

## Discretionary Policy Review 2017/18 Questions & Answers

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Following discussion of the above paper in March 2018 at the City Mayor's Briefing, Housing Scrutiny Commission and Neighbourhood Services & Community Involvement Commission, the following Q&A is provided outlining the issues raised.

**Q. Why is the Discretionary Housing Payment budget reducing whilst the Council Tax Discretionary Relief & Community Support Grant budgets are not?**

The Discretionary Housing Payment budget is determined by a government allocated grant based on the number of households expected to be impacted by specific welfare reforms. The government expect this to reduce by 10% a year for the next three years. In Leicester however, the majority of our expenditure is still committed towards households previously affected by the 'bedroom tax' and Benefit Cap from 2013 onwards. Over 2,000 households continue to be affected by under occupancy, 10% of which are subsidised by DHPs at any one time, whilst 3,800 households with children are on the Housing Register in overcrowded properties.

The Council Tax Discretionary Relief and Community Support Grant budgets are not statutory funds are set at a level currently appropriate for demand.

**Q. Is there available stock for local authority tenants to downsize?**

Yes – over 80% of tenants affected by under-occupancy require a single bedroom property only, which the type most frequently available through the Housing Register and Home Swap schemes. Average waiting times for such properties are measured in weeks as opposed to months. Households affected by under-occupancy are considered to be a priority need under the current Housing Allocations Policy.

**Q. When do DHP claimants need to make new applications?**

Tenants are usually required to reapply at the end of the financial year, unless exceptions apply such as permanent disability that would entitlement a household to a continuous award. At the point of reapplication, it will be determined whether the tenant meets the conditions in the policy. All applications are considered on their own merits.

**Q. How many under-occupied tenants currently receiving DHP support need to reapply and will be affected by the current conditions?**

Approximately 120 households were receiving ongoing DHP awards for under occupancy in March 2018, and will be considered under the policy conditions outlined on reapplication. Unless applicants fall under the protected categories outlined in the report, they will in most circumstances be expected to actively seeking alternative accommodation to support their application.

**Q. What is likely to be the impact on Benefit Cap claimants requiring support?**

The impact is anticipated to be positive. Additional analysis on this is included in Appendix 2b – of 169 households affected by the Benefit Cap requiring DHP support in February 2017, 54% have been able to change their circumstances and are no longer affected by the Cap 12 months later. In contrast, the total number of households affected by the Cap has reduced by only 15% over the same period. Support from social welfare advice providers is also likely to be beneficial for other discretionary award claimants experiencing difficulties with debt and expenditure issues.

**Q. Have the policies taken account of the risk of financial exploitation?**

The policies target financially vulnerable groups, including those at risk of financial exploitation, and are reflective of wider Council policies including the Fair Debt policy. Following feedback, those at risk of financial exploitation are now explicitly recognised as an example of financial vulnerability.

**Q. Do the policies provide protection to households struggling with mental health problems?**

The policies are compliant with our obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and Equalities Act, and now include mental health conditions within existing definitions of vulnerable protected groups.

**Q. Do the policies provide adequate support to refugees and asylum seekers?**

The policies recognise that race and ethnicity are relevant considerations in assessing discretionary awards. Both of the above groups are recognised as in need, although there are legal limitations in supporting the latter, which may be more appropriately assisted through other funds.