

WANDSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE AND CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 27TH FEBRUARY 2013

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE -27TH FEBRUARY 2013

EXECUTIVE – 4TH MARCH 2013

Report by the Director of Finance on Welfare reform

SUMMARY

This report updates on previous papers submitted to committee (Paper No. 12-84 presented on 25th January 2012 and Paper No. 12-316 presented 11th June 2012). The main focus of this report is to look at the reforms that are due to be introduced during the period April 2013 to April 2014. These reforms include:

- Council Tax Reduction Scheme;
- Localisation of element of the DWP Social Fund;
- Social Sector Size Criteria;
- Annual Benefit Cap of £26,000; and
- Universal Credit.

The report also includes analysis of the initial impacts of the earlier reform to Housing Benefit in the private rented sector, details of the criteria for awards under the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme and the proposed staffing measures required to support and advise the most affected residents and the consequential budget variation of £176,000 in 2013/14 which is fully funded from grant.

GLOSSARY

CPI	-	Consumer Price Index
CTRS	-	Council Tax Reduction Scheme
DCLG	-	Department for Communities and Local Government
DHP	-	Discretionary Housing Payment
DWP	-	Department for Work & Pensions

HB	-	Housing Benefit
JCP	-	Job Centre Plus
LHA	-	Local Housing Allowance
RCS	-	Rent Collection Service
TP	-	Transitional Protection
UC	-	Universal Credit
VOA	-	Valuation Office Agency
WDSF-		Wandsworth Discretionary Social Fund

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Finance and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee are recommended to note the update submitted on the impact of the Welfare Reforms and support the recommendations in paragraph 2. If they approve any views, comments or additional recommendations in this report, these will be submitted to the Executive for consideration
2. The Executive is recommended to approve -
 - (a) the proposed Discretionary Housing Payment Policy as set out in Appendix 2; and
 - (b) a budget variation of £176,000 in respect of 2013/14 only.
3. The General Purposes Committee are recommended to agree that the post of Welfare Reform Officer be extended to March 2014 and that four full time equivalent new posts be created to assist with the work of the Welfare Reform Officer for a 12 month period, as described in paragraphs 25 and 38.

BACKGROUND

4. The Welfare Reform Bill received Royal Assent on 8th March 2012. This report updates on previous paper submitted to the Executive, Paper No. 12-84 on 30th January 2012 and Paper No. 12-316 presented on 11th June 2012. The main focus of the report is to look at the reforms that are due to be introduced during the period April 2013 to April 2014.
5. The report also includes analysis of the initial impacts of the earlier reform to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) which is Housing Benefit (HB) for households in the private rented sector (PRS), details of the criteria for awards under the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme and the outcomes and role of the Welfare Reform Officer.

LOCAL HOUSING ALLOWANCE REFORM

6. The changes to LHA were introduced from April 2011 but with a phased approach and a period of 9 months transitional protection (TP) for all affected households. This meant that all new applications for LHA from April 2011 were assessed under the new rules, but due to TP the first existing LHA claims would be affected from January 2012 and the reductions would roll out across the caseload until all TP expired at the end of December 2012.
7. Analysis of the benefit database has shown that the number of households claiming Housing Benefit in the private rented sector has remained static since the introduction of these reforms. The caseload figures for April 2011 and December 2012 are identical in the fact there are 7,421 active claims. However, these are not the same households and as is normal there is an element of churn.
8. The caseload figures do indicate that there is a higher degree of movement in the wider caseload than in the cohort who has seen a reduction in benefit. Households on benefit at the same address in April 2011 & December 2012 are as follows:

Across all Households: 65%
Households affected by the reforms: 75%

9. There were 2,912 households who were eligible for TP; of these 675 households (23%) did not receive their full 9 month additional support. Of these, 375 households are still on HB within the Borough. The reasons for their TP ending are given in the Table 1.

