



Equality Impact Assessment SUMMARY

This information tells you about changes to:

The Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme. The purpose of the scheme is provide people with financial assistance towards their housing costs. To qualify the person must be in receipt of housing benefit or be receiving the housing element of universal credit. The aim of the scheme is to give people support to make improvements to their financial circumstances or find cheaper alternative accommodation.

These payments are administered by the Housing Benefits team within the Finance business unit.

The changes we are making are:

The fundamentals of the scheme remain the same.

However, we have introduced a **fast track** group for the following :

People fleeing violence

Rough sleepers seeking accommodation

Children leaving care.

In addition to the above we are proposing to introduce **conditions attached to any further awards** after the initial award.

Initial awards are currently made for either 6 months or 12 months. After that the claimant can apply for a further award. If the financial gateway is passed then a further award will be made.

Under the proposed scheme the claimant must have taken action to improve their circumstances to either reduce their outgoings or seek cheaper accommodation.

Support will be given in terms of sign posting to other agencies or a personal support plan if their circumstances dictate (see below).

The new Homeless Reduction Act came into force in April 2018. Any customer who states they can no longer afford their rent will now be entitled to an assessment from the Housing Support Team which will culminate in a personal support plan. We will work in partnership with the Housing Support Team ensuring that customers get the right support from the Council.

Any customer that presents as potentially homeless via the Housing Support Team will be have to submit financial information as part of the assessment. Previously they would have had to make an additional claim for a DHP. We are proposing to use the Housing Support Team as trusted friends, using the same information once.

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A new simplified on line form will accompany the new scheme, ensuring that we get a fuller understanding of the claimants circumstances.

Successful award letters will also be changed, identifying support agencies and how to contact them.

The personal support plan (for those who present as potentially homeless) will go even further. The claimant will have a one to one with an officer and a clear plan of the help they can get to improve their circumstances.

We are making these changes because:

We are making the changes because of the introduction of universal credit and the uncertainty of how many people may want to make an application to DHP. The aim is to ensure that there are sufficient funds to go around still supporting those people in crisis and in threat of losing their homes.

Additionally the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act has meant that the council has had to put more resources into helping people remain in their homes. It was identified that there was the potential to cross refer people ensuring that more customers get the support they need and reducing the administration need for both the customer and the Council.

We asked these questions to help us better understand the impact of the changes:

- 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) Do you agree with change 2) conditions attached to further awards
- 13) How might change 2 effect you and your family in the future?
- 14) Do you have any further comments on the proposed scheme?

To answer these questions we did the following things:

1. Identify past and current recipients of the scheme and invited them to complete an online survey (paper versions were available on request)
2. Held a consultation event at the DMC on the 11th December 2018. We invited partner organisations who help support people from protected groups. We also invited both private and social housing landlords to get their opinion on the proposed changes.
3. Consulted with Bernelslai Homes as they support tenants via the tenancy support team. BH also came to the consultation event to meet with partner organisations to highlight the support they could give to tenants.
4. Consulted with the Housing Action team so we could gain a better understanding of the reasons why people presented as potentially homeless and what joint support we could offer to help people remain in their homes.

From this we learnt the following things:

1. The fast track scheme was welcomed by both customers and stakeholders.
2. There were some concerns from customers around the conditions applied to further awards. Their main concern was that they simply did not have enough money.
3. Advertising of the scheme could be improved.
4. Landlords would like the option for the tenants to have the money paid direct to the landlord.
5. We will introduce a leaflet and include on the web an easy read version of 'what is DHP and how to apply'

The people most affected will be:

How they will be affected:

Disabled People.
Lone Parents.
People whose first language isn't English.

Generally on disabled benefits and are more likely to have less capacity to increase income
More likely to work part time and have less capacity to increase working hours because of childcare.
Access need in terms of knowing about scheme and applying.

To help the changes to be as fair and equal as possible we will:

- 1) Redesign of the form simplifying and reducing the questions asked. Ensuring help boxes are sufficient.
- 2) Better promotion of the scheme and full revision of the webpages.
- 3) Google translate is now available on all e-forms including the DHP one.
- 4) Review after 6 months to look at advice/support available and does this help those who have less capacity to increase their earnings.

