

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Scheme

1. What are payments of DHP intended to achieve and who are they intended to help?

- 1.1 This sets out how we will prioritise payment; it does not mean it will always be appropriate to make payments or full payments to everyone who falls into one of the following categories.
- 1.2 The Scheme is designed to:
- enable people to secure or retain appropriate and sustainable accommodation through temporary difficulties
 - reduce the risk of homelessness
 - support the stability of households where children may be at risk
 - support foster carers who need more than one bedroom for their arrangements
 - to support disabled tenants whose home has been significantly adapted to meet their particular needs
 - supporting other vulnerable households in exceptionally difficult circumstances
- 1.3 DHP will not normally be paid where it undermines the purposes of the Housing Benefit scheme, for example supporting payments of exceptionally high rents charged by landlords

2. What can we pay for?

- 2.1 The regulations state that DHP can be used to meet 'housing costs'. This term is defined in the DWP guidance manual as meaning:
- Current rental liability; and more widely:
 - Rent in advance
 - Deposits
 - Other lump sum costs associated with a housing need such as removal costs
- 2.2 The DWP guidance manual also states DHP may not be used for:
- Ineligible services e.g. heating, hot water, water rates etc
 - Increases in rent due to outstanding arrears
 - reductions in benefit as a result of sanctions
 - Benefit suspensions
 - Shortfalls caused by overpayment recovery
- 2.3 The budget is directly linked to government funding which has been subject to considerable change.

3. How long are the awards for?

- 3.1 Awards are expected to last for a fixed period of between four weeks and 26 weeks with the emphasis being on the shorter awards, where the payment is for additional help towards ongoing rent.

3.2 Long-term DHP awards to support tenancies which are unaffordable under normal housing benefit rules will be in exceptional cases only.

4. What other support and conditions might there be attached to an award?

4.1 Payment of DHP should, where possible, be made in conjunction with support from other partners, such as housing options and housing advice agencies, so people's overall housing needs can be addressed.

4.2 The council may make it a condition of an award that the applicant engages with appropriate support; for example:

- Housing Options or other housing advice
- Budgeting and money advice services
- Social Services

5. What will we take into account?

5.1 The budget is cash limited; payments must be of such a level that it allows the council to protect the most vulnerable, whenever they approach us or we identify them. As such, resources need to be carefully profiled and managed throughout the year. The council needs to be particularly mindful of any changes which happen mid-year which could affect the profile of the budget.

5.2 Demand is likely to significantly exceed the funds available. In each year of operation, an analysis should be undertaken to establish the estimated total shortfalls between rent paid and housing benefit received throughout the city.

5.3 The ongoing DHP budget may decrease which in turn will impact the sustainability of ongoing awards; good information should always be kept on levels of likely future year funding.

5.4 A wide range of issues should and can be taken into account when making decisions about whether a DHP should be made. DHP is a discretionary fund with a limited budget and as such it is imperative that each case is considered on its own merits and a decision made accordingly. An overly prescriptive approach could lead to a challenge that the council is fettering its discretion. Whilst this scheme sets out the issues and criteria decision-makers may take into account, other circumstances not listed in this policy could be considered as appropriate to make a payment of DHP against.

5.5 Payments of DHP should be looked at on a case-by-case basis alongside other council discretionary funds, specifically Local Discretionary Social Fund and the discretionary fund to support the Council Tax Reduction scheme.

6. How much will we pay?

6.1 An individual's award should, in the short term, provide an appropriate financial solution. The aim is for this money to have a positive impact.

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- 6.2 Awards will be made on the basis of what is affordable to the individual. It will be common that awards are not made up to the full value of a person's rent and that they will have to make some contribution themselves.
- 6.3 The levels of awards granted in general will need to take into account the other demands on the fund.
- 6.4 We will be carefully profiling expenditure on this budget throughout the year. This will ensure that there is money available during the whole financial year.

Elements staff need to take into account when considering vulnerability and exceptional circumstances

Financial situation

Does the client have multiple debts?	Need to see evidence of all outstanding debts and details of any action taken to recover these. Consider referring to Money Advice agency and / or negotiation on their behalf with any internal creditors e.g. Council Tax arrears, Rent arrears (Council Tenants)
What income does the client have?	Consider whether any household members or relatives able to assist or possibility of help from charitable organisations.
Is the client receiving all the benefits that they may be entitled to?	Check that Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Reduction (CTR) is correct and that there are no other possible welfare benefit entitlements.
Does the client have any capital?	Is it accessible and available to use?