Table 1: Reasons Why Household TP Ended Before 9 Months

Further Breakdown of active 352 claims	No. of Households	Percentage
Number still active: In same property but change in circumstances meant loss of TP	207	59%
Number still active: In new LHA property	90	26%
Number still active: In Council Tenancy	35	10%
Number still active: In B & B	8	2%
Number still active: In other HPU	5	1%
Number still active: In Housing Association:	7	2%

10. The remaining 300 households are either no longer entitled to HB or have moved out of Wandsworth. The Benefit Service does not hold accurate data to show their exact movements.
11. The LHA reform in April 2011 also introduced a cap on the maximum LHA payable on a specific sized property. From April 2013 these caps have been removed and replaced with an annual review of LHA rate by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA). This review of the LHA rates will see the an annual increase by the rate of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) where it is a positive figure whilst remaining the same if CPI has a negative value. The LHA rate will then remain the same for all claims received in that year running April to March.

COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

12. The Executive approved the proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) proposed in Paper No. 12- 654 presented on 4th October 2012. This was then subject to public consultation, the outcome of which was reported to the Committee and the Executive in Paper No. 12-750. The public consultation resulted in no changes being made to the proposal and the Wandsworth CTRS was ratified by the full Council on 5th December 2012.
13. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) are continuing to produce Regulations and clarification to support the introduction of CTRS and these are, where necessary, being incorporated into the final published version of Wandsworth CTRS. The Income Collection Service and the Benefits Service will be carrying out their annual uprating of benefit entitlements on the weekend of 2nd/3rd March 2013 at which stage amounts of CTRS will be applied to Council Tax Accounts for the billing year 2013/14.

LOCALISATION OF THE SOCIAL FUND

14. From April 2013 the Council will be responsible for administering a discretionary awards scheme. This will replace the Community Care Grant and Crisis Loans parts of the current DWP administered Social Fund which are being abolished from the end of March 2013.
15. The details of the scheme were approved by the Executive (Paper No. 13-75) on 28th January 2013. Work is progressing on the choice of IT solution and the local system will be operational from 1st April 2013

SOCIAL SECTOR SIZE CRITERIA

16. The social sector size criteria will be introduced from April 2013 and will mean households that are considered to rent a property that is larger than they require will have their HB reduced. The benefit will be reduced by 14% if the property has one extra bedroom and 25% if there are two or more additional bedrooms.
17. Based on the data provided on the size of both Council properties and Registered Social Landlord (RSL) stock, the Benefit Service has calculated that there will be; 1,466 affected Council tenants and 475 affected RSL tenants. The average weekly loss in benefit for Council tenants will be £24.48 and the average weekly loss in benefit for RSL tenants will be £21.24.
18. The Benefits Service is providing all the necessary information on these households to the Housing Department and to the RSLs operating within the Borough to enable them to work with their tenants.

TOTAL BENEFIT CAP

19. It has previously been reported to committee that the Total Benefit Cap would be introduced from April 2013. However, the Government has now announced that from this date the cap will only operate in four London borough councils (Bromley, Croydon, Enfield and Haringey) and will be rolled out nationally in September 2013, with the actual date still to be confirmed.
20. The data concerning households potentially affected by the weekly benefit cap is generated by the DWP and they have supplied the Council with an updated list. Previously circulated information was based on data received in September 2012 which indicated 837 households were potentially affected.
21. The latest data was received on 1st February 2013 and this shows a drop in the number of potentially affected households to 729. No commentary is provided by the DWP for the lower number but the main reduction is within the private sector caseload. It can be presumed that some of the drop is due to the effects of the LHA reforms in lowering rents and people moving to cheaper accommodation both in and out of the Borough.
22. The level of benefit of weekly benefit has also slightly reduced from the previously reported figure of £100 per week to £97 per week, with losses in the range of £1 to £500 per week.
23. The data also indicates that the benefit Cap will significantly impact on families as 683 (94%) of the potential affected households contain children.

