

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000**

Your request for information has now been considered and the Council's response to your questions is shown below.

### **You asked:**

#### **What specific policies has your authority put in place in response to the benefit cap?**

One new policy but solely as a result of benefit cap:  
Council Tax Discretionary Relief policy

Existing policies used to support households facing the rule:  
Discretionary Housing Payment policy  
Housing Allocations policy

Creation of the discretionary fund board to review decision making on discretionary funds to ensure delivery is appropriately and fairly distributed to those identified as most in need for all discretionary funding managed by the council with particular reference to:

- Council Tax Discretionary Relief policy
- Discretionary Housing Payment policy
- Community Support Grant scheme
- Section 17 and 24 payments

#### **What activity is your authority undertaking to a) identify, and**

1) The Housing benefit caseload data has been data matched with a number of key data sets within the authority to assist with the discretionary fund boards objective to support those in most need. Appropriate data sharing protocols have been put in place and adhered to.

- a. Children's services including care leavers
- b. Adult and Social care
- c. Councils own housing stock
- d. Community support grant caseload – crisis payments
- e. Tenancy support team
- f. Think family programme
- g. Pupil premium
- h. Registered social landlords

2) The Department for Works and Pension data scans has been cross matched with the above activity to highlight the benefit cap households in particular.

#### **b) contact households affected by the benefit cap?**

A) Comprehensive programme of direct engagement with our council tenant residents and private tenants prior to August 2013. All households have received a direct mail shot, council tenants have been offered one to one telephone calls where appropriate and/or home visits where needed.

B) A number of community events across the city both at a central locations and within wards where they impact is the greatest have been ran to highlight the advice and support the council can offer all tenure types have been invited along.

C) Comprehensive communication plan for social and private sector tenants including

- General information leaflet
- Webpage offering advice and support
- FAQ's for customers, staff/advice agencies and councillor's
- Articles in our tenants housing magazine and Citizen Newsletter.
- This has been shared with our registered social landlord colleagues who have been undertaking their own awareness activities.

All of which have ran since October 2012 and are on-going.

**How many**

**a) children**

**b) children in need\***

**will be affected by the benefit cap in your authority?**

We do not know exactly how many children in our city are directly affected by the reforms to welfare benefits. For the benefit cap in particular there are 410 households who have dependent children resident could potentially be affected by the rule. Within these households up to 693 children could be affected based on the accumulative household data supplied to the authority over the past year by the DWP However, until we are formally notified of the cap applying to the household we will not know the true impact.

**How many families with children does your authority anticipate having to move house:**

**a) within the authority**

**b) outside of the authority**

**as a consequence of the benefit cap?**

The emphasis from Housing Options is to ensure that advice and information is available to private tenants who are affected by the benefit cap and to provide information about other housing options that may be available to them

We do not see the Authority 'asking anyone to move' but we will be strongly suggesting that they consider moving to more affordable accommodation as a resolution and how we can help and facilitate this will obviously depend upon individual circumstances.

Anyone who is living in accommodation that has become unaffordable due to no fault of their own may be entitled to statutory intervention as it is deemed as unreasonable to continue to occupy. This is something that has to be assessed on a case by case basis.

### **What joint activity are children's services and housing undertaking in response to the benefit cap?**

Children's Services are involved in joint work with Revenue and Benefits as part of the child poverty commission action plan to look at how we can reduce and mitigate the effects of poverty for children in families with in low income and/or on welfare benefits – including

- collaboration with community grants scheme
- Supporting families to maximise their income
- Promoting access to adult learning
- Supporting parents to move into employment
- Supporting access to affordable childcare
- linking with citywide co-ordination of food banks

### **How do children's services work with services in other authorities when children in need\* are placed in either temporary or settled accommodation in another authority?**

**\* Children in need as defined by Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.**

If a family presented to Children's social care, a social worker would carry out an initial screening of their situation and circumstances. This would then ascertain if a S.17 Single Assessment is required.

Other Local Authorities might be involved, particularly if Domestic Violence is a reason for a temporary move or the move has been facilitated by another Local Authority for other reasons; a child going to live with friend /relative who lives in another area; carer receives no benefits for the child.

If another LA is already involved we would be making contact to discuss if they should be offering support and if the case needs formally transferring to us. Likewise, if this was a family open to Leicester City Council, we would advise other LA's that the family moving to their area.

If there were financial issues we would look at the benefits being claimed and sign post the family to services that could assist with this process.

If there was an immediate issue (exceptional circumstances) for example having no money or essential items, we would assist by making a one off payment or giving food parcel/ items from our own resources.

The crux of the issue is whether temporary or permanent children's social care are required to carry out at the very minimum a screening of the family and ensure that they are receiving benefits for their children from the right service.

Section 17 payments are only made after we have satisfied ourselves that there is a need and the LA is the only service that can provide this.

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