

**To: City Executive Board**

**Date: 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

**Report of: Helen Bishop**

**Title of Report: Discretionary Housing Payments Policy**

### **Summary and Recommendations**

**Purpose of report:** To approve the request for additional Discretionary Housing Payment funding, and to approve the new Discretionary Housing Payments Policy

**Key decision? No**

**Executive lead member: Cllr Susan Brown**

**Policy Framework: N/A**

**Recommendation(s):**

1. To approve the revised Discretionary Housing Payment policy at Appendix 1
2. To delegate authority to the Head of Customer Services to vary the amount and duration of Discretionary Housing Payment awards in line with changing demand.

Appendices to report –

Appendix 1 – Amended Discretionary Housing Payments Policy

Appendix 2 – Risk Register

Appendix 3 – Equalities Impact Assessment

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's) are monies allocated by local authorities under legislation set out in the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000 and The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 (SI2001/1167). In summary, the funds can be used to meet eligible rent for people already in receipt of housing benefit. The customer must make an application for the payment, and the council must consider the applicants financial need if an award is to be made. In effect, the fund allows some local discretion to meet the needs that are not covered by the national Housing Benefit scheme.
2. In the interests of administering the fund fairly and consistently, it is recommended that the Council has a clear policy and criteria on which to base these decisions. This should take into account the local housing situation and other significant factors. The amended policy is set out in Appendix 1 to this document.
3. Guidance from the Department of Communities & Local Government (DCLG) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) recommends using the DHP fund as one way of preventing and tackling homelessness. On occasions a small

increase to Housing Benefit payments via the DHP fund can secure adequate housing at a much lower cost to the Council than dealing with the same customers as homeless. The guidance also advises that support from the DHP fund, should generally be temporary in nature.

4. The prevention of homelessness is one of the Council's key objectives, and the payment of DHP's supports this. Since 2004, the Council has reduced the number of families in temporary accommodation from over 1,000 to 120. This has largely been achieved by placing people in private sector accommodation through the Home Choice scheme. Currently 887 families have such tenancies, sustained with a Home Choice deposit or bond, and half of this number are supported with a DHP. Payment of DHP helps sustain these tenancies where shortfalls in Housing Benefit might otherwise lead to evictions.
5. The Council's Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) policy should be regularly updated to ensure that support is being provided in accordance with the Council's objectives. However there is a specific need to review the policy in 2013 as a result of the impact of the Government's reductions in Welfare Benefits which are likely to result in a significant increase in applications for DHP's. The government has also provided more money to Local Authorities for Discretionary Housing Payments. Funding has increased from £60 million in 2012/13 to £165 million in 2013/14.
6. Although this represents significant additional funding, it only equates to approximately 6% of the estimated national reduction in Housing Benefit awards. Oxford City Council's grant for 2013/14 is £525,369, an increase of £295,523 from 2012/13. However the cumulative impact of changes to Housing benefit from 2011-2013 is estimated at an annual reduction of £3.5 million in payments to Oxford residents.
7. Benefit claimants may be seeing reductions in their Housing Benefit due to a reduction in the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, the Benefit Cap or the Under Occupancy rules in the social sector (known as the "bedroom tax"). There is an additional impact for private sector tenants in that rents are increasing at a greater rate than the LHA rates, where increases have been limited to a maximum of 1% for the next two years.
8. It is important that the Council's DHP policy is able to focus support where it is needed most whilst also encouraging people to take responsibility for their personal circumstances. A proportion of the DHP funding is provided specifically to support people who are disabled, and the policy reflects this. The Government's Welfare Reform program is aimed at incentivising work and helping to move people off benefits where possible. This is also reflected in the policy.

## **SCHEME COST**

9. Oxford City Council pays out around £67 million per annum in Housing Benefit to around 12,500 households. The majority of this is claimed back in subsidy from central government. Many of these households receive sufficient Housing Benefit to cover their rent in full. Those who do not, fall into the following categories:
  - 1) Those that are working or have other income above the basic minimum levels. Their benefit is reduced in proportion to their income and capital.
  - 2) Private sector tenants in properties considered too large by the national scheme for the household or more expensive than the average for Oxford.