24. As part of the work to ensure that potentially affected households are aware of the changes, officers within the Finance Department have met with the JCP to arrange joint customer contacts. In the period between now and the introduction of the change in September 2013 the officers aim to make personal contact with all households to explain the effects of these reforms and direct them to the JCP for assistance in finding employment. To assist with this, additional staffing resources will be required to deal with the short term additional increase in work whilst the Council moves towards implementing the overall benefit reform package.
25. Due to the level of work in this area and the other welfare changes, the Welfare Reform Officer post is proposed to be extended to March 2014 and two further posts are proposed for a further 12 months. This would enable the Council to offer one-to-one casework with vulnerable families, which has been identified as the most effective way of getting customers to engage with their changing financial environment. In addition to the Welfare Reform Officer posts, a specific need has been identified for a 12-month period to cover work with elderly and other similar clients and it is proposed to recruit two further posts for a twelve month period.
26. It is proposed that the substantial bulk of these contacts will be carried out by the Income Maximisation Officer in the Rent Collection Service (RCS) and the Welfare Reform Officer within the Benefit Service.
27. A full breakdown of the potential number of households affected by the Benefit Cap is attached at Appendix 1.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT

28. The DWP have indicated that London borough councils should not expect to see Universal Credit (UC) cases until April 2014 although the scheme will start to be piloted from April 2013. The full movement of cases from other welfare benefits to UC is still proposed to be achieved by April 2017. The DWP have advised that a migration timetable will be available before April 2013; this will inform all councils when they can expect their Housing Benefit caseload to migrate to UC.
29. The DWP are still operating a number of UC test projects on direct payments and models for service delivery. These have yet to be reported on but interim findings are expected by April 2014.
30. On 11th February 2013, the DWP published a "Universal Credit –Local support services framework". This outlines the arrangements and interaction between local authorities and the DWP and claimants for the period between 2013 and 2017 by which time it is planned that all UC claimants will be on the

national system. The framework suggests roles for local authorities in acting as a local support service to claimants enabling claimants to both submit claims, understand the result of the assessment, and provision of budgeting and financial advice.

31. The framework also provides further information on the categories of claimants that may be likely to need additional support including a wide range of claimants that would fall into the generable description of vulnerable such as those with mental health issues. physical disabilities and those supported by the troubled planning programme as examples. One of the roles of the Council acting as a local support service will be to identify cases from those in need of additional support to which exception to the normal payment rules for Universal Credit may be appropriate. One such exception is the direct payment of housing costs to the landlord. The final decision as to whether an individual should receive payments outside of the normal arrangements is the DWP.
32. The DWP have stated that the funding of the local support service will be subject to further discussions between the Government and local authorities. However, local authorities will be required to continue to provide welfare advice and support, housing advice and solutions to their residents from existing funding arrangements.

DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS

33. The Government has indicated that councils can use their discretionary housing payment (DHP) fund to help the most vulnerable families with shortfalls in their costs attributable to Welfare Reform. In recognition of the significantly reduced levels of housing cost support that will be available after the reforms, they have increased the money that is available for the Council to spend on DHP.
34. Over the past four years the fund allocated has increased as follows:

2010/11	£82,990
2011/12	£222,607
2012/13	£613,010
2013/14	£1,839,423

35. The policy for how DHP decisions will be made has been revised for this year based on the fact that main areas of expenditure will not just be meeting shortfalls resulting from the LHA reforms in the private sector but, due to welfare reform, will affect vulnerable households across all tenures. The main principals that the DHP policy reflect are:
- (a) DHP is an interim support while long term solutions are found;
 - (b) the applicant must be engaging in a process that will find a long term solution
 - (c) the proposed DHP policy is attached as Appendix 2 and is recommended for approval.
36. The Benefits Service will continue to ensure that DHP applicants are referred to the necessary support agencies to assist them with long term solutions, and will through the work of the Welfare Reform Officer continue to pro actively work with identified vulnerable households to provide not just assistance through DHP but practical long term planning
37. It is expected that most awards will continue to be made for initial periods of 3 – 6 months with a built in review period to ensure that households are still engaging and not reliant on DHP as the solution to their housing shortfall.

COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES

38. The Head of Human Resources comments that it is proposed that the post of Welfare Reform Officer is extended to March 2014 and that an additional four FTE posts, to assist with this work, are established for a 12 month period. The salary grade of the additional posts will be evaluated under the Council's Job Evaluation Scheme. Any extension beyond 12 months would be subject to separate approval of the General Purposes Committee, if necessary under the Standing Order No. 83 procedure.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

39. The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Council when exercising its functions must have "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. As such an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken on 13th February 2013 and is attached as Appendix 3 to this report. This EIA has found that overall will the change not have a negative impact on any of the equality groups.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

40. The Council currently receives an administration grant from the DWP to cover part of the cost of administering Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. The current year's grant is £3,049,513, with notified grant for 2013/14 of £2,672,959. After grant, the budgeted net cost of the service in the two years is £2,279,000 in 2012/13 and £2,609,000 in 2013/14. It is unclear from the Local Support Services framework whether the administration grant will in future cover those aspects of work the Council will be required to undertake in its changed role. The Council will still be responsible for dealing with all Council Tax support work which covers the majority of existing claimants. It is assumed that, as claimants move over to UC, the DWP will pass information of their financial circumstances to the Council to reduce the amount of double handling. However, until further details are known, this has to be flagged up as a potential future cost pressure to the Council.
41. The Council has also received in the current year a grant for £134,000 in respect of welfare reform implementation for 2013/14. Meanwhile, in 2012/13 grant funding of £195,000 was received of which £90,000 of additional expenditure has been approved. If the staffing proposals summarised in paragraph 37 are approved, then a budget variation for 2013/14 of £176,000 will be required which will effectively be funded from grant received over the two years.
42. The Discretionary Housing payments will need to be contained within the allowance of £1.8 million received from the DWP.
43. With respect to the Social Fund, replacement expenditure will need to be contained within the overall grant of £1,127,634 for 2013/14 and £1,111,230 for 2014/15.
44. The cost of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme to Wandsworth's Council Tax payers is estimated at £643,324 and this is included in the Council Tax setting paper elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting. The Council has received new burdens grant in respect of the setting up the CTRS of £84,000 in 2012/13, £153,156 in 2013/14 and £141,967 in 2014/15. The Council will also qualify for a transition grant of £145,466 from setting a Council Tax Reduction Scheme within the range acceptable to the Government.

CONCLUSION

45. The local impact of the Welfare Reforms will continue to be monitored and regular update reports will be provided to the Finance and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee at appropriate intervals.

46. The additional temporary staffing proposed in this report will be used to work with residents that have been identified as affected by one or more of these reforms to ensure relevant information on the potential impacts is circulated and where possible mitigating some of the impacts on vulnerable residents.

The Town Hall
Wandsworth
SW18 2PU
19th February 2013

CHRIS BUSS
Director of Finance

Background papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

All reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, regulatory or other committees, the Executive and the full Council can be viewed on the Council's website (www.wandsworth.gov.uk/moderngov) unless the report was published before May 2001, in which case the Committee Secretary, Graham Collins on 020 8871 6021; email: gcollins@wandsworth.gov.uk can supply it, if required.

APPENDIX 1to Paper No. 13-179**WARD BASED BENEFIT CAP DATA - FEBRUARY 2013**

Ward		Claims Affected by Benefit Cap	Average Loss in HB (£ per week)
Balham		17	119.54
Bedford		21	132.58
Earlsfield		48	92.83
East Putney		16	67.42
Fairfield		21	102.71
Furzedown		104	109.89
Graveney		87	99.79
Latchmere		53	92.00
Nightingale		13	65.75
Northcote		7	111.63
Queenstown		49	95.67
Roehampton and Putney Heath		45	73.40
Shaftesbury		12	86.26
Southfields		20	86.45
St Mary's Park		24	65.17
Thamesfield		9	92.40
Tooting		71	137.73
Wandsworth Common		10	76.57
West Hill		56	65.09
West Putney		38	101.67
Out of Borough Postcode		8	57.71
Total		729	97.11

DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT POLICY

Benefits Service Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Policy

Introduction

1. The main aim of the document is to set the criteria for decisions on requests for Discretionary Housing Payments. The policy is based on the fundamental aim that awards, except in exceptional circumstances, will be interim support for households while long term solutions are found. The applicant must also be showing a commitment to finding a solution by actively engaging with agencies including their social landlord if appropriate and/or advice and support services including Job Centre Plus.
2. In making awards the Council will be expecting the customer to resolve their financial difficulties or find a housing solution which is more suited to their financial and household situation.
3. The policy recognises that the DHP has been increased to address some of the issues that households will face due to current programme of welfare reform. It must therefore be targeted and its use prioritised and reflect the needs of vulnerable families and be aware that households may be dealing with a number of complex issues and seek to maintain a level of housing stability.

