



Policy, Finance and Development Committee	Tuesday, 26 March 2024	Matter for Decision
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Report Title: Updated Discretionary Payments Policy (2024/25)

Report Author(s): Claire Werra (Revenues & Benefits Manager)

Purpose of Report:	The purpose of this report is to seek Committee's approval of the updated Discretionary Payments Policy (2024/25)
Report Summary:	Policies are more consistent and effective when they are reviewed regularly. The previous Discretionary Payments Policy required improvements to ensure it was relevant and clear for the residents of our Borough.
Recommendation(s):	A. That the content of the report be noted; and B. The Discretionary Payments Policy (2024/25) (as set out at Appendix 1) be approved).
Senior Leadership, Head of Service, Manager, Officer and Other Contact(s):	Teresa Neal (Strategic Director) (0116) 257 2642 teresa.neal@oadby-wigston.gov.uk Trish Hatton (Head of Customer Services & Transformation) (0116) 257 2700 trish.hatton@oadby-wigston.gov.uk Claire Werra (Revenues & Benefits Manager) (0116) 257 2681 claire.werra@oadby-wigston.gov.uk
Strategic Objectives:	Our Council (SO1) Our Communities (SO2) Our Economy (SO3)
Vision and Values:	"Our Borough - The Place To Be" (Vision) Customer & Community Focused (V1) Proud of Everything We Do (V2) Resourceful & Resilient (V4)
Report Implications:-	
Legal:	There are no implications arising from this report.
Financial:	There are no implications arising from this report.
Corporate Risk Management:	Decreasing Financial Resources / Increasing Financial Pressures (CR1) Reputation Damage (CR4)
Equalities and Equalities Assessment (EA):	There are no implications arising from this report. Initial EA Screening (See Appendices)
Human Rights:	There are no implications arising from this report.

Health and Safety:	There are no implications arising from this report.
Statutory Officers' Comments:-	
Head of Paid Service:	The report is satisfactory.
Chief Finance Officer:	The report is satisfactory.
Monitoring Officer:	The report is satisfactory.
Consultees:	None.
Background Papers:	None.
Appendices:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Updated Discretionary Payments Policy (2024/25) 2. Equalities Assessment (Initial Screening)

1. Background

- 1.1 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) were introduced in July 2001. The aim of these payments was to provide additional help to people who were already in receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit that were in severe hardship.
- 1.2 The scheme is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Although the DWP has issued guidance for local authorities, the method of allocation adopted and the decision-making process lies with individual authorities.
- 1.3 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 abolished Council Tax Benefit and introduced a new local provision to provide Local Council Tax Support. The discretionary payments for Council Tax are now funded locally and set by the Council each year.

2. Changes to the Policy

- 2.1 With Discretionary Housing Payment funding from the DWP reducing year upon year, there is greater need for the policy to be clearer and more robust, to ensure transparency for customers in our decision-making process.
- 2.2 The updated policy now clearly shows the Council's objectives for discretionary payments. Supporting our corporate visions and values.
- 2.3 The policy now shows the reduction in funding levels from the DWP for greater transparency.
- 2.4 The policy more clearly sets out the parameters for awarding discretionary payment and factors which will be considered by the awarding officer.
- 2.5 Backdating rules are now more clearly explained.
- 2.6 The role of our Financial Inclusion Officer is highlighted in our Policy to increase awareness of the support the Council provides.
- 2.7 The most significant change for customers is that they are now required to provide 2-months bank statements, by introducing this measure, customers will be able to demonstrate they are unable to meet their housing costs and Council Tax liability from their available income or that they have a shortfall in meeting these costs. This approach will allow us to provide targeted support to the most financially vulnerable customers who are experiencing severe financial hardship.

3. **Summary**

- 3.1 The recommendation is that Members approve the Policy included in **Appendix 1**.
- 3.2 The Policy will now be renewed on an annual basis to reflect the changing levels in DWP funding and any other relevant factors that arise.