- 3) Social sector tenants in properties considered too large by the national scheme.
- 4) People impacted by the Benefit Cap (from Summer 2013). Families will be restricted to a total of £500 per week in benefits. This will be £350 for individuals. The following benefits are included in the Cap:
  - i. Bereavement Allowance
  - ii. Carer's Allowance
  - iii. Child Benefit
  - iv. Child Tax Credit
  - v. Employment and Support Allowance
  - vi. Guardian's Allowance
  - vii. Housing benefit
  - viii. Incapacity benefit
  - ix. Income Support
  - x. Jobseeker's Allowance
  - xi. Maternity Allowance
  - xii. Severe Disablement Allowance
  - xiii. Widowed Parent's Allowance (or Widowed Mother's Allowance or Widows Pension you started getting before 9 April 2001)
10. Oxford's grant for 2013/14 is £525,369 increased from £229,846 last year. Regulations put a ceiling on DHP expenditure of 2.5 times the central government grant. Therefore for 2013/14 the ceiling is £1,313,423. Any expenditure over and above the grant, up to the ceiling is a direct cost to the Council.
11. The Housing Service is committed to providing an additional £100,000 from Homelessness Prevention funding to supplement the DHP grant. This means there is a total fund of £625,369 spend in this way.
12. Discretionary Housing Payment expenditure in 2012/13 was £199,206 against a budget of £229,846. Although this represented an increase in spending of over one third from 2011/12 it was the first time that Oxford under spent its DHP grant.
13. Expenditure on DHP's increased greatly throughout the year from £36,175 in Quarter 1 to £84,102 in Quarter 4. The majority of these requests came from private tenants affected by the reduction in Local Housing Allowance Rates. This year will see applications for people affected by the new Under Occupancy rules in the social sector and the Benefit Cap. These two measures are estimated to reduce Housing Benefit by £1.7 million. This potential additional demand is well in excess of our budgeted provision. As such it is necessary to amend our policy for awarding Discretionary Housing Payments to maximise its effectiveness and utilise the awards to facilitate more sustainable solutions for residents.
14. Forecasting demand for Discretionary Housing Payment is very difficult. Expenditure in 2012/13 was significantly less than expected. A reason for this is thought to be the delay from when a change occurs in the benefit system, to when people ask for help. For this reason the Board are requested to delegate authority to the Head of Customer Services to vary the amount and duration of awards in line with demand for DHP's.

## **POLICY CHANGES**

15. The aims of the DHP Policy have been narrowed down, with emphasis being placed on the prevention of homelessness, and the use of DHP as temporary support whilst a more sustainable solution is found.
16. The revised policy includes provision for conditionality to be applied to the majority of awards, and for the awards to be withdrawn if that conditionality is not met. It is intended that any conditionality is designed to promote the reduction of discretionary expenditure, help support people into work, or assist with reducing rental liability. Examples provided in the policy include attending work related coaching and seeking assistance to manage debts.
17. Ongoing awards of Discretionary Housing Payments are not sustainable in the long run. The introduction of Universal Credit will see a reduction in the DHP grants provided to Local Authorities. As such a new measure is introduced in the revised policy to make any repeat awards of DHP smaller than previous awards for people of working age where at least one adult in the household is capable of taking up work.
18. The changes to Housing Benefit outlined above will see greater demand than ever for assistance in the form of Discretionary Housing Payments. As such it is important to ensure there is consistency in determining applications. To ensure this, a 10% check of all applications will be made, whether successful or unsuccessful.

