

Introduction and Overview

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) 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 a vital role in sustaining tenancies, preventing homelessness, and enabling tenants to move to more affordable accommodation. Increasingly, DHPs are assisting those adversely affected by welfare reform.

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.

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

The following costs cannot be covered under a claim for a DHP:

- 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 Council Tax Reduction scheme from 2013 onwards

Haringey's DHP scheme

Haringey Council follows these principles in administering the local DHP scheme to make sure the right people receive the right support:

- All applications will be treated fairly and consistently and assessed on their individual merits
- Applications will be processed in a timely manner, throughout the year

DHPs will be awarded in those 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 households 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 the move from supported housing, residential settings, or institutions
- Promoting good educational outcomes for children and young people
- Alleviating poverty

Our aim will be to strengthen the financial independence of all claimants and reduce the need for ongoing DHP support.

DHP Awards

The Council will use the DHP budget to support those residents who are most in need and will give priority to applications from the following households:

Households Affected by the Benefit Cap

- Households seeking to move to alternative, lower-cost private or social rented accommodation and are working proactively (e.g., with the Housing Needs Team) to improve their situation
- Households seeking to move to alternative, lower cost accommodation but are unable to do so immediately for reasons of health, education, or child protection
- Households residing in temporary accommodation (provided by, or on behalf of, Haringey Council) and have been assessed as being particularly vulnerable and needing to remain in the area, or are awaiting an offer of alternative temporary accommodation procured at a lower cost

Households Affected by Social Rented Sector Size Criteria (Bedroom Tax)

- Households that include a person with a disability and are living in 'significantly adapted' accommodation
- Households that include 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 include 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 including 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 can 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 or couples who are pregnant and 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 engaging in seeking to downsize to accommodation that matches their need.

Foster Carers

Foster Carers are allowed one extra bedroom under the size criteria rules. Some may be caring for siblings, or for two or more unrelated foster children, and need more bedrooms. National standards require a foster child over the age of three to have their own room. A DHP

may be awarded to help cover any reduction in housing benefit due the additional rooms that are required.

Households affected by high rent levels

- Households who need security deposits to move to alternative accommodation
- Households experiencing shortfalls between their rent and the Local Housing Allowance

Assessment of applications

In deciding whether to award a DHP, the Council will assess each application on its merits and consider equality considerations, strategic objectives and fiduciary duties including:

- The impact that awarding, or not awarding, a DHP may have on the claimant and other council services, especially homelessness, social care, household support and health
- The size of, and reasons for, any shortfall between the amount the claimant is receiving in housing costs (from Housing Benefit or Universal Credit) and the eligible housing costs
- The financial circumstances (income and expenditure, savings, capital, and indebtedness) of the claimant, their partner and anyone else living in their home
- The ability and willingness of the claimant to meet the qualifying criteria to avoid the Benefits Cap where this is a factor in the shortfall
- Any special needs or health and social problems that the claimant and/or their household have, and what impact these have on their housing, work, and financial situation
- The impact that moving home and/or changing schools is likely to have on the household and the educational outcomes of any young people in the household
- The reasons why the circumstances of the claimant and their household should be considered 'exceptional' compared to other people,
- The length of time for which a DHP is being sought
- The steps the claimant has taken to reduce their housing cost shortfall
- The level of contact the claimant has had with Housing Needs Team, or other relevant agency/department, and their engagement with their personal housing plan
- The extent to which the claimant has complied with previous conditions
- The amount of funding remaining in the DHP budget

After the Council has considered the claimant's needs and circumstances, it will decide how much to award. This may be any amount to cover the gap between the rental liability and payment for Housing Benefit/Universal Credit, or a lump sum to cover a deposit. The weekly DHP award cannot exceed the limits set out in the Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001.

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

Claiming a DHP

A request for a DHP must be made in writing and may be made using the application form available through the My Account portal. <https://www.haringey.gov.uk/contact/my-account>

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

Where 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.

Where the claimant does not provide the information and documentation on time, the Council will make its decision based on the information it already holds. Additional time may be allowed where there are exceptional circumstances.

Award decisions

In considering whether to make an award of DHP the Council will look at other sources of funding available to the claimant and will offer alternative funding routes where this is appropriate.

Award decisions will be made in a timely manner after all the information required has been received. The claimant will be notified in writing of the outcome of the DHP claim within 14 days of receipt of the claim and supporting documentation, or as soon as possible after that.

Where 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

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

The length of a DHP award will be based on the individual circumstances of each claimant but will consider the date that the tenancy and/or notice period expires. In all cases, the maximum duration of a DHP award must not exceed the period during which the person was entitled to either housing benefit or universal credit.

As an award can only be made for the current financial year, any award that is made for the current financial year must be followed by a new application for the next financial year even if the claimant's circumstances remain unchanged.

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. However, 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 the evidence held and will aim to 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 Haringey Citizens Advice) for free, confidential, impartial advice.

Policy review

The Council may review this policy periodically and in the event of any legislative changes, trends or other factors that impact on its effectiveness.