

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

Administration Framework, April 2022



What is the purpose of this administration framework?

This Administration Guide explains what a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) is, what it is for, who can apply, how to apply and how we make decisions. More information can be found in the Department for Work and Pensions Discretionary Housing Payments Guidance Manual which can be located at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/discretionary-housing-payments-guidance-manual>

What is a Discretionary Housing Payment?

DHPs are extra payments to help with rent or housing costs for people in receipt of a qualifying benefit. It is a short term emergency fund and is not to be used as a means of ongoing support nor can it support ongoing financial hardship. For the majority of people, DHP is short term support giving people time to make changes to their circumstances.

What is the eligibility criteria?

You must be in receipt of Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit and be able to clearly demonstrate that further financial assistance towards housing costs is required. In most cases 'further financial assistance' means that you are unable to meet your housing costs yourself as you have no available income.

Before you apply

We would expect you to demonstrate the following (where appropriate) before applying:

- You have tried to negotiate a lower rent with your landlord
- You are looking for more affordable alternative accommodation.

In addition, we may ask you what you are doing to improve your situation. For example, that you are registered on Tees Valley Homefinder and are actively looking for affordable accommodation.

Information you need to apply

Application forms can be obtained from The Civic Centre, Victoria Road, Hartlepool, TS24 8AY during office hours. Alternatively, you can apply online:

https://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/info/20127/benefits_and_grants/850/discretionary_housing_payment/1.

Application forms must be fully completed with all relevant evidence supplied where required. Incomplete application forms missing essential information will be rejected. As a minimum you will need to tell us:

- your name and contact details
- your address and landlord details
- your National Insurance Number
- confirmation of your benefit entitlements
- details of your income including amounts you receive
- breakdown of your expenses and how you spend your money each week
- details of any arrears or debts you have and the repayment amounts
- details of anyone who lives with you, including their income
- if applying for a rent deposit, bond or rent in advance we need the details of the new property, how many bedrooms, who the landlord is and their contact number.

What can DHP cover?

DHP can be used to:

- help with rent shortfalls
- help with a bond
- help with deposits
- help with removal costs
- help with rent overlaps (in exceptional circumstances)
- help with rent arrears (in exceptional circumstances).

What types of shortfall in rent can it cover?

There are a number of reasons why the amount of Housing Benefit, or the housing costs element of Universal Credit, you receive is less than the rent you have to pay. These are the main types of shortfall DHP can help cover:

- Social Size Criteria – also known as the ‘under-occupancy charge’ or ‘the bedroom tax’
- Non-dependent deduction – you have an adult living with you who is not a partner, joint tenant or boarder
- Baby due – you have moved into a bigger property as your family size is due to increase
- Benefit Cap – your benefits have been capped
- Local Housing Allowance – you are only entitled to the rate for a shared room or the maximum rate for 4 bedrooms
- Any other reason than the above – for example, your income is too high to be entitled to full help with your rent.

How we decide who can have DHPs

DHPs are for Hartlepool residents. You need to have been a resident of the town for at least six months before you apply (exceptions apply, for example those who are fleeing domestic abuse or have had to relocate due to family caring responsibilities). DHP funding comes from central government and is limited each year. Once the funding has been spent, no more awards can be made. Applicants must meet the eligibility criteria. We aim to make sure that payments are made to those who are most in need.

We look at the following when we make a decision:

- your income and your savings
- if anyone else in your house can help you
- if you have any loans or debts
- if you could manage your money better
- if you or anyone in your family is ill or disabled; and
- if you have tried to put the situation right.

We will not usually pay DHPs if we think you can deal with the shortfall in other ways such as:

- asking the landlord for a rent reduction or help with the rent costs
- claiming other benefits you may be entitled to
- negotiating any debt repayments
- cutting down on unnecessary and avoidable expenses
- using your savings to cover the shortfall for a period
- any contributions that are or could be made by a non-dependent
- whether it is possible for you to move
- how long it will take you to find suitable alternative accommodation.

Applications that do not demonstrate that the eligibility criteria are met will be rejected at the point of receipt and the applicant notified accordingly. Applications that do demonstrate that the eligibility criteria are met will be reviewed by an Officer who will recommend whether or not a DHP should be made and if so on what terms.

Note: We treat every case on its own merits and may also take into account other factors that we have not mentioned above.

What cannot be covered by DHPs?

DHPs cannot be paid where there is no rent shortfall. DHPs for Bonds, rent in advance or removal costs cannot be paid retrospectively. In addition, DHPs cannot be used to pay for:

- ineligible service charges
- increases in rent due to outstanding rent arrears
- reduced income caused by sanctions or reductions in benefit.

How much DHP will I get?

The Council receives the DHP fund from central government in six monthly installments. For this reason awards will be made for no more than six months at a time. It is entirely up to the Local Authority how much we pay and for how long.

If a DHP is for help towards ongoing rental liability then, depending on your circumstances, we may pay some or all of your shortfall. The DHP will go direct to the landlord.

If a DHP is for a Bond then we will speak to your landlord to confirm the value of the Bond and that it is in an approved tenancy protection deposit scheme. The DHP will go direct to the landlord.

If your DHP is towards removal costs then we will agree with you which company will undertake the removal and how much they estimate the cost of the work. We will pay the removal company.

If a DHP is to help with rent arrears then you must have been in receipt of Housing Benefit or housing element of Universal Credit at the time the arrears occurred. Arrears payments will only be considered if they are preventing you from sustaining your tenancy or moving to a more affordable one.

What if my circumstances change?

DHPs are based on your circumstances at the time you apply. If your circumstances change, you must tell us straight away as this could affect how much you receive.

Maximum number of awards

DHPs are for short term support and are not to be relied on for long term help. The fund is not able to continuously pay the gap in funds for those tenants that are living in accommodation that they cannot afford and/ or that is too big for their needs. Due to the nature of the fund and its financial limitations, we are not able to make repeat awards. For this reason, and in order to make sure we help as many people as possible, no more than 3 awards can be claimed on a property in successive financial years. Repeat claims must demonstrate what is being done to improve the situation or what additional barriers are preventing them from doing so.

What if I disagree with a decision?

The scheme is purely discretionary and you do not have a statutory right to a payment. If you disagree with our decision you can ask us to look at the decision again. We call this a 'reconsideration'. You should write to us within fourteen days of the date of the decision letter, telling us why you do not agree with our decision. Your case will be reconsidered by a senior officer who will then make a final decision. You will be notified in writing of this reconsideration within 14 working dates of your request for a review. You have no further right of appeal against the final decision and you cannot appeal to the Tribunals Service.

Related Documents

Discretionary Housing Payments Guidance Manual, DWP 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/discretionary-housing-payments-guidance-manual>