

Introduction and Overview

DHPs are short-term awards administered by Local Authorities using funding from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to help people with housing costs. They can play an important role in sustaining tenancies, preventing homelessness and, where needed, enabling tenants to move to more affordable accommodation. Increasingly DHPs are being given to assist those affected by welfare reform.

DHPs may cover all or part of a shortfall in a tenant's eligible rent or provide the rent-in-advance and damage deposit a tenant may need in order to secure a tenancy. DHPs may be awarded as a one-off payment and/or as a series of payments.

To qualify for a DHP, the claimant must have a rent liability, require further financial assistance with their housing costs, and be entitled to Housing Benefit or a Universal Credit Housing Costs element.

The overriding principles of Haringey's DHP scheme:

- All applications will be treated fairly and consistently and assessed on their individual merits
- The priority is to prevent homelessness and to sustain tenancies
- Applicants make a contribution to their rent shortfall, unless there is a clear reason why they cannot do so;
- All of the options available to the applicant (including, for example, reducing household expenditure, maximising income, securing employment and/or moving to alternative, less expensive accommodation) will be taken into account
- The applicant is experiencing exceptional circumstances

The following cannot be included in an application:

- Ineligible service charges
- Increases in rent that are due to outstanding rent arrears
- Certain sanctions and reductions in Benefit
- Council Tax liabilities incurred under the 2013 onwards Council Tax Reduction scheme

Haringey's DHP scheme

The expectation is that DHPs will be awarded in unusual or extreme circumstances where additional help will have a significant effect in reducing the risk of homelessness, alleviating hardship, or alleviating difficulties that may be experienced in the transition from long-term benefit dependence into work. In addition, applications will be considered against the Council's objectives of:

- Sustaining tenancies and preventing homelessness
- Safeguarding Haringey residents in their own homes
- Encouraging and sustaining people in employment
- Helping people who are trying to help themselves

- Keeping families together
- Supporting victims of domestic violence to move to a place of safety
- Supporting the vulnerable and elderly in the local community
- Helping customers through personal and difficult events
- Supporting young people in the transition to adult life
- Supporting move on from supported housing, residential settings or institutions
- Promoting good educational outcomes for children and young people
- Alleviating poverty

Conditions may be attached to a DHP award, for example requiring the claimant to participate in a training or employment programme that will improve their prospects of securing paid employment and so reduce the period that a DHP will be required for. Other conditions may be attached to the DHP to encourage behaviour change and achieve an early resolution of the claimant's difficulties.

Funding Limitations

Given the limitations of the DHP budget, the Council will give priority to DHP applications received from the following households:

Households Affected by the Benefit Cap

- Households that need to move to alternative, lower cost private rented accommodation but are working proactively, and with the Housing Needs Team, to resolve their situation
- Households that need to move to alternative, lower cost accommodation but are unable to do so immediately (for reasons of health, education or child protection)
- Homeless households that are residing in temporary accommodation (provided by, or on behalf of, Haringey Council) and have either been told, by the Council, that they will be able to remain in the accommodation / area or they are awaiting an offer of alternative temporary accommodation, procured at a lower cost
- Homeless households that are residing in temporary accommodation (provided by, or on behalf of, Haringey Council) and have been assessed, by the Council, as being particularly vulnerable and needing to remain in the area;
- Households that are living in social rented housing

Households Affected by Social Rented Sector Size Criteria

- Households that contain a person with a disability and are living in 'significantly adapted' accommodation
- Households that contain a disabled child who is unable to share a bedroom because of their severe disabilities, where regulations do not allow for the extra bedroom
- Households that contain a disabled child and are living in accommodation that has been adapted to meet the child's needs, where regulations do not allow for the extra bedroom
- Households containing someone who has a severe and persisting disability which means that they are dependent on the care and support of relatives and friends who are living in

the local community and there is no suitable accommodation available, within the local area, to which they are able to transfer

- Households whose Housing Benefit is restricted by the Size Criteria but that restriction will soon be lifted because the claimant (and their partner, if they have one) will reach the age at which they will be able to claim Pension Credit.
- Households whose Housing Benefit is restricted by the Size Criteria but that restriction will soon be lifted because one or more of their children will soon reach an age when they are not expected to share a bedroom
- Single people who are pregnant (and childless couples containing a pregnancy) who are living in a two-bedroom home but whose Housing Benefit is restricted by the Size Criteria to a one-bedroom home but that restriction will soon be lifted when the baby is born
- Households with exceptional need, which are actively and consistently engaging in seeking to downsize to accommodation that matches their need.

