

City Executive Board response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 17 May 2018 concerning the Discretionary Housing Payments Policy

Provided by the Board Member Supporting Local Communities

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Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1. <i>That consideration is given to 'topping up' the DHP grant provided by HM Government, in order that the policy criteria can be broadened to include more residents who are in need of support. Consideration should be given to how this might be funded and to what extent, such as from the Homelessness Reserve.</i>	Not agreed	<p>Topping up the DHP would not necessarily reach the specific residents in need of support due to the restrictive nature of the DHP regulations. The biggest issue in terms of hardship occurs before people are in receipt of Universal Credit and you have to be in receipt of Universal Credit to be entitled to DHP. This is why the additional hardship fund was created as it provides flexibility to reach the people most in need.</p> <p>Whilst there are still funds available in the hardship scheme we anticipate there may be a bigger draw on it this year as an increasing number of people move onto universal credit. Therefore we will keep it under review and make more funds available if necessary.</p>

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the following point of clarification:

The City Executive Board on 22 May 2018 expressed concern the Scrutiny Committee's report (paragraph 3 – below in italics) appeared to suggest that the agreed DHP Policy criteria have been applied with varying degrees of consistency as a direct response to (and to ameliorate the consequences of) varying levels of grant funding. This is patently not the case. The priorities for the allocation of DHPs have been fine-tuned from year to year to target those with the greatest need (e.g. families have been prioritised over single people) but the Policy at any particular time (as agreed by the City Executive Board) has always been applied consistently and no one has been refused a DHP who would otherwise have been awarded one. Changes to the level of DHP grant funding from year to year have reflected changes to the benefits regime at a national level. While the Council's grant funding has been reduced for 2018/19, no new demand is expected to arise this year as a consequence of changes to benefits.

3. One key issue that is evident from the report is that the varying level of HM Government grant received each year provided no consistency in the total level of grant available in any given year. For example, in 2015/16, the total net expenditure on DHPs was £270,505 (94% of the available grant), but this stretched to £494,566 in 2017/18 (97% of the available grant). In these circumstances, it is clear that the policy criteria is being applied with varying consistency based on the different levels of grant received each year. The Committee are pleased however to see that officers are working to ensure that the maximum amount of grant is being used to support local residents.