

Homelessness Prevention Fund Policy

1. Introduction

This document sets out the general principles Chichester District Council will apply in allocating the Homelessness Prevention Fund.

2. Aims

The Homelessness Prevention Fund will make financial assistance available by way of a grant, to eligible households, in order to address financial hardship which renders an applicant ineligible to join the Council's housing register due to significant housing related debt.

3. Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Ensure that people in genuine financial hardship are supported to claim any help they are entitled to and provided with free debt advice.
- Ensure that vulnerable people are supported to manage their financial affairs effectively including the payment of debt.
- To adopt a more preventative approach to indebtedness where appropriate.
- Reduce the time households spend in temporary accommodation to minimise the impact of homelessness on households.
- Increase the turn-over of temporary self-contained accommodation owned and managed by the Council.
- Reduce the use and time spent in bed & breakfast accommodation by homeless households, especially outside the district.

4. The process and eligibility assessment

- 4.1 Homeless Prevention Fund payments will only be available to applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and owed a Prevention or Relief Duty by the Council in accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act or equivalent for legacy case prior to April 2018. The Fund will be available to families, single and couple households.
- 4.2 Applicants in debt or financial hardship will be referred to the Housing Welfare Officer by the Housing Advice Team for a full financial assessment. Following the assessment a debt management plan will be agreed with the applicant to address and manage the debt.
- 4.3 The Housing Welfare Officer will establish whether the applicant is eligible or entitled to any:
 - charitable donation
 - welfare benefits and/or
 - discretionary non-repayable grants

to reduce or pay off the outstanding debt. The Housing Welfare Officer will confirm the total outstanding housing related debt after all attempts to claim for eligible donations, welfare benefits or non-repayable grants are exhausted.

5. Applicants will only be eligible for a grant through the fund if:

- a grant payment will eliminate all of the applicants housing related debt(s) and,
- any other secondary debts are manageable and managed and,
- that prior to the grant, the applicant is managing their financial affairs for a minimum period of at least 8 weeks and
- once the significant housing related debt is cleared the applicant will be eligible to join the housing register.

6. Financial assessments which conclude that the applicant has sufficient savings and/or income to repay the significant housing related debt(s) within a six months period will not be eligible for a grant through the Fund.
7. The Housing Welfare Officer will administer applications for grant funding and will make recommendation for authorisation to the Housing Options Manager, Accommodation Services Manager or Divisional Manager.
8. Payments of grant to individual households from the fund will be limited to £3,000. In exceptional circumstances where the household has no alternative housing options available to them, the limit can be increased to £6,000 with approval from the Divisional Manager for Housing.
9. On authorisation the Business Support Officer will arrange direct payment to client's creditor. The application will be recorded in the applicant's digital housing file and a Homeless Prevention Fund spreadsheet will record payments made.
10. The policy has been developed to reflect the Corporate Debt Recovery and Write Off Policy adopted on 5 September 2017. This cites vulnerability as one of the circumstances where a debt may be written off i.e. where a debtor has no realistic means of paying the debt due to vulnerability, and all due process has been followed.

Implementation

This policy will be effective from 1st April 2019 and will be used to allocate the remaining funds in the Homelessness Prevention Fund.

Monitoring and review

This policy will be viewed as a pilot for a period of 12 months or until the fund is exhausted subject to review. The use of the fund and outcomes for both the clients and the Council will be monitored and fully reviewed after 12 months to ensure that this policy aligns with the Housing Allocations Scheme and provides the most effective outcomes for both clients and the council.