## **RISK**

19. An evaluation of the risks associated with the implementation of this policy has been carried out. A detailed risk register is at Appendix 4.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

20. No impact

## **EQUALITIES IMPACT**

21. An initial impact assessment has been carried out and is at Appendix 3. No undue, adverse impacts have been identified. However as the DHP budget is finite, and needs to be allocated within set guidelines, monitoring will be carried out to ensure there are no unintended consequences of the policy to any specific group of customers.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

22. By making effective use of the Discretionary Housing Payment budget, and targeting awards effectively, the Council will save the costs of placing people in temporary accommodation or dealing with people who are homeless. Typically the cost of placing someone in temporary accommodation can be 18 times that of sustaining a tenancy using DHPs. However, there is a risk that the £625k of financial resources available to the council will be insufficient to cover the potential increase in applications for DHP which may arise from the welfare reforms currently being implemented. Whilst there is a £362 earmarked reserve in the region of

£520k clearly any use of this reserve is one-off in nature and is unsustainable in the longer term. Going forward officers will be carefully monitoring the situation.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

23. The recommendations of this report are within the scope of the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000 and The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 (SI2001/1167), and subsequent amendments.

24. As policy in this area is discretionary, the Council must ensure it does not fetter its discretion.

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### **List of background papers:**

**Version number: 1**

## Appendix 1

### Revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy

# Oxford City Council's Discretionary Housing Payment Policy

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## 1. Aims

- 1.1. The overarching objective of this policy is to distribute funding granted under the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme (DHP) in order to prevent homelessness. This will be achieved by providing short term relief to applicants in order to give them time to find more sustainable solutions to their financial arrangements.
- 1.2. Demand for support through awards of DHP is likely to increase from 2013/14 as a result of the introduction of under occupancy criteria in the social sector, and the Benefit Cap. This is in addition to the current demand from private sector tenants who have seen a reduction in the Local Housing Allowance rates. These three measures are estimated to reduce the amount of Housing Benefit paid in Oxford by £3 million annually.
- 1.3. **The Council's DHP policy intends to provide people with short term support whilst they seek ways of increasing their income or reducing their rental liability, or other outgoings.**
- 1.4. In addition to the overarching objective of the policy outlined in 1.1, the policy also aims to
  - support vulnerable young people in the transition to adult life, including young people leaving care
  - keep families together;
  - support the vulnerable in the local community;

## 2. Determination of Applications

- 2.1. Applications for DHP awards must be made on the form shown at Appendix A. The Benefits Service will treat all applications for DHP on their individual merits.
- 2.2. DHP's can not be awarded in the following circumstances:
  - To top up an award made under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme<sup>1</sup>.
  - To contribute to the cost of ineligible service charges
  - To assist in paying for rent increases imposed as a result of incurring rent arrears
  - To assist in paying for rent costs which arise from the imposition of sanctions or reductions in Housing Benefit. These include any reduction made as a result of not complying with work related conditionality, or in arranging maintenance as directed by the Child Support Agency, or breaching a community service order.
- 2.3. It is not intended to award DHP in the following circumstances, unless to do so would strongly support the policy objectives outlined above:
  - Assistance with moving costs, rent in advance, and deposits (unless moving to more affordable accommodation)
  - Assistance with Council Tax Reduction
  - Shortfalls caused by a non-dependent deduction.

<sup>1</sup> Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 provides for Local Authorities to make reductions in the amount of Council Tax owed by an individual.

- Where a DHP is requested for a backdated period
- Where Capital in excess of £6,000 is held for people of working age, or £10,000 for those of pensionable age
- Where the tenancy was not affordable when it was taken on.
- Where an applicant has multiple outstanding debts, and professional debt advice has not been sought, nor a plan put in place to deal with the debt
- Where there is affordable and suitable available alternative accommodation.
- Where applicants have not taken steps to reduce or remove their need for DHP, and/or state the period of time they require the DHP.
- Where multiple family units or households are living in one property, and another household could be expected to make additional contributions to the rent
- Where fraud has been admitted or proven in relation to claims for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Council Tax Reduction Scheme or Discretionary Housing Payments.

