

Claiming a Discretionary Housing Payment

This leaflet contains information and advice on claiming extra help to meet your Council or housing costs. This extra help is called a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP).

What is a discretionary housing payment?

A discretionary housing payment (DHP) is an extra payment that the council can make if the Council believes that you need extra help with your housing costs. DHP's are not payments of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit. The council cannot give DHP's for the following:

- Service charges not covered by Housing Benefit (such as electricity or water).
- Any rent that you owe.
- Rent, if you are only entitled to Council Tax Benefit.
- Council Tax, if you only get Housing Benefit.
- Second Adult Rebate.

Who can apply for a discretionary housing payment?

You can apply if the amount of benefit you get is less than the rent or council tax you have to pay. (This includes council tenants, council tax payers and people whose Council Tax Benefit has been restricted because of the council tax band their property is in.) The council will only award a DHP if we think that you are suffering exceptional hardship.

How do I apply?

In order to claim you will need to complete our online application form, go to www.southend.gov.uk and go to the Do it Online section, then select Make an Application.

How does the Local Authority decide who is entitled to a discretionary housing payment?

When we decide whether to make a DHP, we will consider:

- The money you have coming into your household;
- The money that you are spending, including living costs, bills, debts; and
- Your personal circumstances.

An officer from the Revenues and Benefits department may contact you to discuss your application or to invite you to an interview.

How much will the payment be and how long will I receive it for?

The amount of the DHP will depend on how much we think you need to help you pay your housing costs. A DHP is intended to help in the short term. We will give you a payment for as long as we think is appropriate to help you pay your housing costs.

If we decide to give you a payment, we will write to you and let you know the amount and how long you will receive it for. If awarded DHP's are usually paid alongside any Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit that you get. This is to keep any extra payment costs for the council down. It is important to remember that DHP's are not benefit payments.

I've had a discretionary housing payment before – can I apply for another one?

A discretionary housing payment is paid for a set period of time. At the end of that period you can reapply for discretionary housing payment if you think that you still need extra financial help. The council will consider each application for a discretionary housing payment individually. We cannot guarantee that you will receive a discretionary housing payment, even if you have received one before.

What if I disagree with the decision about my discretionary housing payment?

If you think that our decision is wrong, you should write to us and ask us to reconsider our decision. You have one month from the date of our decision to write to us asking for your application to be looked at again.

If I get a Discretionary Housing Payment what do I do if my circumstances change?

If your circumstances change, you must tell us in writing straight away. Your benefit claim for Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit and DHP will be looked at again to see if it needs to be changed. If the change means that the amount of DHP or benefit we have paid you is too much then you will have an overpayment that you will have to repay.

For further information and advice on all aspects of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit contact us Housing benefit on 01702 215001.