

 Overview & Scrutiny Committee 7 May 2014		Agenda Item No. 4
Title	Discretionary Housing Payments	
For further information about this report please contact	Andrea Wyatt Benefits and Fraud Manager 01926 456831 andrea.wyatt@warwickdc.gov.uk	
Wards of the District directly affected	N/A	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	N/A	
Background Papers		

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	No
Equality & Sustainability Impact Assessment Undertaken	No

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	24/04/2014	Chris Elliott
Head of Service	24/04/2014	Mike Snow
CMT		
Section 151 Officer	24/04/2014	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer		
Finance	24/04/2014	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	25/04/2014	Andrew Mobbs
Consultation & Community Engagement		
Final Decision?		

1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report has been prepared at the request of members to provide information regarding discretionary housing payments.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 The report is for information only.

3. **REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 As this report is for information as the request of the committee, there are no specific recommendations.

4. **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

- 4.1 The Discretionary Housing Payments Policy was updated in March 2013 so as to ensure that it continued to support the sustainable community strategy and the cross cutting themes and in particular narrowing the gaps.

5. **BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK**

- 5.1 A total discretionary housing payment fund of £168,556 for 2013/14 was provided by Government to assist those affected by the welfare reforms.

6. **ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S) CONSIDERED**

- 6.1 There are no alternative options – this is an information report only.

7. **BACKGROUND**

- 7.1 The budget for discretionary payments was increased significantly to £168,556 in April 2013 by Central Government to enable the Council to provide additional assistance to those affected by the Welfare reforms. The Discretionary Housing Payment policy was revised and presented to members in March 2013 to reflect these changes. A report was made available to Committee providing an update following the first quarter of the financial year in respect of both discretionary payment and the effects of the spare room subsidy. The Benefits Section has been asked to present a further report detailing more up to date figures on discretionary payment expenditure.
- 7.2 From the 1st April 2013 to the 31st March 2014, 651 applications for discretionary payments were received, 457 awards were made and the total budget of £168,556 was utilised. When considering a request for discretionary payments, details of both income and expenditure are considered together with the individual's circumstances. The length of each award varies depending on the particular circumstances of each case, when an award ends re-applications are not discouraged. However, in some cases we would expect to see some evidence of what a claimant is doing in order to help themselves. The following is a breakdown of the reasons for awarding a discretionary payment:

- Under Occupancy: 351 awards granted (243 council tenants)
- Benefit Cap: 18 awards granted (8 council tenants)
- LHA Restrictions: (under 35 years) 4 awards granted.
- No Impact (outgoings exceed income): 81 awards granted (14 council tenants)

7.2 There were originally 1043 tenants identified as being possibly affected by the spare room subsidy, this number has reduced and there are currently 804 tenants affected, of these 566 are local authority tenants. The Government has increased the discretionary payments funding to £185,219 so that we can continue to help support those most in need.

7.3 The discretionary housing payment fund is a ring fenced fund and can only be used to help claimants who are in receipt of housing benefit. Therefore a similar fund of £20,000 has been set aside to help those who have been affected by the changes to the Council's council tax reduction scheme from April 2014.