2.4 In deciding whether to award a DHP, the Benefits Service will consider:

- how the award will meet the policy objectives
- the shortfall between Housing Benefit and the rental liability (unless Universal Credit is in payment, in which case the award can be any amount up to the amount of eligible rent);
- any steps taken by the claimant to reduce their rental liability;
- any steps taken by the claimant to find work, or increase their hours of work
- the financial and medical circumstances (including ill health and disabilities) of the claimant, their partner and any dependants and any other occupants of the claimant's home;
- the income and expenses of the claimant, their partner and any dependants or other occupants of the claimant's home. (All applicants will be required to complete an Income & Expenses Form.) Where it is felt that expenditure is inappropriate or incompatible with award of a DHP, the claimant will be referred for debt advice or financial capability support.
- any savings or capital that might be held by the claimant or their family;
- the level of indebtedness of the claimant and their family;
- the exceptional nature of the claimant and his / her family's circumstances;
- the amount available in the DHP budget at the time of the application;
- the possible impact on the Council of not making such an award, e.g. the pressure on priority homeless accommodation;
- any other special circumstances brought to the attention of the Benefits Service.

### **3 Amount and condition of awards**

3.1 The Benefits Service will decide how much to award based on all the circumstances. However the main determining factor will be a consideration of the applicant's ability to meet their shortfall based on their income and expenditure. The amount awarded can be any amount up to the difference between the applicant's Housing Benefit award, and their rental liability. An award of a DHP does not guarantee a further award at a later date even if the claimant's circumstances have not changed.

3.2 The DHP scheme should be seen as providing short-term financial assistance, rather than on-going financial support. The period of the award will be decided based on the criteria above and any evidence supplied. Normally awards will be made for a maximum of six months, unless making a longer award would support the aims set out in 1.1 and 1.4 above. Longer awards are likely to be more appropriate where people with disabilities are affected by the

Under-occupancy rules, and unable to take any other course of action to mitigate their circumstances. The start date of the award will normally be:

- the Monday after the Benefits Service receives the written claim for a DHP; or
- the date on which entitlement to Housing Benefit starts; or
- another date, where this fulfils the objectives of this policy better than the dates above.

3.3 An award of DHP will have conditionality attached to it in the majority of circumstances. Any conditionality will be linked to either increasing the applicant's income or reducing their rental liability. Examples of types of conditionality could include:

- Attending work related coaching with our partner Skills UK
- Registering for housing and bidding for suitable properties in each cycle
- Seeking assistance to manage debts

The intention of any conditionality is to assist the customer in improving their circumstances rather than as a punitive measure. However an award of DHP can be cancelled if a customer has not undertaken the agreed activity.

3.4 When making a repeat application for an award, the customer must set out the steps they have taken to reduce their reliance on DHP awards. Such applications will require an interview with a Council officer before an award can be made. Repeat awards may be smaller than any previous award, where the customer is of working age and capable of taking up work. Any such reductions will be based on an individual's circumstances.

#### **4 Administration of Payments**

4.1 Where the applicant appears to be entitled to another state benefit that they are not receiving, they will be advised to make a claim, and provided with details of other agencies in the city who may be able to help with such a claim. Any DHP will be reviewed in light of the result of this claim.

4.2 The Benefits Service may need to revise an award of a DHP where the claimant's circumstances have materially changed. Any revision to the award will take effect from the Monday following the date of change in circumstances. If a revision of an award leads to an overpayment then steps will be taken to recover this money if it is reasonable in the circumstances to do so.

4.3 A DHP will normally be made payable to the person receiving the Housing Benefit payment. This will normally be the claimant or the landlord. If the claimant wants the payment made to another party, they should make this request on the application form. This could be:

- the claimant;
- their partner;
- an appointee;
- their landlord (or an agent of the landlord); or
- any third-party to whom it might be more appropriate to pay.

4.4 The Benefits Service will pay an award of DHP by the most appropriate means available. This will normally be by BACS transfer. The payment frequency will normally be made in line with payments of Housing Benefit.

