

REPORT OF Section 151 Officer
To: Full Council
Subject: Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support – War Pension and Armed Forces
Compensation Scheme
Date: 17th June 2023 Reference:

PURPOSE OF REPORT: For members to approve the adoption of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support Policy for war widows/widowers of members of the armed forces and those receiving a disability related pension arising from their service within the armed forces.

1. Introduction and background

1.1. A recent external housing benefit audit recommended a formal adoption of a policy pertaining to the awarding Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support for those in receipt of a war widows/widower pension or in receipt of a disability related pension arising from their service within the armed Forces. This report and the attached policy address this recommendation.

2. Current Practice

The Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 make provision for the first £10 per week of income from War Widows (Widowers) pensions and armed forces related disability pensions to be ignored when calculating entitlement to Housing Benefit. The cost of this being reimbursed to the Council via the Housing Benefit Subsidy.

The Council has discretion to disregard further amounts when assessing entitlement to Housing Benefit, however this disregard of income comes at a cost to the Council, with the Council bearing the cost for 25% of the additional disregarded income.

The current practice of disregarding these income source comes at a cost to the Council of circa £7k per annum in terms of unrecoverable Housing Benefit Subsidy.

The Council also fully disregards these income sources when making assessment for Local Council Tax Support. The cost to the Council of disregarding this income for Local Council Tax Support is minimal as Torridge's share of Council Tax income is only circa 8%.

3. Conclusion

Given that the Council has adopted the Armed Forces Covenant it would appear inconsistent for the Council to not to formalise its current practices into a formal policy. The costs to Torridge Council of adopting this policy are minimal, and are currently within approved budgets

Implications

Legal Implications

The Council is required to set a balanced annual budget.

Financial Implications

These are contained in the report.

Human Resources Implications

n/a

Sustainability Implications

None directly applicable to this report.

Equality/Diversity

None directly applicable to this report.

Risk Management

The Council's exposure to expenditure is modest, and likely to decline over time as the caseload reduces.

Compliance with Policies and Strategies

Forms part of the strategy process.

6. Recommendations:

That Members

- Approve the attached policy for full disregards for War Widows/(Widowers) and disability related pensions arising from service with the armed forces.