The DHP Fund

4. The DHP spend is based on a limited fund based on a contribution from central Government which can be supplemented by Council funds.

The Government Contribution 2013/14 £ 1,839,423

The Council from its own resource can decide to increase the available fund to a Permitted Total for 2013/14 of £4,598,558; no provision has been for the additional funds.

Length of Awards

5. The general length of awards will be 13 or 26 weeks; awards can be reviewed at the end of the fixed term period and consideration given to further payment.

Award notifications will advise the customer that an initial award is no guarantee that subsequent application will be awarded. Customers will be advised that the period of the award should be used to seek solutions to their housing cost shortfall.

Claiming DHP

6. The council does not have a specific form to complete for DHP, this because previous experience had shown that the form became very prescriptive and that all applications became similar. It is proposed that during 2013/14 the Council will investigate whether an on-line claim form can be developed to sit alongside the on line forms for the Wandsworth Discretionary Social Fund and develop a portal on the website for all discretionary awards.
7. Until an on line presence is developed all applications will need to be made in writing to:

Benefit Finance Team
Wandsworth Benefit Service
PO Box 500
Wandsworth
SW18 2PN
Or via email to: benefitpayments@wandsworth.gov.uk

8. The request for DHP can be made on the behalf of the customer but the Council will contact them to obtain any specific information needed to support the claim.
9. The council will aim to make initial responses to all applications for DHP within 10 working days of the application being made.

Supporting Information needed for DHP Application

10. Based on the reason for the DHP application the council may require additional information to support the claim. The information will generally be requested from the customer but the council may in some instances seek permission from the applicant to approach third parties directly e.g. private landlords, support workers or other Council services.

Advice & Assistance

11. In making the DHP decision the Council will consider the level of commitment the household has to finding the long term solution to their housing issues. It may be appropriate for the customer to be referred to other services that may assist them these could include:

- JCP employment advice;
- Housing Options Team
- Housing Letting Service for re-housing options;
- RSL Welfare Support provisions;
- Children & Adult Services.

12. This list is not exhaustive but an indication of the types of organisations that can assist households with their long term housing needs.

After a decision is made

13. When a DHP claim is successful the award is paid along with housing benefit or credited to the council tax account. The customer will be issued with a letter detailing the decision advising how much DHP they will receive and for what period.

14. If the claim is refused a letter advising the reasons for the decision will be issued and advising the customer of how they can request a review.

Appealing a DHP decision

15. The decision whether or not to award a DHP is not a Housing Benefit decision so cannot be disputed using the normal benefit appeal regulation. Customers who want the Council to reconsider its decision must request a review in writing

16. Reviews of a decision will be carried out by a panel of officers, none of which had a role in the original decision.

17. If a customer is still unhappy they can seek to challenge the decision via judicial review; the Council would advise them to seek independent legal advice if they are considering this option.

18. The Council will respond to all requests for review within 1 calendar month of the challenge being received.

Promoting DHP

19. The Council's stated aim is that it wants to maximise its DHP spend to vulnerable households so the Benefits Service will be promoting the DHP policy across the borough to ensure awareness of the scheme. This will include providing information and training (where requested) to other sections within the Council e.g. the Rent Collection Service and the Housing Options Teams

20. There will be DHP specific items within the quarterly bulletins that are sent to advice agencies across the borough and in other Council publications such as

the Collector and Homelife. These will encourage an understanding of the scheme and the Council's policies.

21. The Benefits Service website will have information pertaining to DHP and the ability to claim through the website will be investigated as part of portal for Benefit Service administered funds.

Examples of Where a DHP would be considered

22. The following are examples of where the council may consider awarding a DHP, this is not an exhaustive list of situations and if a person is having difficulties meeting their housing cost their application will be judged on its own individual merits.