4.5 Decisions regarding DHPs will be notified to the claimant within 14 days of receiving the last piece of information required to determine the application, and will include:

- Reasons for the decision
- The start and end date of the award
- Conditions attached to the award
- The claimants right of review



- Advice that future awards may not be made

4.6 A more senior officer will review any DHP decision that is disputed by the claimant. If the decision is still upheld, any further dispute must be dealt with by judicial review.

4.7 Where a customer has a complaint in the way we have applied our policy, they may ask the Local Government Ombudsman to look at their case, after exhausting the Council's own complaints procedure.

## **5 Fraud**

5.1 The Benefits Service is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. A claimant who tries to fraudulently claim a DHP by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under the Theft Act 1968. Where the Benefits Service suspects such a fraud may have occurred, the matter will be investigated and this may lead to the instigation of criminal proceedings.

## **6 Monitoring**

6.1 The Team Leader/ Manager will extract reports from the DHP software on a monthly basis to ensure that expenditure is within budget and is correctly profiled to ensure no overspend at the end of the financial year. Spending to date and projected annual spending will be reported on a quarterly basis to voluntary groups and housing providers. Overpayments will be reconciled on a monthly basis. A 10% check will be made of all DHP applications, whether successful or not, to ensure that decision making is consistent.

6.2 The Team Leader/Manager will also report on the reason for making a DHP award from the following list:

Benefit Cap

LHA Reductions

Housing Benefit reductions due to under-occupation

Combination of reforms

Other

This will be reported back to DWP twice a year for monitoring.

## **7 Communication of Policy**

7.1 The Benefits Service will publicise the scheme and will work with all interested parties to achieve this. A copy of this policy statement will be made available for inspection and will be posted on Oxford City Council's web site.

## **8 Review**

8.1 This policy is effective from 12 June 2013. It will be reviewed no later than 1 July 2015.

**Appendix 1:****DHP Application form**

The application form shown on the following pages is provided as a 3 page gatefold form. The part that customers need to fill in has a perforated edge so it can be detached. The customer is able to retain the DHP guidance and other helpful information contained in the other pages.

**Customer Services**



[www.oxford.gov.uk](http://www.oxford.gov.uk)



# **Discretionary Housing Payments**

**Additional help towards rent for those  
receiving Housing Benefit**

**Postal Address**

Oxford City Council Benefits Service  
PO Box 10  
St Aldate's Chambers  
St Aldate's  
Oxford  
OX1 1EN

**Or Visit Us At**

Oxford City Council Customer Services Centre  
2 – 3 Bank Court  
Templars Square Shopping Centre  
Oxford  
OX4 3UZ

Oxford City Council Customer Services Centre  
St Aldate's Chambers  
109 – 113 St Aldate's  
Oxford  
OX1 1DB

**Telephone:** 01865 249811

**Fax:** 01865 252438

**Email:** [benefits@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:benefits@oxford.gov.uk)



## What is a Discretionary Housing Payment?

If you get Housing Benefit which does not cover the full amount of your rent, you may be able to get extra help by applying for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP).

If you apply for a DHP, we will look at all your circumstances to decide whether or not to make a payment. We will also decide how much, how long and how often we will make a DHP for. If we agree to make a DHP, payment will usually be made along with your usual Housing Benefit payments.

A DHP is not part of your normal Housing Benefit award, and you have no general right to get a DHP. The amount of money we have to pay DHPs is limited, and it is up to us to decide whether you should get a payment. Any payment may have certain conditions attached to it. These will be clearly explained to you.

A DHP is not meant to be a permanent option for paying your full rent. If you are awarded a DHP, our aim is to give you short to medium term financial support, which will give you (and any agencies supporting you) enough time to:

- look at the money you have coming in and going out so you can make up any rent or shortfall yourself; or
- find cheaper housing that you will be able to afford on a long term basis without the need to claim a DHP.

The kinds of things we will look at when deciding your claim include:

- whether there is a genuine risk of eviction from your home;
- your income and outgoings;
- whether you have any savings;
- any health problems you may have;
- whether you can get financial help from anywhere else (e.g. family or friends);
- whether you can move to cheaper housing.

