

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LANDLORD SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

29 SEPTEMBER 2022

Title:

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT HARDSHIP FUND UPDATE

Portfolio Holder: Co-Portfolio Holder for Housing Paul Rivers

Head of Service: Hugh Wagstaff, Head of Housing Operations

Key decision: No

Access: Public

1. Purpose and summary

To share updated guidance on the use of the HRA Hardship fund following the Boards comments in July.

2. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board considers the report and guidance and:

- 1) identifies any areas for comment or further exploration,
- 2) supports the implementation of the guidance and
- 3) makes any recommendations to senior management or the Portfolio Holders for Housing as appropriate,

3. Reason for the recommendation

To provide review and challenge to housing service implementation of the fund.

4. Background

4.1 The Council agreed a £30,000 Housing Revenue Account hardship fund, in the 2022/23 budget. This discretionary fund is aimed to assist tenants who are financially impacted by the 2022/23 rent increase.

4.2 Since the budget approval further resources have been made available to residents experiencing financial hardship due to the pandemic and/ or cost of living increase. Therefore, the take up and request for funds from the HRA Hardship fund is expected to be lower than originally envisaged. No referrals have been made as at 15 September 2022.

4.3 The Household Support Fund has been extended by Surrey County Council, to help the most vulnerable households with the cost of essentials such as food,

clothing and utilities. Waverley residents can apply directly, details on the Council website.

4.4 Utility providers have additional funds to assist with the increase in energy costs and other charitable organisations have increased funds available to tackle food and fuel poverty. Citizens Advice can assist residents with making claims.

4.5 The government have also announced a £650 cost of living payment for all on means-tested benefits. Payment will be made in two lump sums in July and in the autumn.

4.6 The Energy Bills Support Scheme will deliver £400 to households with a domestic electricity meter, from October 2022.

4.7 The HRA Hardship Fund was developed to assist tenants experiencing financial hardship due to the 2022/23 increase in rent and will be used when all other funding options have been considered and exhausted.

4.8 The Rent Accounts team work closely with tenants with financial difficulties and support and signpost accordingly.

4.9 In July the Board were asked if the eligibility guidance should include a financial threshold to be eligible for support eg a month's arrears and if there should be a limit to the number of times a tenant may seek assistance through the HRA Hardship Fund. The Board also made suggestions to broaden the use and widen the promotion of the HRA Hardship Fund to ensure tenants knew help was available.

4.10 Officers have updated the eligibility guidance accordingly for the Board's review.

5. Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan

The report supports the Council's Corporate commitment to promote "*Good quality housing for all income levels and age groups*" and aim to "*be the best council landlord in the South East and to be acknowledged so by our tenants.*"

Annexes:

Annexe 1 –HRA Hardship Fund

Background Papers

There are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

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