Health of client

Is the client in poor health?	Is this a temporary situation i.e. short stay in hospital or more long term? Does the client receive the correct Disability Benefits? Are we awarding the correct Disability Premiums? Have we got proof of the illness / disability?
Are there members of the client's household who are disabled?	Check that they are getting the correct benefits. Establish carer roles and consider Care Allowance and the HB Carer's Premium.
Does the client have additional spending because of their ill health or disability?	E.g. has to use taxis to travel, special dietary requirements

Loss of home

Has the client been threatened with legal action to recover the property?	Verify copies of any notices served. Check with Housing Options if there is doubt to whether the action taken is correct or legal.
Has the client any alternative accommodation arranged?	Are they due to be re-housed by the council or Housing Association (from the Housing Register)?
Is the home suitable for their	Would they qualify for assistance from the council for

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needs?	re-housing to more suitable accommodation? Check against re-housing criteria or contact Housing Allocations for additional advice.
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Suitability of accommodation

Is the area particularly suitable for the clients needs?	Does the client give good reason for this e.g. close to schools, support networks, hospital, clinics, work, childcare. Are these requirements equally satisfied elsewhere?
Is the accommodation itself suitable for the client or their household members?	Does the client or a member of their family require special facilities? e.g. ground floor, ramps, lifts, wardens or adaptations?

Short term assistance

Does the client need short-term assistance following an emergency situation?	Is there clear evidence of circumstances that may have affected the clients earning capacity or ability to meet financial commitments? E.g. recent burglary, loss of income (job loss, recent bereavement), relationship breakdown.
Has the client recently come back into the community?	Is the client in a transitional period where they may require additional assistance to establish themselves in the community? E.g. release from prison, rehabilitation unit, Community Short Term Care (previously Intermediate Care). Consider transitional Housing Benefit for Supported Accommodation.

Length of payment

Is there a pending change of circumstance?	Is there a baby about to be born? Is there a partner returning from hospital / prison / working away? Is their income due to change shortly?
How long is the assistance required?	Is this a short-term situation? Will the client be able to afford the full payments in the near future? Is the client awaiting the outcome of applications for any other benefit? Are they hoping to find a job or alternative, better-paid employment? Are they actively seeking alternative accommodation? Are they moving – if so when? Have they indicated how long they think they will need the assistance?

Financial considerations

Would the award of DHP keep a client in their home?	Will the payment of DHP make any difference to the client or will they be evicted or re-housed anyway?
How much of a shortfall should be met?	Is the rent they are paying reasonable for their circumstances? What would be a reasonable level? Can they meet part of the payment themselves?
How much funding is available?	What is a reasonable payment in context of the uncommitted amount left in the fund and awards being made to other applicants?

One-off payments

Would a one off payment to help with moving costs mean the client could move to long term sustainable accommodation?	Will the payment be sufficient; are there other payments which may also help?
How much should be paid?	Will the client be eligible to apply to the Deposit Guarantee Scheme through the Housing Options Team?

Further assistance

Could the client's issues actually stem from underlying other issues?	Should a referral be made to further specialist services?
Would the client's situation be better addressed by payment from an alternative discretionary scheme?	Look at eligibility under Local Discretionary Social Fund and Council Tax Reduction Discretionary Scheme.

7. Decision-making and appeals

- 7.1 The Council will notify an individual of the result of their DHP request whether it is positive or negative.
- 7.2 The individual may appeal against that decision by giving their reasons why they disagree with that award in writing within one month of the notification. If the appeal is later than one month it may be considered if there is good reason why the appeal is late.
- 7.3 If an appeal is received a member of staff who was not involved in the first decision will review the first decision and any new information which has been provided. They will then notify the applicant of the outcome of their reconsideration. If the decision is still negative the applicant may appeal again within one month.
- 7.4 If the individual does appeal again, the appeal will be considered by a panel consisting of appropriate senior managers. The panel must consist of at least two people. The decision made by this panel will be final and there is no further right of appeal.