This is not intended to be a full list – we look at all DHP claims individually, so if there is anything else you think is relevant, tell us about it.

We cannot give a DHP for all shortfalls in your rent. We cannot pay for:

- ineligible service charges included in your rent (e.g. personal heating or lighting charges, or meals);
- rent increases that have been made to recover any previous rent arrears with your landlord;
- rent, if you do not get Housing Benefit;
- a reduction in benefits because of sanctions;
- Housing Benefit that has been suspended; or
- shortfalls in benefit because overpayments are being recovered.

## How to claim

Please complete the enclosed claim form and income and expenditure form giving as much information as possible and return it to the Council as soon as possible.

Please provide any evidence to support your claim along with your completed claim form.

If we need any further evidence we will contact you. You should reply within one month. We will make a decision within one month of receiving your claim, or within one month of receiving any further information we have requested.

We will write to you and tell you:

- If your claim has been successful or not
- How much discretionary housing payment will be made
- How often you will receive it
- How long the payment will be made for

If you are unhappy with our decision you should write or e-mail, within one month of receiving our letter, asking for the decision to be looked at again. You should explain why you disagree with the decision and you can provide any further details or evidence that you wish us to look at.

You should send your letter to:

Oxford City Council Benefits Service  
PO Box 10  
St Aldate's Chambers  
St Aldate's  
Oxford  
OX1 1EN  
E-mail: [benefits@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:benefits@oxford.gov.uk)

**If you require this information in large print, or in any other format, please contact us on 01865 249811.**

# Claim for Discretionary Housing Payment

www.oxford.gov.uk



Full Name:.....

Address: .....

.....

.....

..... Post Code: .....

Telephone number: .....  
(if available during daytime)

Claim reference number: **80-** .....

Tick box if your tenancy was organised by the Home Choice Scheme

**Please state full reasons you are applying for a discretionary housing payment. You should give as much detail as possible and provide whatever evidence you think will support your claim. Please refer to section on “What is a Discretionary Housing Payment” for guidance. If necessary please continue on a separate sheet of paper.**

**How long do you want DHP to last?**

**How much are you requesting per week?**

**Anything else you think we should take into account?**

## Housing Benefit Income and Expenditure

The income / expenditure details on this form are required to assist the council in making a decision about Discretionary Housing Payments. You may be asked to provide proof of the amounts declared.

**Expenditure** (please state period as: W = weekly or M = monthly)

Expense	Period	Amount	Expense	Period	Amount
Rent (after HB)			Food		
Mortgage			Baby Food / Mix		
Council Tax (after CTRS)			Toiletries		
Ground Rent			Nappies		
Service Charges			Health Care e.g. prescriptions		
Repairs			Laundry / Dry Cleaning		
Water rates			Cleaning materials		
Insurance – endowment mortgage protection, building, contents, life			Newspapers / magazines		
Travel expenses			Cigarettes		
Meals at work			Alcohol		
Fuel			Clothing		
Gas			School meals		
Electricity			School trips		
Loans/ credit card repayments			Childcare		
Private Pension payments			TV licence		
Court Fines			Internet/ Cable/ Sky		
Maintenance payments			Furniture		
Hire Purchase (Car or other)			Telephone/ Mobile		
Entertainment			Holidays		
Housekeeping			Arrears (rent, council tax, mortgage, gas, electric)		
			Other		
			Other		

**Income** (please state period as: W = weekly or M = monthly)

Income Type	Period	Amount	Income Type	Period	Amount
Wages			Tax Credits		
Wages (partner)			Child Benefit		
Jobseeker's Allowance			Maintenance		
Income Support			Disability Living Allowance		
Employment Support Allowance			Occupational Pension		
State Retirement Pension			Carer's Allowance		
Sick pay/maternity pay			Student income		
Rent from lodger			Savings/ Investments total		
Money from non-dependant			Other		
Pension Credit			Other		

## Declaration

**I understand the following:**

- If I give information that is incorrect or incomplete, you may take action against me. This may include court action.
- You will use the information that I have provided to process my claim for Discretionary Housing Payments

**I know** I must let the council know about any change in my circumstances which might affect my claim.

**I declare** the information that I have given on this form is correct and complete.

Signed: ..... 373 ..... Dated: .....

