised	If a Saving please give amount(£) N/A
Summary of findings:		
Main conclusions on the likely impact of the function on different equality groups (protected characteristics):		
<p>The Council currently administers Council Tax Benefit (CTB) and Housing Benefit (HB), through the Income & Awards Service on behalf of the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). In addition to CTB and HB the DWP funds Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) through an annual grant with is administrated by the Council. DHP's are not payments of benefit, they are free-standing payments made at the discretion of the local authority. A customer does not have a right to a payment of DHP.</p> <p>At the time of formulating this assessment the Council is embarking on a co-ordinated approach to assisting residents through changes to welfare benefits. To support households through the changes in Housing Benefit the Government has increased the amount of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) funding to the Council for 2012/13 and pledged additional funding for 2013/14. However, it may not be sufficient to cover the financial effect of change in HB entitlement and/ or to assist all HB claimants facing hardship in meeting housing costs.</p> <p>The DHP policy has the objective to strike a balance between awarding further financial assistance to those in need, administrating the service within budget and encouraging claimants to seek additional support to achieve a positive outcome. Any award of DHP must be seen as being fair and consistent while ensuring all legislative requirements and hardship issues are addressed.</p> <p>Additional funding from the DWP and CLG has enabled the recruitment of a "Financial Support Officer" to work directly with households of HB claimants facing financial difficulties due to a loss in Housing Benefit or shortfall in rent and reducing the risk of negative outcomes for residents.</p> <p>It is important to identify factors that may affect vulnerable communities and ensure we are identifying any that could have a disproportionate negative effect on certain groups. We need to recognise these effects in our approach to awarding DHP.</p> <p>It is important to note the impact of the HB changes will not only affect vulnerable people receiving HB but also affect providers of support as claimants reach for support and assistance. As we aim to work closer with agencies to holistically support residents, we need to be aware of the waiting time for each agency to see clients and award DHP as relevant.</p> <p>It is important we develop ways of monitoring those who have been successful or unsuccessful in awards and use information in the future to both modify our approach and forecast any identified money available and needed by claimants.</p>		

Actions:

Actions to be taken to mitigate or reduce any negative impact:

Action	Outcome	Timescale
General Awareness Training	<p>To ensure all relevant staff, partners, third sector organisations or targeted residents are aware of DHP and circumstances for possible award.</p> <p>Training will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include when DHP can be awarded. When DHP may not be awarded. The DHP application, decision making and appeal process. • Be provided to relevant staff within Solihull Connect, Contact Centre, Solihull Community Housing Income & Awards and departments identified as providing support for key vulnerable or prioritised groups, e.g. foster carers. • Be provided to key partner organisations assisting individuals who may be in receipt of Housing Benefit. These include Citizens Advice Bureau Solihull, D.I.A.L and local registered housing providers. <p>Information on situations when DHP may be available, the DHP application, decision making and appeal process will be make available on the councils web site for residents' use.</p>	Completion of awareness training by 31 March 2013
Establish Equality Monitoring System	<p>To ensure all relevant characteristics are monitored for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All successful DHP applications, and • Unsuccessful applications where possible. 	Monitoring in place by 31 March 2013
Forecasting to determine priority groups & timetable for yearly forecasting activities	<p>Yearly and rolling forecasting of DHP spend is agreed with accountancy and communicated to relevant staff, partners, third sector organisations that may assist agreed priority groups.</p> <p>The results of forecasting will enable clarity of households or individuals who may have priority in receiving DHP award to be communicated to relevant staff, partners, third sector organisations and residents.</p>	Forecasting in place and communicated 31 March 2013 with further quarterly reviews
The recruitment of a "Financial Support Officer" to work directly with households of HB claimants facing financial difficulties due to a loss in Housing Benefit or shortfall in rent and reducing the risk of negative outcomes for residents.	The post holder will work with households, colleagues, partners and third sector organisations to develop a practical 'action plan' for DHP assistance which is relevant for each unique household situation	Officer in post working with targeted households by December 2013

Encourage closer multi-agency/ partnership working, introduce easier access for advisors to help relevant clients apply for DHP	Training to be held in organisations identified as assisting and supporting residents most in need of DHP. Open communications between Income & Awards officers accessing DHP applications and external advisors assisting clients. Regular reviews to ensure continuity of awards and encourage best practice.	Training to be completed with all relevant parties by 31 March 2013 with further quarterly reviews
View any actions to complement partners working arrangements - including complementing not duplicating actions & resources	Partnership working process in place to ensure clear understating of roles & responsibilities.	Partnership process in place by 31 March 2013 with further quarterly reviews
Introduce a new application form and guidance notes, asking questions relevant to identifying vulnerable groups	A consistent application process to be easily accessible to all relevant staff, partners or third sector organisations.	Application form and guidance readily available for residents to apply through agreed organisations by 31 March 2013 with further quarterly reviews
Introduce information sharing between partners where relevant and within remit of Data Protection Act	Introduction of a data sharing agreement and process to ensure claimants, staff and organisations are assisting residents within the data protection regulations.	Agreement and necessary process agreed with all parties and in place by 31 March 2013 with further quarterly reviews
To revisit the DHP Policy and FTA once the revised Housing Allocations Policy and relevant Welfare Reforms are in place.	To ensure fair treatment of individuals applying for DHP once the Housing Allocations Policy and Welfare Reforms are in place.	To be determined
Date Assessment Signed Off	15 November 2012	