



HRA Hardship Fund Policy

Service Improvement Team

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1. Introduction

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.

This set of criteria is to be used as a guide and not as a definitive set of rules – the Housing Officer will use their discretion in assessing cases and making recommendations for payments.

We will raise awareness of the fund through the Tenant Newsletter and officer engagement.

The policy will be routinely reviewed at the Landlord Services Advisory Board, and formally reviewed at the next budget setting.

January 2023 addendum

Since the 2022/23 budget approval further resources¹ have been made available to residents experiencing financial hardship due the 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. (£1k in first six months).

Tenants in financial hardship are having challenges in balancing day to day essentials such as rent, heating, water, food and transport. They are often reluctant to seek help or wait until circumstances are dire, before seeking assistance. The escalating cost of energy services has an impact on tenants particularly those in homes with poor energy performance. With “heat or eat” becoming a reality for many.

Therefore consideration was given on ways to use the HRA hardship fund to proactively support tenants.

2. Statement of Objectives

This policy has two objectives to assist those tenants affected by the introduction of Waverley’s 2022/23 rent increase.

1. Enable the council to consider awarding a discretionary sum of money, to a household that experiences severe financial difficulties and whose circumstances are such that they cannot meet essential day to day living costs as a result of the introduction of Waverley’s 2022 rent increase

¹ Household Support Fund extended, central government cost of living payments, charitable and utility provider funds.

2. To prevent tenants going into arrears, putting their tenancy at risk as a result of the 2022/23 rent increase

3. The Policy

The main features of the policy are:

1. It is discretionary and the decisions are taken by Housing Officers for awards up to £500, and by the Rents Account Manager when above £500
2. There is an initial sum set aside of £30,000 which is subject to change over the year
3. Any unsuccessful applications can be appealed in writing to the Rent Account Manager for applications of up to £500 and by the Head of Housing for anything above this
4. Applications are considered on a case-by-case basis and awards given to assist tenants to maintain their tenancy.

January 2023 addendum

5. Proposals to proactively use the fund to support tenants in homes with poor energy performance and/or poor condition, will be considered

4. Applying for an award

Any application for a discretionary payment must be made in writing by a Housing Officer.

The application must:

- Be made on behalf of a Waverley Council tenant
- Provide evidence in support of an application, e.g., rent account, bank account, utility bill

January 2023 addendum

The Head of Housing Service in consultation with Co-Portfolio Holder for Housing will consider any proactive proposals to assist tenants.

5. Criteria for an award

The Council will:

- Seek alternative financial assistance
- Treat all applications on their individual merit
- Assess all applications on a basis of financial need
- Consider whether there are sufficient funds in the Council's budget to make an award

Applications will be considered on a basis of financial need and only where an applicant has:

- Satisfied the council that they have taken all reasonable steps to resolve their situation prior to making the application
- Been awarded all other eligible discounts and benefits
- Provided all necessary and relevant information within the required time scale

January 2023 addendum

The Head of Housing Service in consultation with Co-Portfolio Holder for Housing will agree any proactive proposals to assist tenants.

6. Notification

The council will notify the applicant of the outcome of their application within fourteen days of the application.

Where the application is successful, we will tell the applicant:

- the amount of the award
- the manner in which it will be awarded, e.g., added to the rent account, given as a voucher, direct ordering of goods

Where the request for a discretionary award is unsuccessful, we will explain the reasons why the decision was made.