

Chichester District Council

Homelessness Prevention and Relief Policy

1. Introduction

This document sets out the general principles for providing funding under the Chichester District Council Homelessness Prevention and Relief Policy (HPRP)

This policy supports and is to be read alongside the Council's Discretionary Housing Payment Policy (DHP) and the service level agreement with Stonepillow for the provision of furniture packs under the Crisis Furniture Support Project. It should also sit alongside the Council's Debt Recovery Policy. The Council's Allocations Scheme will also be relevant in cases which revolve around access to the Housing Register.

It is also supported as part of the Council's Community and Housing Covid Recovery Plan.

2. Aims

To provide flexible, bespoke, financial assistance via the HPRP to prevent or relieve homelessness for residents with whom the Council (or its key partners) is actively working.

Based on the principle that the policy is drafted so that it is broad enough to be applicable to almost any situation which may arise and to allow the budget holder/approver to exercise judgement in relation to specific cases.

3. Objectives

The objectives of the policy are:

- To help with housing related debts which **prevent** people moving into a suitable home, to free up short stay accommodation and/or to reduce costs to the council
- To assist those who are **not eligible** for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) eg for rent in advance and tenancy deposits
- To provide financial assistance to **access** housing eg payment of incentives, removal/relocation costs or where a landlord will not accept the Council's deposit bond scheme provided via the Homefinder Service.
- To provide other financial assistance to **retain** housing eg landlord payments to meet arrears or bolster deposits.
- To **reduce** costs to the Council eg on an invest to save basis
- To **enable** a flexible, bespoke, 'what matters is what works' approach on a person centred basis

4. Priority groups for assistance

- Residents moving out of nightly paid accommodation eg B and B or Westward House
- Rough sleepers actively working with the Rough Sleeper Team and/or partner agencies such as Stonepillow
- Anyone coming to the council under the Homelessness Reduction Act who is actively working and co-operating with the housing advice team

5. Other considerations

- That those being helped are in genuine financial hardship and are actively working with the council's services (eg housing, housing benefit, rough sleeper) and its partner agencies eg debt and money advice services to resolve their situation.
- Applicants will need to agree to providing evidence of income/savings, debts and/or agree to a credit search, and in addition to be claiming all the income and welfare benefits they are entitled to.
- For access to the Housing Register, once financial issues have been resolved, applicants would then need to be eligible (ie have no other factors rendering them ineligible for the Housing Register)
- It is in our interest to make sure that people can move on from hostel, specialist or supported housing and the policy will be part of the tool box giving officers the ability to unblock obstacles to getting people rehoused where there is seems to be appropriate as part of a long term solution.
- Funding made under this policy must not generate unintended consequences eg where a resident deliberately makes no payments or does not attempt to address housing related debts in the belief that the council will make these payments for them. Agreements can be made under this scheme to meet a proportion of the debts on the basis the resident/friend/relative/guarantor meets the remainder.
- There is no upper limit on any total award under this policy although in general it would not be expected to often exceed £5,000. The invest to save assessment will work very differently for different types of applicant so a payment to prevent or relieve homelessness for a family of ten would be very different to that for a single person. Discretion rests with the budget holder/approver.
- An assessment will need to be made where housing related debts could be resolved via this policy but the applicant still has one or more secondary debts eg loans, council tax arrears.
- A case by case view will be needed if the applicant has prioritised non-essential expenditure over rent, mortgage and/or service charges.

6. Recommendations, approval and budget holder

- The budget holder is the Housing Options Manager and they or the Divisional Manager for Housing will approve applications.
- Recommendations and requests under this scheme can be made by any officer in Housing Services or a support worker from a partner organisation working with the same client group for example Stonepillow
- Payments are made to the creditor rather than direct to the resident. Those organisations, individuals or landlords who will be in receipt of a grant under this policy may already be known to the Council and set up as creditors. Those that aren't will complete a new supplier form (or the on line e-form when launched) to confirm their details including banking details. The grant requisitioner will complete a payment request form with sufficient supporting documentation to evidence and justify the request. This will then be reviewed and authorised as appropriate by those delegated to approve payments under the policy.

7. Monitoring and record keeping

- Accurate records must be kept for all decisions and payments made under the scheme to ensure a valid audit trail.

8. Review

- The scheme will be reviewed on an annual basis or at the point the budget reduces to below £10,000, whichever is the sooner.
- An assessment will be made of the outcomes, impact and effectiveness of the policy particularly where it can be demonstrated that the 'spend to save' principle has been achieved and whether there is a need to identify further funding.