Assessment of applications

When deciding whether or not to award a DHP, the Council will assess each application on its merits (including considerations of equality) and take into account its objectives and areas including:

- The impact that not awarding a DHP is likely to have on the Council's finances and services, especially homelessness, social care, family support and health
- The size of any shortfall that exists between what the claimant is receiving in housing costs (from Housing Benefit or Universal Credit) and the eligible housing costs for which they are liable, together with the reasons for this shortfall
- The financial circumstances (income and expenditure, savings, capital and indebtedness) of the claimant, their partner and anyone else living in their home
- Any special needs or health and social problems that the claimant and/or their family have, and what impact these have on their housing and financial situation
- The impact that moving home and/or changing schools is likely to have on the family and the educational outcomes of any young people in the household
- The reasons why, compared to other people, the circumstances of the claimant and their family should be considered 'exceptional'
- The length of time for which a DHP is being sought
- Any steps the claimant has taken to reduce their rental liability
- The nature of any contact the claimant has had with Housing Needs Team and their engagement with their personal housing plan
- The amount of money remaining in the DHP budget
- The extent to which the claimant has complied with previous conditions.

When the Council has considered the claimant's needs and circumstances, it will decide how much to award. This may be any amount below the difference between the rental liability and payment for Housing Benefit / Universal Credit. The DHP award cannot exceed the weekly eligible rent for the claimant's home.

The award of a DHP does not guarantee that a further award will be made at a later date, even if the claimant's circumstances remain unchanged.

Claiming a DHP

A request for a DHP must be made using the DHP application form available via the My Account portal. In exceptional circumstances a written request may be accepted.

A claim for a DHP will be considered from the date a DHP is requested, but on condition that all supporting information and documentation is received by the Council within one month of that request.

If the Council requires additional information and evidence to assess the claim, it will request this from the claimant in writing, electronically or verbally (over the telephone, face to face or by visit). The claimant must provide this information and documentation within one month of the date of the request.

If the claimant fails to provide the information and documentation on time, the Council will make a decision based on any information it already holds, including the information held on its Housing Benefit computer system. More time may be allowed for some individuals, if there are exceptional circumstances.

The length of a DHP award will be based on the individual circumstances of each claimant, but will take into account the date that the tenancy and/or notice period expires.

As an award can only be made for the current financial year, any award that is made for the remainder of 2019/20 will have to be followed by a new application for the next financial year even if the claimant's circumstances remain unchanged.

Failure to meet the conditions stated in the award notification or to demonstrate a valid reason why the set conditions could not be met, will lead to the withdrawal of any DHP award.

The claimant will be notified, in writing, of the outcome of the DHP claim within 14 days of receipt of the claim and all supporting documentation, or as soon as possible after that.

If a claim is unsuccessful, the Council's decision letter will include an explanation of how the decision has been reached and details of the right of review.

If the claim is successful, the Council's decision letter will include the following:

- The reason for the award
- The amount awarded
- The period of the award
- To whom the DHP will be paid
- The claimant's duty to report any changes in circumstances
- Any conditions associated with the award

Right to request a review

As a DHP is not a payment of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, it is not subject to the appeals process that operates under those schemes.

Claimants can request a review of a decision to refuse to award a DHP, a decision to award a reduced amount, a decision not to backdate an award for DHP or a decision to seek recovery of an overpayment of a DHP. This must be made in writing, within one month of when the notification was issued, and set out the reasons for requesting a review. A DHP Review Panel, will review all of the evidence held and will inform the claimant of the outcome within 14 days or as soon as possible after that.

The DHP Review Panel's decision will be final. In cases of alleged maladministration by the Council, the claimant should follow the Council's complaints process. If a claimant is still unhappy, they have a right to contact the Local Government Ombudsman.

Fraud

The Council is committed to tackling and preventing fraud in all its forms.

If a claimant attempts to claim a DHP by making a false declaration or providing false evidence or statements, they may have committed an offence under the Theft Act 1968. Where the Council suspects that fraud may have occurred, it will investigate the matter as appropriate and this may lead to criminal proceedings.

Debt advice

Anyone experiencing debt problems will be signposted to local debt advice agencies (including the Citizens Advice Bureau) for free, confidential, impartial advice.

Policy review

This policy will be reviewed annually and in light of any legislative changes, trends or other factors that impact on its effectiveness.