- Data Matching - The Benefits Service will work with other Council Departments to data match lists of households affected by welfare reform with Council lists of vulnerable families where, for instance, care orders may be in place or they are part of a structured intervention programme (e.g. Family Recovery Project).
- Social Sector Size Criteria - Provide interim support for periods where families have indicated to their social landlord that they wish to downsize but there is a delay beyond the household's control i.e. no suitable sized accommodation is currently available and they cannot afford to make up the difference themselves.
- Consideration will also be given to under-occupying households whose property has been adapted to meet the needs of a member of the family who is disabled. The level of adaptation will be considered in terms of the potential cost of making similar adaptations at any new property.
- Families that have chosen not seek their landlords assistance in downsizing or have refused a reasonable offer of suitably sized alternative accommodation are unlikely to receive support from DHP for the size criteria related housing cost shortfalls. In these instances the notification of the decision will also be made available to the Social Landlord so that they can take appropriate action.
- Fostering Arrangement - It has been identified that the size criteria may have negative effects on households who foster children. In cases where there is a reduction in benefit due to a bedroom normally used for a foster child the Council will consider whether DHP is appropriate.
- Total Weekly Benefit Cap - The Council recognises that the implementation of the total benefit cap may put extreme financial

pressures on some households which may require them to be provided with interim support while they find employment or alternative cheaper housing. In such cases the Council will give consideration to the case and the steps the household is taking to take themselves out from the effects of the cap.

- Prevention of Homelessness Cases – The Council will continue to ensure there is close liaison between the Housing Benefit and Homelessness Services and may prioritise DHP payments in order to delay or prevent homelessness where the Council would be likely to become subject to a statutory duty to assist the family under the terms of the Housing Act 1996 – Part VII (as amended)
- This will include households previously owed a duty under s193 (2) of that Act where that duty was ended by way of a suitable Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO) made by a private landlord via arrangements with the Council, where the household are at risk of financial hardship for example due to changing circumstances linked to the wider welfare reforms.
- Consideration could also be given as to the capacity of the DHP fund to pay rent deposits which secure rented accommodation on terms that are affordable to the household being assisted.
- Changes in Circumstances - The council will consider DHP in cases where a person has been able to meet their housing costs but a change in circumstances has resulted in a shortfall they can no longer afford. This can occur in cases where the number of people resident in the property reduces and now they are assessed on a lower LHA rate.
- Excess Income Cases - It may be possible for the council to make an award where the shortfall due to excess income is causing hardship. This will look at issues such as where the transition from full benefit to in work levels has caused issues with budgeting or unexpected expenses.
- End of Transitional Protection / LHA Reforms - The council is expecting that most private landlords will have adapted to the Local Housing Allowance reforms and will reduce rents accordingly once transitional protection ends. As the final period of TP ended in December 2012 there could be some cases where the landlord is still expecting payment of the full contractual rent then DHP can be considered.
- New Tenancies - It is unlikely that the council will award DHP on claim where a tenant reliant on Housing Benefit has entered a property

where the housing costs are higher than the relevant Local Housing Allowance rate. In such cases there will have to be a specific reason why the applicant needs to occupy that property and not a similar property at a more affordable rent.

23. The examples given above have been given as some of the more common reasons, and should not preclude cases that do not fall into any of these categories. Each application will be judged on the individual circumstances of the case.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**Initial Equality Impact Assessment – New Policy.**

Department	Finance
Policy	Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme
People involved	Clare O'Connor, Mathew Darby

1. What are the aims of the policy?

The policy aims to provide interim support in relation to housing payments. The policy is based on the fundamental aim that awards, except in exceptional circumstances, will be interim support for households while long term solutions are found. The applicant must also be showing a commitment to finding a solution by actively engaging with agencies including their social landlord if appropriate and/or advice and support services including Job Centre Plus.

The policy supports vulnerable families and is therefore targeted and its use prioritised to reflect the needs of vulnerable families.

The funding has increased in 13/14 to 13/14 £1,839,423

2. What is the rationale behind the policy?

The policy for how DHP decisions will be made has been revised for this year based on the fact that main areas of expenditure will not just be meeting shortfalls resulting from the LHA reforms in the private sector but, due to Welfare Reform, will affect vulnerable households across all tenures.

