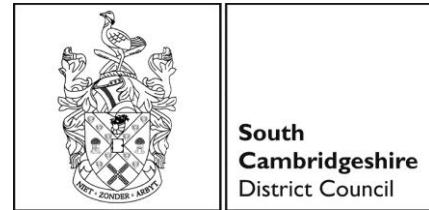


Appendix A

South Cambridgeshire District Council



Policy for the Award of Discretionary Housing Payments

In accordance with the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000, and the Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001.

Overview

This policy has been agreed by the South Cambridgeshire District Council to ensure all persons making applications for this payment are treated in a fair, consistent and equal manner.

This policy;

- Is intended to facilitate awards to those residents most in need of assistance with their housing costs
- Sets criteria for the factors that should be considered when making a decision to award or refuse a discretionary payment
- Establishes a transparent process for evaluating applications for awards against established criteria
- Shall be publicised and made freely available

Application of Policy

1. Awards of discretionary housing payments should normally only be made where there is sufficient Government grant to meet the cost of the award. Awards exceeding the amount of the grant may only be made in exceptional circumstances in accordance with item 9 below.
2. Individuals applying for an award shall normally be required to complete the Council's Application Form and supply sufficient evidence, to the Council's satisfaction, to support their application. The Council will provide help and assistance, including home visits, to assist those who may have difficulty, for any reason, in completing the application.
3. Translation services will be made available and provided on request, or where it appears to the Council that the applicant will benefit from this service.
4. Applications will only be considered where signed by the applicant, or a suitable advocate such as a social worker or a welfare benefits advisor.
5. Applicants aggrieved with an initial decision made in respect of an application may appeal against the decision. Appeals must be made in writing (subject to item 2 above) and will only be considered if received within one month of the Council notifying the applicant of the decision.

6. Determination of awards and appeals shall be processed in accordance with the Council's Constitution.
7. Awards shall be limited to a maximum of 26 weeks or for the period to 31st March of the year in respect of which the application is made, whichever is the sooner. New applications may be submitted once the current award ends.
8. The allocation of any award between Council Tax and rent liability shall be as determined by the Council and shall not be subject to appeal.
9. In exceptional circumstances where an application is considered to be particularly deserving, (for example to prevent immediate homelessness), but falls outside the scope of this policy, the Council may choose to make an exception and allow an award. Such awards will be determined in accordance with the Council's Constitution, will be strictly at the discretion of the Council and not subject to any right of appeal.
10. All applications shall be evaluated against the following factors weighing in favour of, and against, an award.
11. Where those factors in favour of an award outweigh those against, an award shall be made, and vice versa.
12. The amount of the award shall be determined at the discretion of the Chief Financial Officer processing the application, taking into consideration the weight of factors in favour of and against an award. Higher awards shall therefore be made where factors weigh strongly in favour, and lower awards where the opposite applies.
13. The duration of an award shall be determined with regard to the particular circumstances of the case and item 7 above.
14. Requests will be considered as quickly as possible and decisions shall be made within no more than four weeks of the Council receiving all the information it requires.
15. A written record shall be kept of all awards and applicants shall be notified in writing of the outcome.
16. In the event that it is discovered that incorrect or false information was supplied with the application the Council will seek to recover the discretionary housing payment and will take legal action where necessary.

Discretionary Housing Payment – Factors to be considered in evaluating awards

	Factors supporting a discretionary housing payment	Yes	No	N/k
1	The applicant is proactive in addressing the circumstances that have led to a need for a discretionary award.			
2	The applicant is at risk of becoming homeless and an award would help to prevent homelessness.			
3	The applicant has fled domestic violence.			
4	The applicant or a resident family member has a disability, serious illness or other special circumstances (these may include recent bereavement, drug or alcohol dependency, domestic violence etc).			
5	An award may prevent the applicant incurring further costs in connection with recovery proceeding for unpaid Council Tax of rent.			
6	The applicant's disposable income, after reasonable expenses, does not cover the shortfall in rent.			
7	No other suitable accommodation is available in the locality.			
8	It is not reasonable to expect the applicant to move due to strong links with the local community (i.e. family, employment, schools, health care, etc).			
9	The Council's Housing Advice and Options service consider the applicant a priority need housing case.			
10	The applicant has applied for social housing with the Council or a recognised social landlord.			
11	The applicant is receiving advice from the Council's Housing Advice and Options Service.			
12	The shortfall is due entirely to a difference between the current rent and the rent agreed by the Rent Service and it is likely that the Rent Service will increase the reference rent when the claim is able to be referred for re-evaluation.			
13	The applicant could afford the rent when they took the tenancy but their financial or personal circumstances have changed unexpectedly.			
14	The landlord terminated their previous tenancy with short notice limiting their ability to find alternative accommodation.			
15	The applicant has a regular access arrangement with non-resident children and therefore requires a larger property.			
16	The circumstances leading to a claim are of a short-term nature and are expected to change within no more than 52 weeks.			
17	The accommodation has an extra bedroom which is required due to the special circumstances of the household (i.e. due to health problems)			

	Factors weighing against a discretionary housing payment	Yes	No	N/k
1	The applicant has not supplied the information requested to support the award, or there is good reason to believe the information supplied is inaccurate.			
2	The shortfall against liability is entirely due to the excess income taper reduction of benefit entitlement.			
3	Sanctions have previously been imposed against the applicant for fraudulently claiming benefits.			
4	Their income exceeds reasonable expenditure and there is a disposable income with which to meet the shortfall.			
5	The applicant has other debts or financial commitments that could be renegotiated to reduce outgoings.			
6	There is a reduction in benefit as a result of the 'two-strikes' fraud overpayment reduction.			
7	The rent on property is expensive compared to others in the area.			
8	The applicant applied for a pre-tenancy determination, or received advice from the Council's Housing Advice service or other reputable advice agency, but still entered into an agreement knowing that the full rent would not be met by housing benefit.			
9	The applicant gave up a tenancy at a lower rent without good reason.			
11	The applicant has refused an offer of social housing in the last 12 months.			
12	The applicant has an interest in another property.			
13	The applicant has received an award within the previous 52 weeks and the circumstances remain the same.			
14	Previous awards in excess of £500 have been made within the current financial year.			
15	The applicant has failed to advise the Council of a change in circumstances that may have affected a previous award.			
16	The shortfall is due to the property being larger than required for the applicant's circumstances.			
17	The applicant has a record of being abusive or violent towards Council employees.			