

**HOUSING BENEFIT – DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT POLICY
(Report by the Overview & Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being))**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting held on 7 March 2012, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) considered the contents of a new Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Policy for the Authority. This report summarises the Panel's discussions.

2. THE PANEL'S DELIBERATIONS


- 2.1 The Panel has been advised that the District Council has had a Discretionary Housing Payment Policy in place since 2001. To mitigate changes to Housing Benefit the DWP has increased the level of grant awarded to each local authority. Officers have taken the opportunity to review the Council's DHP policy to ensure that it adheres to best practice and that the relatively small budget will be spent to help the most vulnerable benefit customers.
- 2.2 In considering the contents of the report, Members have discussed households who are willing to move to avoid the new bedroom tax but are unable to do so because of a shortage of smaller properties. The Head of Customer Services has explained that the District Council has been working with Registered Social Landlords: however, with the exception of encouraging property exchanges, there is little that the District Council can do. Clarification has also been provided on the position of foster children who are currently not counted as part of the household for benefit purposes.
- 2.3 Members have noted that the District Council has been allocated £169,561 for discretionary housing payments in 2013/14. Although it is possible to pay up to 2.5 times more than this amount, any additional costs would need to be met by the District Council. Members have commented that although the annual funding from the DWP has increased year on year since 2010-11, the District Council's proportion of the total national DHP budget has reduced year on year. In response, further information on the allocation of funds has been circulated to Panel Members by email.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The Cabinet is invited to adopt the Discretionary Housing Benefit Policy.

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