**Discretionary Housing Payments**

This factsheet provides you with information regarding Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). This information has been provided because you have either requested additional assistance with your housing costs, or because you have been notified of a DHP decision

**What can DHP be used for?**

DHP can be considered where there is a shortfall between rent and Housing Benefit and/or other lump-sum costs associated with housing needs

**What can DHP NOT be used for?**

DHP cannot be considered for service charges or other housing costs which are not eligible for Housing Benefit, shortfalls due to overpayment recovery or payment of rent arrears

**How long can an award be for?**

All awards are short term. You may re-apply once an award ends. The actions you have taken to resolve your rent shortfall since your last award will be taken into account in any further decision

**What changes in circumstances do I need to report?**

You have a duty to report all changes in your circumstances for your Housing Benefit claim. The same changes need to be reported when you are in receipt of DHP as well as additional ones. These could include:

* Changes to the circumstances of joint tenants or other people you share the rent payments with (for example they have people moving in/out or they start to pay more/less of the total rent)
* Changes in your medical situation or care needs
* Changes in the medical or care needs of anybody else in your household

**Do I have to pay DHP back?**

You do not need to re-pay DHP payments. However, payments may be recovered from you where you fail to report a change in circumstance, false or incomplete information is provided at the point of application or an error is made and you could reasonably have known an error was being made

**How does Welfare Reform affect the council’s DHP Guidance?**

From April 2013, Welfare Reform means that the DHP fund needs to be used for a variety of additional reasons and because of this the council’s DHP guidance has been changed. Applications that may have previously been successful under the old guidance may no longer be agreed, or may be agreed but for lower amounts, or shorter periods.

**How are DHP decisions made?**

Each application is looked at individually. The council’s DHP guidance is followed to ensure that applications are dealt with consistently.

The following may be considered when making a decision:

* Can Housing Benefit entitlement be increased?
* Can Housing Benefit payments be increased (e.g. from a reduction to overpayment recovery)?
* Is the need for DHP short term?
* Has the applicant taken steps to resolve the rent shortfall?
* Does the applicant have the intention to resolve the rent shortfall (e.g. by moving home)?
* The income and outgoings of the applicant
* The income of other people in the household
* Income that is disregarded for Housing Benefit is not normally ignored in the DHP decision process (for example, Child Benefit, Disability Living Allowance)
* Can somebody else in the household contribute to the rent (even if not expected to under normal Housing Benefit rules)?
* Disability & Health needs of the applicant and other people in the household
* Previous awards of DHP
* Imminent life events affecting Housing Benefit entitlement, such as significant birthdays

The DHP application form and any supporting information will be used in the decision process. It is very important that you fully complete the application form and provide as much information as possible. For example, when providing details of health problems, you should provide detailed information and explain how this affects your housing need.

**How can a DHP decision be disputed?**

A dispute must be made in writing within 1 month of the decision date.

Your written dispute must provide as much information as possible to explain why you do not agree with the decision made. If you think we have made a mistake, you should tell us what you think is wrong.

Your dispute will be considered by a Benefits Team Leader.

If you still do not agree, you can make a further written dispute which will be considered by the Benefits Manager.

If you still do not agree, the route of judicial review is available, and the local government ombudsman if there is an allegation of maladministration.