



AGENDA ITEM:

SUMMARY

Report for:	Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	4 June 2013
PART:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Review of discretionary policies in Revenues and Benefits
Contact:	<p>Cllr Nicholas Tiley, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources</p> <p>Author/Responsible Officer: Chris Baker, Group Manager Revenues, Benefits and Fraud</p>
Purpose of report:	To seek approval of revised policies for discretionary housing payments, discretionary council tax reduction and discretionary rate relief.
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To agree recommendations for new discretionary housing payments policy. 2. To agree recommendations for new discretionary council tax reduction policy. 3. To agree recommendations for new discretionary rate relief policy.
Corporate objectives:	<p>Dacorum Delivers – revision of the policies will ensure that discretionary awards made by Revenues and Benefits support local residents thus providing better value for money.</p> <p>Building Community Capacity – ensuring discretionary awards contribute to the objectives of the Council and thus benefit the local community.</p> <p>Regeneration – discretionary rate relief can be used to support local businesses and so aid regeneration in rural areas.</p>
Implications:	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>The April 2013 changes to welfare benefits and the localisation</p>

	<p>of business rates have impacted on the discretionary funding required to be made by the Council. This review enables the Council to review on-going entitlement, to ensure future applications meet the new criteria and therefore ensure all expenditure is beneficial to the community.</p> <p><u>Value for Money</u></p> <p>Revising the policies enables the Council to ensure that all awards contribute to the priorities of the Council and so therefore provide value for money to residents.</p>
Risk Implications	Risks reviewed and risk associated is addressed by actions highlighted in this report.
Equalities Implications	The aim of the policies is to ensure that all applicants are treated in a fair consistent and equal manner.
Health And Safety Implications	There are no health and safety implications arising from this report
Consultees:	None
Background papers:	None

1. Background

1.1 There are three areas of Revenues and Benefits within which the Council has discretion to make further awards of support:

- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) can be made in addition to housing benefit awards;
- Discretionary Council Tax Reductions (DCTR) can be used to reduce council tax bills in addition to discounts, exemptions and local council tax support; and,
- Discretionary Rate Relief (DRR) can be used to reduce business rate bills in addition to statutory reliefs.

2. The impact of Welfare Reform

2.1 Changes arising from the government's welfare reform agenda, effective from 1 April 2013, have necessitated a review of the Council's discretionary policies for each of these areas:

- The Discretionary Housing Payments policy needs to be revised to take into account the recent changes to welfare benefits, and to ensure that effective use is made of the additional central government funding provided for this scheme;

- The Discretionary Council Tax Reduction policy needs to be revised to take into account the recent changes to welfare benefits and the local Council Tax Support Scheme; and,
- The Discretionary Rate Relief policy needs to be revised to take into account changes in funding due to Business Rates Retention.

2.2 The proposed policies incorporating these changes are attached as appendices to this report. They have been drafted to make it clear how awards will be made in line with the Council's objectives, and the factors which will be taken into account when decisions are made.