

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 changes proposed in the new DHP policy broaden the scope of the policy by removing reference to prioritisation of households with children. This was introduced last year as a result of a 44% reduction in the government contribution for DHPs. There is evidence that there was an undue impact on single adults (predominantly males). A new policy aim has been added which is to support people who are transitioning from hostels into settled accommodation. This group tends to comprise mainly of single males and so goes some way to redressing the negative impact which occurred last year.

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.

The CAB have expressed concern at the treatment of income related to disability benefits (Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Attendance Allowance). They believe that taking such income into account when determining DHP applications could be discriminatory as such income is intended to meet costs related to the illness or disability concerned. The Council's view is that it is reasonable to take such income into account provided that any expenditure related to such income is also taken into account. The presence of such income prompts officers to ask specific questions related to expenditure on care costs and related items.

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

In 2015/16 the DHP policy was narrowed in scope to take account of reduced government funding. This resulted in priority being given to families with children. The increase in budget means that this narrowing of priorities can be removed. The amended policy also emphasises the intention to support

people into work

The Welfare Reform team have developed strong partnerships with a wide range of support organisations. Where financial support cannot be provided, customers will be referred to appropriate organisations for support..

As the policy is discretionary people who are in groups at risk of being disadvantaged can still receive DHP awards if to do so meets the policy's broader objectives.

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. There is no fundamental change being proposed to the DHP policy. 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.

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 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. 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

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. Regular reports have also been provided to Scrutiny Committee in the last two years. It is expected that this will continue.

Appendix 4

Discretionary Housing Payment – Background Document

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 or Universal Credit schemes.

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.

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.

Oxford City Council pays out around £70 million per annum in Housing Benefit to around 11,500 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. Families are currently restricted to a total of £500 per week in benefits, and individuals to £350 per week. In autumn 2016 the Cap will be lowered to £385 and £258 respectively. 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)