

REPORT TO: HOUSING COMMITTEE – 18 NOVEMBER 2002
SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE – 18 NOVEMBER 2002

REPORT ON: CHARGING POLICY FOR HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICES

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF HOUSING AND DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 839-2002

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval for the implementation of a new charging policy for housing support services.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council agrees:

- 2.1. To adopt the current Charging for Non-residential Care Policy for housing support services, funded by Supporting People Grant.
- 2.2. Bring forward at a later date, an additional report identifying chargeable services.

3. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

The Supporting People policy framework should improve the health and well-being of people by enhancing the range of accommodation and support services to meet their needs.

4. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

The full implementation of the Supporting People Policy and framework should improve the choice of accommodation with support available to vulnerable people. It also gives the opportunity to provide flexible housing support irrespective of where the recipient lives.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The introduction of this proposed charging policy is likely to result in the requirements for additional staff. Where individuals previously paid their service provider for housing support services, under Supporting People the Council will be responsible for assessing, billing and recovering charges. If not done timeously, will lead to a shortfall in the Supporting People Budget. A further report will be brought forward at a later date to outline the practicalities and financial consequences of the new administrative process.

6. **BACKGROUND**

- 6.1. The Supporting People programme is a new funding and administrative structure to provide Housing Support Services to a wide range of vulnerable people. In April 2003, Supporting People funding will replace Transitional Housing Benefit (THB), Scottish Homes' Needs Allowance Package (SNAP), Resettlement Grant and the support element of income related Job Seekers Allowance. Lead responsibility for Supporting People rests with the Local Authorities through which all Supporting People funds will be distributed.
- 6.2. Supporting People grant will be paid by the Scottish Executive to the Local Authorities net of an assumed level of charging income. Any income lost by not charging for services or non-payment, must be borne by the Local Authority.
- 6.3. The Authority to charge for housing support services is given under section 87 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968.
- 6.4. The Scottish Executive Guidance requires Councils to adopt a charging policy based on the recent COSLA guidance on Charging Policies for non-residential services.

The existing City Council charging policy for non-residential care is in line with this guidance.

7. **PROPOSED CHARGING POLICY**

- 7.1. All service users receiving a housing support service will either be exempt from charges or will have to contribute based on their financial circumstances. The financial assessment will determine how much the service user has to pay. Since 1996 service users have been financially assessed for non-residential care services through the Council's Charging for Non-residential Care Policy. From April 2003 this assessment will include housing support services. While service users in receipt of Housing Benefit will be exempt from charges for housing support, they may still be eligible to contribute towards their non-residential care services.

Receipt of Housing Benefit does not passport service users to free non-residential care services, their ability to pay will continue to be based on their financial circumstances.

When a service user is assessed as being unable to pay for their non-residential care services, the subsidy is borne by the Homecare budget.

- 7.2. The guidance suggests that any potential charging arrangement for housing support services should be incorporated into an overall scheme which would include charges for non-residential care. A single financial assessment would take account of the level of non-residential care and housing support services. It would avoid duplication and ensure service users disposable income is not brought below a defined basic level. Under no circumstances will a service user pay a charge greater than the cost of the service. In addition the level of service provided would be based on need assessed not ability to pay.

7.3. The charging process/policy needs to be fair and understandable for service users and consistent with other charging policies locally.

7.4. Dundee City Council have had a comprehensive charging policy for non-residential care services since 1996.

The current charging for non-residential care policy is in line with recent COSLA guidance, although this is primarily aimed at services for older people, the principles apply equally to all other service user groups.

All service users receiving a non-residential care service are offered a comprehensive welfare benefit check with the aim of increasing the service user's weekly income. No-one using the service is asked to contribute until they have been offered a benefit check. People who refuse or fail, to provide information about their resources are charged the economic cost of their service.

7.5. Dundee City Council have experience of developing income maximisation policies and teams have been working closely to ensure effective implementation of the housing support charging process.

8. CHARGEABLE SERVICES

8.1. Scottish Executive guidance states that certain service users will be exempted from charges and certain housing support services will be exempted.

8.2. "No charge can be levied on service users who fall into the categories below:

- Protected tenants; (*these are tenants who have previously not been required to pay housing support charges or who have incurred higher charges as a result of Scottish Executive guidance on Pooled Rent income*). NB – Dundee City Council does not have any tenants who will require to be treated as "Pooled Tenants".
- Those whose housing support services were previously funded by SNAP.
- Those in receipt of Housing Benefit; and
- Those receiving short-term services defined below:

A service may be considered short-term where it:

- Aims to bring about independent living within 2 years (*disregarding delays in securing move-on accommodation*) following resolution of a specific need or needs which the supported living arrangement aims to remedy, or following completion of a time-limited programme of support of under 2 years intended duration.
- Aims to increase the capacity for independent living (*even if fully independent living may not be likely*) through a package of time-limited housing support under these directions, which package has an intended timescale of under 2 years.

It is unlikely to be short-term where it:

- aims to maintain a limited degree of independent living which is not expected to increase, and may diminish over time, as part of a permanent or open-ended arrangement.” *(Further guidance on long and short term schemes will be issued by the Scottish Executive soon).*

8.3. The guidance states that certain services should be treated differently:

Cannot charge service users for short-term services (*under 2 years*).

Can charge service users for long-term services (*2 years +*).

Can choose not to charge for any housing support services.

A separate report will follow with a list of chargeable housing support services.

9. **CONSULTATION**

The Chief Executive, Director of Support Services and Director of Finance have been consulted on the content of this report.

10. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Dundee City Council Charging for Non-Residential Care Policy.
- Supporting People Consultation Paper 12, Charging and Financial Assessment.

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DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

SIGNATURE _____

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DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

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