## Other benefits and support services

**Food** – If you are pregnant or have a child under 4 years old, you may be able to get Healthy Start vouchers. These can be used to buy fruit, vegetables, milk and formula. Speak to your health visitor/midwife, or visit [www.healthystart.nhs.co.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.co.uk)

**Baby** – If you are pregnant, have recently given birth or become responsible for a child under one, you can find advice about the Sure Start Maternity Grant at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

**Health care charges** – You may be eligible for free prescriptions or other help with health costs. Phone the Health Cost advice line on 0845 850 1166, or pick up a form HC11 from your local chemist or health centre.

**Smoking** – If you would like advice on how to quit there is a free support service available. Phone Oxfordshire Smoking Advice Service on 0845 408 0300, speak to your local health centre or visit [www.smokefreeoxfordshire.nhs.uk](http://www.smokefreeoxfordshire.nhs.uk)

**Alcohol** – If you have concerns over alcohol or would like more information, including services which can help, visit [www.nhs.uk/livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx)

**School meals** – Your children may be eligible for free school meals. Call 01865 797199 or visit [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/school-meals](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/school-meals)

**Childcare** – You can get advice about finding and paying for childcare, including help with costs, from the Oxfordshire Family Information Service. Call 08452 262636 or 01865 328580, or visit [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/oxfordshire-family-information-service-oxonfis](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/oxfordshire-family-information-service-oxonfis)

**Debt and welfare benefits** – If you are in debt or need advice about claiming benefits, the Citizens Advice Bureau can help. Call 08444 111 444 (10am-4pm Monday-Friday), drop in at 95 St Aldate's, or visit [www.caox.org.uk](http://www.caox.org.uk) for details of opening hours.



**Sport/leisure** – Oxford Leisure offers a range of membership options for swimming, leisure and fitness centres in the city.

Visit [www.fusion-lifestyle.com/contracts/Oxford\\_City\\_Council/Memberships](http://www.fusion-lifestyle.com/contracts/Oxford_City_Council/Memberships)

**Energy Saving** – If you are struggling to pay your bills, you can get free and impartial advice on ways to save energy, including grants and offers to improve heating and energy efficiency,

from the Energy Saving Trust. Phone **0800 512 012** or visit [www.energysavingtrust.org.uk](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk)

**Housing Advice** – If you believe you may be at risk of losing your home, contact our Housing Needs team on **01865 252858** or email [housingneeds@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:housingneeds@oxford.gov.uk)

**Education, employment or training** – If you would like to look at your options for getting into or back into work or training, contact our Housing Needs team on **01865 252145**,

email [workandtraining@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:workandtraining@oxford.gov.uk), or visit [www.oxford.gov.uk/workandtraining](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/workandtraining)

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## **Appendix 2 Risk Register**

Nos.	Raised by	Date Raised	Probability	Impact	Gross Risk Score	Proximity	Description	Mitigation	Owner	Target Date	Revised Probability	Revised Impact	Residual Risk Score
DHP001	PW	30/4/13	3	4	12	Short term	Council fails to spend government allocation of DHP	Promote DHPs to customers, partner organisations and relevant stakeholders.	PW	31/3/14	2	4	8
DHP002	PW	30/4/13	4	4	16	Short term	Those most in need of support don't receive it due to budget being spent before EOY	Monitor expenditure monthly. Provide scope to amend length and amount of awards during year to target those most in need	PW	31/3/14	3	3	9
DHP003	PW	30/4/13	4	3	12	Short term	Council challenged on application of policy by unsuccessful applicants.	10% check of applications carried out to ensure decision making is consistent	PW	31/3/14	2	3	6
DHP004	PW	30/4/13	2	4	8	Short term	Unintended negative impact on specific customer groups	Monitor successful and unsuccessful applications against the criteria established in the policy	PW	31/3/14	1	4	4

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## Appendix 3

### Initial Equalities Impact Assessment

1. Within the aims and objectives of the policy or strategy which group (s) of people has been identified as being potentially disadvantaged by your proposals? What are the equality impacts?

