

Appendix 2

Case Studies for Discretionary Housing Payment Report to Scrutiny

Case Study 1 (Benefit Cap, Employment Outcome)

The Welfare Reform Team contacted the customer due to the application of the Benefit Cap, and arranged a meeting. At the meeting the customer went through her options and set out a plan for the future to sustain her tenancy. This was focused on helping the customer with basic work and job searching skills so she could find employment, and help with housing because issues with the landlord were preventing the customer focusing on long term solutions.

A DHP was awarded with conditions to seek employment and to engage with our partner organisations. The customer started working with Skills Training UK and engaging with employment support. The customer stayed engaged for the 9 months that followed, improving her skills and employability over this period, even after going through a period of uncertainty when she had a dispute with her landlord. At the 3 monthly reviews the conditions were updated and changed to recognise the improving work prospects. After 9 months the customer found part time work as a receptionist and qualified for working tax credit exempting her from the Cap. The customer was found not to qualify for extended Housing Benefit payments so the DHP was awarded for a further month to cover her rent as she waited for her first wage slip.

Case Study 2 (Bedroom Tax, Debt, Employment Outcome)

The customer was referred to the Welfare Reform Team by a Rent Advisor after the customer had built up arrears of £1,000. They were affected by the bedroom tax and at risk of eviction. A caseworker met with the customer to discuss her long-term options and a DHP claim. A DHP award was made with conditions set over a 2 month period due to the customer having a history of failing to engage. These were to agree an arrangement on the rent account to bring down the arrears, to seek to increase her income by finding work and working with our partners to support her into work.

Shortly afterwards she made the arrangement on the arrears and started working with the Blackbird Leys job club to support her job search. At the 2 months mark she had made satisfactory progress and the DHP was extended for a further 3 months. The job club worked with the customer to produce a good CV and covering letter, improved her interview skills and confidence, and even drove the customer around employers to drop in CVs. The customer has now started work as a carer after the job club helped her with an application. She no longer claims housing benefit so is not affected by the bedroom tax. Her arrears have now halved and she is secure in her tenancy.

Case Study 3 (Bedroom Tax, Ongoing DHP).

The customer was referred to the Welfare Reform Team from the contact centre in January after calling about the impact of the Bedroom tax which meant she was

losing 25% of her Housing Benefit. The customer has a long history of both serious physical and mental illness, and has no support from carers or social services at the present time.

A case worker has been in regular contact with the customer over the year to ensure she is coping and not falling into arrears. She required intensive support, mainly down to suffering with memory loss and extreme anxiety, needing frequent face-to-face meetings and at some point's daily phone conversations. This was mainly spent reassuring her that she was not falling into arrears, committing fraud (by applying for DHP), or reminding her what was happening.

A DHP was awarded for 6 months and then renewed for 6 months to cover her rent shortfall. The long term options for the customer have been discussed but have failed to find a long term suitable solution - she can't move from the property due to support networks and adaptations, she also would not be able to cope with a lodger due to her mental health, and is likely never to be able to work.

In addition to this other welfare reforms have affected the customer. She transferred from Incapacity Benefit to ESA in June, which added to her distress as she didn't understand her situation, and again she turned to the Council for support. Finally in July she was written to by the Direct Payment Demonstration Project to move her to direct Housing Benefit payments. This caused a panic attack and the need for a meeting. A Welfare Reform Officer helped her fill in the letter detailing why she could not deal with direct payments, and she was exempted from the project.

The customer remains in frequent contact with her designated Council Officer but is secured in her property with DHP paying her rental shortfall until the next financial year. She is now being supported by her brother with her financial affairs.

Case Study 4 (Bedroom Tax, Team work, Downsize)

In May 2014 this customer was struggling to pay his rent when he was affected by the 'bedroom tax', finding himself with a 25% reduction in his Housing Benefit. Falling into rent arrears and battling with increasingly challenging mental health issues, Mr X was entering a spiral of troubles. When a Rent Officer noticed these issues, he contacted the Welfare Reform Team for advice.

Working together with the Council's tenancy sustainment, housing and rent teams, the Welfare Reform Case Worker introduced the option of downsizing. Working together, the officers supported the customer by awarding a DHP and helped him start bidding on smaller properties.

The Welfare Reform Case Worker took responsibility to ensure there was clear communication between officers so everyone knew exactly what support the customer was receiving. Not only did this make the support efficient, it meant he received consistent advice, despite being supported by four separate teams from the council. The customer successfully moved into a smaller property on 18th August 2014, is no longer affected by the bedroom tax and has been given a fresh start.