3. What information do you have on the policy and the potential impact of your policy in relation to the following?

	List information you have. Do not put what the information shows you			
Overall	Year	Applications	Paid	

	2012/13 (To date)	720 *	481
	2011/12	404	180
* Includes 20 currently undecided cases			
Race	Data not collected as no specific form used to apply During 2013/14 the Council will investigate whether an on-line claim form can be developed to sit alongside the on line forms for the Wandsworth Discretionary Social Fund and develop a portal on the website for all discretionary awards.		
Gender	As above		
Disability	As above		
Age	As above		
Faith	As above		
Sexual Orientation	As above		

4. Thinking about each group below please list the impact that the policy will have.

	<u>Positive</u> impacts of policy	Possible <u>negative</u> impacts of policy
Race	<p>The Benefits Service will continue to ensure that DHP applicants are referred to the necessary support agencies to assist them with long term solutions.</p> <p>The Welfare Reform Officer will pro actively work with identified vulnerable households to provide not just assistance through DHP but practical long term planning.</p> <p>The scheme will be widely publicised to ensure that</p>	<p>Requests have to be made in writing which may disadvantage residents where English is their second language or they do not speak English. To mitigate the impact of this, requests for DHP can be made on the behalf of the customer but the Council will contact them to obtain any specific information needed to support the claim.</p>

	vulnerable families are aware of the support and that services supporting vulnerable families are aware of the scheme.	
Gender	<p>The Benefits Service will continue to ensure that DHP applicants are referred to the necessary support agencies to assist them with long term solutions</p> <p>The Welfare Reform Officer will pro actively work with identified vulnerable households to provide not just assistance through DHP but practical long term planning</p> <p>The scheme will be widely publicised to ensure that vulnerable families are aware of the support and services supporting vulnerable families are aware of the scheme.</p>	None identified
Disability	<p>The Benefits Service will continue to ensure that DHP applicants are referred to the necessary support agencies to assist them with long term solutions</p> <p>The Welfare Reform Officer will pro actively work with identified vulnerable households to provide not just assistance through DHP but practical long term planning</p> <p>The scheme will be widely</p>	None identified

	<p>publicised to ensure that vulnerable families are aware of the support and services supporting families are aware of the scheme.</p> <p>The policy specifically refers to “Consideration will also be given to under-occupying households whose property has been adapted to meet the needs of a member of the family who is disabled. The level of adaptation will be considered in terms of the potential cost of making similar adaptations at any new property.”</p>	
Age	<p>The policy supports vulnerable families and is therefore targeted and its use prioritised to reflect the needs of vulnerable families.</p> <p>The Benefits Service will continue to ensure that DHP applicants are referred to the necessary support agencies to assist them with long term solutions</p> <p>The Welfare Reform Officer will pro actively work with identified vulnerable households to provide not just assistance through DHP but practical long term planning</p> <p>The scheme will be widely publicised to ensure that vulnerable families are aware of the support and services</p>	None identified

	supporting vulnerable families are aware of the scheme.	
Faith	<p>The Benefits Service will continue to ensure that DHP applicants are referred to the necessary support agencies to assist them with long term solutions</p> <p>The Welfare Reform Officer will pro actively work with identified vulnerable households to provide not just assistance through DHP but practical long term planning</p> <p>The scheme will be widely publicised to ensure that vulnerable families are aware of the support and services supporting vulnerable families are aware of the scheme.</p>	None identified
Sexual orientation	<p>The Benefits Service will continue to ensure that DHP applicants are referred to the necessary support agencies to assist them with long term solutions</p> <p>The Welfare Reform Officer will pro actively work with identified vulnerable households to provide not just assistance through DHP but practical long term planning</p> <p>The scheme will be widely publicised to ensure that vulnerable families are aware</p>	None identified

	of the support and services supporting vulnerable families are aware of the scheme.	
--	---	--

5. Is a full EIA required? No.

- Does the policy support a frontline service? Yes
- Is it clear what impact the policy will have on all the equality groups? No, but as supports vulnerable families likely to support protected groups.
- Overall will the change have a negative impact on any of the equality groups? No.

6. Through the initial EIA have you identified any actions that needed to be implemented to improve access or monitoring of the policy? (please list)

Equality data to be captured via the online form to ensure that usage of the scheme and success rates can be monitored in order to identify if any groups are not accessing the scheme.

Signed

Date: 13.02.13

Approved by: Clare O'Connor

This page is intentionally left blank