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5) Monitoring the number of people refused and understanding the reasons they have not taken up the additional support.

<u>You said (public responses)</u>	<u>We did</u>
Clearer forms. Better definition of items of expenditure.	We have amended the form to make the questions clearer and added help boxes. We have also deleted some of the questions that did not add benefit to the decision making process.
Clarity around the length of time the DHP payment will last.	All documentation has been reviewed.
Concerns about the money running out and their will be none left for those in need.	The budget is monitored month on month and a forecasts made of the expected spend. Policy would be amended if we could not meet demand.
Make people more aware of the scheme.	More will be done on promoting the scheme and a refresh of the website will also be undertaken. Look to make an easy read version of DHP's their purpose and how to apply.
Make the form easier to read for people with dyslexia and disabilities.	We will commission an easy read leaflet regarding the scheme to made available on the web.
Make an application over the phone as elderly and vulnerable people do have the internet. More help for those who cannot get on line.	We already do outbound calls to customers who cannot access via the internet. We also offer face to face appts in extreme cases. Will amend the website and documentation to ensure that all access channels are made clear.
Some customers not aware the scheme existed.	Better promotion of scheme.
Make it clearer where the payments will go to i.e landlord or tenant.	Form amended for tenant to select payment method.
More options for single mothers and children that don't live in the samehousehold.	We can pay DHP in these case and do. However, the payments are intended as a short term solution and there are no guarantees for these families. The housing benefit legislation dictates how we assess the no.of rooms a family needs and we

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	have no discretion over this factor.
Add an option for emergency situations	This will be done if the new fast-track scheme is approved.
Have the option of a paper form.	Barnsley council has moved to digital platforms. For those who cannot go on line we will help people by offering an outbound call at an agreed time or a face to face appointment.
Concerns that even with support then they will not be able to manage their money as the simply do not have enough.	The right support will enable the claimant to renegotiate debts and bills thus freeing up money. Additionally looking for cheaper accommodation is also an option for some. A review after 6 months will tell us more why people are not taking up help and if the signposting is useful.
You said (stakeholder)	We did
What about a disabled fast – track group	This category is too large in terms of types of disability and needs relating to that disability to be considered as a fast track. There are a multitude of reasons why a disabled person may have additionally expenditure but equally they tend to qualify for disability related income. Any reasonable disability expenditure will be considered in the financial statement and balanced against their income.
Make the application form easier Time reduced to make a decision	Covered above. We generally process a DHP application with in 14 to 28 days. This is monitored and we plan to reduce this time within the next financial year.
Could we consider ‘threatened with homelessness’ as part of the fast track route.	This could encourage people to get into rent arrears especially if the route to a DHP was guaranteed through a fast track scheme. These

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	people will still be eligible for a DHP. We will refer them on the homeless team who will put in place a support plan. This should prevent them from becoming homeless. The scheme will be reviewed with the homeless support team.
Refugee Council - Limited information and unsure how often this is identified for our clients. How can we make knowledge of the scheme well known to our clients? What about clients who are not engaged with any source?	The website will be refreshed and the DHP form is available in different languages. We will contact the Refugee Council to see how we can work better with their clients as we know that decent housing is already an issue for this client group. This is a concern. We will work with the RC, homelessness team and the asylum team to see how the Council can work in a more coordinated way to engage with this group.
Centrepont – Young people coming into their properties have historical debt that is already deducted from their rent allowance.	This is supported accommodation for which we pay an element for the landlords to help these young people to manage their money and negotiate debts.
Faster smarter on line form	Already covered.

Tell us what you think . . .

Do you understand the changes we are making?

If no, what don't you understand?

Do you understand why we are making these changes?

If no, what don't you understand?

Have we asked the right questions about the changes?

If no, what questions do you think we should be asking?

Do we fully understand the affect the changes will have on people?

If no, what affect do you think the changes will have on people?

What could the council do to reduce the affect these changes have on people?