

**REPORT TO:** Corporate Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Community and Resources

**PORTFOLIO:** Resources

**SUBJECT:** Discretionary Support Scheme Topic Group - Update

**WARD(S):** Borough-wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1. To consider two recommendations from the Discretionary Support Scheme Topic Group, following its recent meeting. The Topic Group meets periodically to review the operation of the scheme in accordance with a request from the Executive Board.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION That:**

- (i) The Topic Group's review of progress with delivery of the Discretionary Support Scheme and Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme during 2015/16 to date be noted;**
- (ii) The minimum food order be increased to £40 under the Discretionary Support Scheme;**
- (iii) The award period for Discretionary Housing Payments be increased to 18 weeks per application;**
- (iv) The Strategic Director – Community & Resources be recommended to exercise his delegated authority from Executive Board, in liaison with the Executive Board Member – Resources, with regard to recommendations (ii) and (iii) above.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **Background**

3.1 The Discretionary Support Scheme (DSS) is now in its third year of operation. Over this period the Scheme has been developed and amended where necessary with the Corporate Policy & Performance Board Topic Group's input. On 12<sup>th</sup> December 2013 Executive Board approved the removal of the ringfence around the DSS funding, to enable its use if necessary to support the Discretionary Housing Payments Scheme (DHPs).

- 3.2 On 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015 the Topic Group met to review progress with both the Discretionary Support Scheme and the Discretionary Housing Payments Scheme during 2015/16 to date.

### **Progress to Date**

- 3.3 It was noted that payments from the DSS have remained steady throughout the first half of 2015/16 totalling £48,638 to date and follow a similar pattern to the previous year.
- 3.4 Expenditure on DHPs has also stabilised during this period, compared to the significant pressure which this funding experienced during 2014/15. At this stage it is forecast that expenditure on DHPs will be in line with the £343,725 of available DHP grant funding by year-end.

### **Proposed Scheme Changes**

- 3.5 With regard to food orders placed via the DSS, all major supermarkets have now increased their minimum delivery amount from £25 to £40. Orders placed below £40 will therefore now incur charges of between £5 and £11. The Topic Group therefore proposed that a minimum food order value be adopted for the DSS of £40.
- 3.9 There are significant proposals arising from the Welfare Bill and Summer Budget proposals, such as the reductions in the Benefit Cap and Tax Credits, which will bring increased financial pressures especially for those tenants affected by the “under occupancy charge” (Bedroom Tax). The Topic Group considered how changes might be made to the award of DHPs, to assist with supporting tenants in these circumstances.
- 3.10 DHP awards are currently made for periods of 13 weeks per application, except where exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated. The Topic Group therefore proposed that the award period for DHPs be increased to 18 weeks per application, in order to ensure more stability for claimants.
- 3.11 The Topic Group also requested that discussions be held with RSLs regarding their priority cases for DHP and those that are in a position to move to alternative accommodation, in order to ensure that assistance is granted during the move period.

## **4.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES**

- 4.1 The Discretionary Support Scheme and Discretionary Housing Payments have the potential to affect all Council priorities.

## **5.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

5.1 DSS and DHP payments will be monitored by the Topic Group to ensure they remain within budget.

## **6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

6.1 The eligibility criteria and application process would have to ensure that no particular groups of individuals were excluded. An Equality Impact Assessment will need to take place on any amendments to the Schemes.

## **7.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Various letters from the Department of Works and Pensions	Revenues & Benefits & Customer Services Division Kingsway House Widnes	Peter McCann