The Discretionary Housing Payment policy is intended to support those who are disadvantaged by changes to Housing Benefit rules, specifically the under occupation rules in the social sector, the Benefit Cap and the changes to Local Housing Allowance rates. The under occupation rules disproportionately impact older customers (from 45 to pension age) and people with a disability. The Benefit Cap affects mainly households where there are lots of children (and in most cases a single parent). The Local Housing Allowance changes impact mainly on households with children. As such, if the DHP policy is not applied correctly, these groups could be disadvantaged.

2. In brief, what changes are you planning to make to your current or proposed new or changed policy, strategy, procedure, project or service to minimise or eliminate the adverse equality impacts?

Please provide further details of the proposed actions, timetable for making the changes and the person(s) responsible for making the changes on the resultant action plan

The aim of amending the DHP policy is to help more families and individuals retain their tenancies than are currently supported by Housing Benefit alone. In addition to the financial support that we can provide, our Welfare Reform team will assist customers in negotiating new rents with landlords, and in trying to find alternative accommodation if the rent is unaffordable. For people affected by the new under occupancy rules in the social sector we will explore whether taking a lodger is an appropriate solution. Where this can not be found, we will continue to support them in their existing accommodation as far as the DHP budget allows.

We will also be signposting customers who are in debt to appropriate advice agencies who can assist them in tackling this issue. We will also be working with people affected by the Housing Benefit changes to try and support them into work so they no longer rely on Housing benefit.

Please note that the Home Choice team already carry out similar work for families who are in danger of becoming homeless.

3. Please provide details of whom you will consult on the proposed changes and if you do not plan to consult, please provide the rationale behind that decision.

Please note that you are required to involve disabled people in decisions that impact on them

We are not consulting externally on the change to the DHP policy. The report is the product of joint working between the Benefits and Housing team. By working together we were able to properly consider the impact of changes in the DHP policy on the ability to sustain tenancies. Due to the restrictions imposed by regulations in this area, the Council is quite constrained in the actions it can take. As such the process of consultation may raise unrealistic expectations and would be an unproductive exercise at this point, as it would not generate any information that the Council hasn't already anticipated or did not know.

However copies of an initial draft of the revised policy were circulated to a wide range of advice and support groups which operate in the city for their comment.

4. Can the adverse impacts you identified during the initial screening be justified without making any adjustments to the existing or new policy, strategy, procedure, project or service?

Please set out the basis on which you justify making no adjustments

As outlined in Section 2 above, adjustments have been considered to provide support to anyone who is adversely impacted by this policy. In addition, as this policy is discretionary, all applications will be considered on their merit. Where an application meets the aims of the policy, it is intended to provide support.

The policy is a fairly straightforward one to apply. The primary concern is that any future difficulties will be due to the anticipated rise in the volume of claims that will be made. CEB should note that, as it is a discretionary payment the Council are not intending to set out any circumstances in which we definitely wouldn't support someone. If an application meets various policy aims, it will be successful.

5. You are legally required to monitor and review the proposed changes after implementation to check they work as planned and to screen for unexpected equality impacts.

Please provide details of how you will monitor/evaluate or review your proposals and when the review will take place

Unsuccessful applications for DHP will be reviewed on a quarterly basis to try and identify any trends showing unexpected equality impacts. This will be undertaken by the Benefits team leader responsible for this area. The first review will be made in September 2014.

A 10% check of applications will be carried out to ensure consistency of decision making. This will be done for both successful and unsuccessful applications. Monitoring will be carried out on a monthly basis, and this will also include the reason for the application being made.

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