

# Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme

## Engagement and Consultation Plan

## 1. Why we're engaging/consulting

The Discretionary Housing Payment scheme is a scheme to provide people with financial assistance towards their housing costs. People must be in receipt of Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit to qualify for assistance in the first place. Furthermore they must pass a financial gateway to qualify. The scheme aims to help people to stay in their current home while they take action to improve their financial circumstances. This could be to move to cheaper accommodation or improve their financial situation.

We are proposing to amend the scheme and are consulting on the following changes.

The proposed changes are:

- 1) Fast track scheme for the following groups; rough sleepers, children leaving care, people fleeing violence. These people would complete a simplified form; no financial details needed and to be processed within 5 working days of receipt;**
- 2) Conditions to be attached to subsequent awards. The customer will be required to demonstrate that they have taken steps to improve their circumstances.**

We are consulting on the above amendments to the scheme as we have identified as part of the Equality Impact Assessment that some protected groups may be affected.

The policy intention is that we help more people but for a shorter period of time. The council will signpost people to support agencies for them to get the necessary help to improve their situation.

This scheme is grant funded by the DWP. The grant is cash limited year on year.

There have been a number of changes that have affected the residents of Barnsley over the past few years, austerity, benefit cap, bedroom tax, universal credit, all of which have a direct impact on the scheme and increase the potential to exhaust the funds within the discretionary housing payment scheme.

Additionally, the homeless reduction act puts a statutory obligation on the Council to help anyone who presents as being potentially homeless. To ensure that the DHP fund is allocated fairly and consistently we have worked closely with the Housing Actions team to develop a way in which we can cross refer customers ensuring we use the same information once and that there is a common understanding of how we can help people through the DHP funds.

We want the funds to be available to more people but for a shorter period of time. The aim of working with the Housing Action team and ultimately putting in place a 'support plan' is that we work better with our partners to help people get out of crisis and become independent.

We aim to consult for 2 month and part of the consultation will be to have an open day event in December for external agencies that support people in our communities.

## 2. The team and resources involved

We have 4 members of the team involved:

- Lisa Smith – Head of Service for Benefits and Taxation;
- Wendy Betts – Benefits Manager;
- Julie Whitely – Manager for DHP's.
- Brandon Turner – Support (future leaders apprenticeship)
- Lucy Machin – Support (future leaders apprenticeship)
- Kay Dodd – Survey design, admin and feedback.

There will be a small budget for the consultation event.

The proposed scheme has been to SMT for approval to pass the cabinet. Recommendation from SMT is that meaningful consultation takes place.

Sign off by Neil Copley – Service Director for Finance.

## 3. Who we want to involve

### How we'll work with each stakeholder group

Stakeholder group	How we'll engage	When we'll engage	Where we'll engage	How we'll feedback after engagement
Community influencers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group meetings?</li> <li>• Emails?</li> <li>• Letters?</li> <li>• Focus groups?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting date</li> <li>• Workshop date</li> <li>• Date email to be sent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library building?</li> <li>• Community space?</li> <li>• Online?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
Dial	E mails, Consultation event	11 <sup>th</sup> December 2018	Digital Media Centre, Barnsley.	E mail
CAB	as above	as above	as above	as above
Refugee Council	as above	as above	as above	as above
Age Concern	as above	as above	as above	as above
Clover Leaf	as above	as above	as above	as above
Deaf Forum	as above	as above	as above	as above
Conversation Classes	as above	as above	as above	as above
Polish Library	as above	as above	as above	as above
BMBC – housing options	as above	as above	as above	as above
Yorkshire Housing Association	as above	as above	as above	as above
Centre Point	as above	as above	as above	as above
Human Kind	as above	as above	as above	as above
IDAS	as above	as above	as above	as above
Together Housing Ass	as above	as above	as above	as above
Riverside HA	as above	as above	as above	as above
Berneslai Homes tenancy support officers	as above	as above	as above	as above
Current recipients	On line/paper	Nov/Dec	On line/postal	On line
Past recipients	On line/paper	Nov/Dec	On line/postal	On line

## 4. What we want to say

The current scheme has to change to ensure that we have enough money to help all those in need. The scheme is cash limited and there is no guarantee that this money will be given to local authorities in future years.

The fundamentals of the scheme will remain the same.

We have introduced a fast track scheme for those in crisis.

We propose to work in partnership with the homelessness team to help prevent homelessness. The DHP policy aims to support the Homeless Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

The council has committed to support looked after children transition into adulthood and independent living. The proposals seek to reinforce this commitment by fast tracking DHP payments for this group, helping young people secure suitable accommodation from the offset.

We believe that people on disability benefits, lone parents and people on low incomes may be the main recipients of discretionary housing payments. We will consult with current recipients to get their views.

People in protected groups including disabled people, women and people whose first language isn't English could be affected more. We will consult with these support agencies to ask for their views and to ensure that the policy intention is sound.

As part of this consultation we will also look at where the scheme is published and how people find out about it. The form will also be redesigned and we will ask as part of this consultation how easy the form is to use. This will be especially useful from groups who have an accessibility need and we will consider more accessible formats.

## 5. What we want to ask

- 1) What was your reason for claiming DHP?
- 2) Have you ever been refused DHP?
- 2a) were the reasons explained to you?
- 3) How did you find out about DHP?
- 4) Did you find the information easy to understand
- 5) How could we make this better?
- 6) Did you find the form easy to complete?
- 7) How could we make the application form better
- 8) Did you receive any help to complete the application form?
- 9) Who helped you?
- 10) Please give details of how the DHP helped you/your family?
- 11) Do you agree with change 1) fast track for people in crisis
- 12) How might this change affect you or your family in the future?
- 13) Do you agree with change 2) conditions attached to further awards?
- 14) How might change 2 affect you and your family in the future?
- 15) Do you have any further comments on the proposed scheme?

## 6. How we'll make sure people know they can get involved

Date	Activity	Audience	Lead
Dec	Consultation event with stakeholders	Protected Groups  Private landlords and registered social landlord.	<b>Lisa Smith</b>
Dec	On line survey (paper copies available on request) to current and past recipients.	Service users	<b>Kay Dodd</b>

## 8. How we'll evaluate the feedback

The results will be evaluated by Lisa Smith and the Equalities and Inclusion team.

## 9. How we'll report the results

The results will be published on the web and we will contact all partners invited to the consultation event.

## 10. After the consultation – How well it went

We ran two consultations, one to customers and one to stakeholders. The one to customers was an online survey (paper versions were available on request) and the results are discussed below. We selected past and present customers who were both successful and unsuccessful in their applications.

We also ran a stakeholder event on the 11<sup>th</sup> December at the Digital Media Centre in Barnsley. Stakeholders were selected on advice of the equality and inclusion team and were aimed at organisations that supported protected groups we believed may be affected. We also invited private landlords and registered social landlords.

The event was a drop in session where the attendees were given details of the proposed scheme and asked to make comments. Berneslai Homes co-attended the event as they also help tenants to make applications for DHP's via their tenancy support team. The tenancy support team also play a vital role in helping their tenants facing financial and personal difficulties.

### **Results from the on line survey.**

We invited 1273 to complete the survey and we had a response rate of 3%

The questions were asked as outlined above. In response to the question do you agree with change to include a fast track route for those in crisis 75% of respondents agreed 13% neither agreed or disagreed 4% disagreed and 8% didn't know.

This is a positive response towards the change.

We also asked for comments on this change, these were also positive with some of the respondents having been in one of the fast track situations in the past. One concern was that there was not enough money to go around and the fast track groups would take up most of the money with none left for other people.

In response to the question 'do you agree with the change that conditions would be attached to any future awards' the results were 48% strongly agreed or agreed, 21% neither agreed or disagreed, 20% disagreed or disagreed strongly 11% didn't know.

This was again a positive result.

There were however more concerns over this change in that people may not get a further award on which they relied. Other concerns were that no matter how much they budgeted they could not make ends meet as their outgoings were more than their income. Bedroom tax and the local council tax support scheme were a cause of people finding themselves in financial difficulty.

### **Results from the stakeholder event.**

We held a drop session at the Digital Media Centre on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Stakeholders and landlords were given some information prior to event on the proposed changes and we invited them to the event to come and chat with members of the team regarding the proposed changes. Colleagues from the Equalities and Inclusion team were also at the event to talk about specific issues that the stakeholder's client group may experience.

The feedback was positive and 100% of the respondents agreed with the changes. We had 12 people from the above groups attend.

Comments were positive in respect of the fast tracked group and in generally agreeing the changes. The general consensus was that the changes helped to prevent homelessness.