

IF I APPLY, WHAT IS TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION?

Everything is taken into consideration. The Council will need further information from you about your circumstances before it can award a Discretionary Housing Payment.

For example, it might be necessary to ask for details of your expenditure, particularly in relation to special diets and extra heating costs due to personal problems. It might be appropriate to ask about why a particular property is necessary compared to cheaper alternative accommodation. It might be appropriate to ask you about letting part of your accommodation.

The Benefit Officers will act reasonably and will need to know why you have made a claim for extra help.

Remember those with greatest need must have priority.

HOW DO I APPLY?

You can apply online from your local council's website. Alternatively application forms are available from your local council's Benefits Service. It is important when completing the form to ensure that you provide as much information as you can about your circumstances so that the Benefit Officers can have a full understanding as to why you think extra help is needed.

OVERPAYMENTS

The Benefits Service may seek to recover a DHP found to be overpaid in the following circumstances:

- a misrepresentation or failure to disclose a material fact by the applicant, or
- an error made when the application was determined.

If you qualify for a Discretionary Housing Payment it is because of the circumstances you have reported on your application form.

Any change in circumstances will affect your entitlement to Discretionary Housing Payment. It is important that you inform the local councils Benefits Service of any change in your circumstances straight away.

WHO TO CONTACT

If you have any questions regarding Discretionary Housing Payments, please contact your local Benefits Service.

Telephone: **0345 034 4569**

Email: **svpp@bcpcouncil.gov.uk**

Postal address: **Stour Valley & Poole Partnership, PO Box 722, Poole, BH15 2YE**

DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS

Discretionary Housing Payments is extra help that is available to assist you with your rent. Discretionary Housing Payments can be paid by the Council where the Benefit Officers consider extra help is needed.

Discretionary Housing Payments are separate from Housing Benefit with different rules.

However in order to be considered for a Discretionary Housing Payment you must be in receipt of Housing Benefit or in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) that includes housing costs towards rental liability and require further financial assistance with housing costs.

HOW MUCH HELP CAN BE GIVEN?

It is wholly up to the Benefit Officers to decide how much to give in each case.

The maximum that can be given is the difference between your Housing Benefit or Universal Credit entitlement and your contractual rent excluding service charges that are not eligible for Benefit.

This maximum does not apply to help with rent in advance or deposits.

WHAT CAN DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS COVER?

A claimant may receive Discretionary Housing Payments to help them with their rent where:

- Housing Benefit has been restricted because of information received from the Rent Service or because of the reduction to the Local Housing Allowance rates from April 2011. There is a maximum rent on which Housing Benefit can be calculated and Discretionary Housing Payments can make up the difference.
- Discretionary Housing Payments can be used to provide extra help if Housing Benefit or Universal Credit has been reduced because of the number of adults living in the property.
- Discretionary Housing Payments can provide extra help where Benefit has been reduced because the claimant's income exceeds the allowances used in the Benefit calculation.
- Discretionary Housing Payments can provide help where Housing Benefit or Universal Credit has been reduced due to the benefit cap or under occupation in the social rented sector.

Discretionary Housing Payments can provide help with rent in advance and deposits. However a request for assistance with these types of costs should first be made to the Housing Advice Team at the Council.

HOW LONG CAN THIS BENEFIT BE AWARDED FOR?

This is a Discretionary Housing Payment scheme and it is for the Benefit Officers to decide how long a claimant needs this extra help. It might only be given for a few weeks in certain circumstances and on other occasions it could be given for a longer period.

Discretionary Housing Payments are not a long term solution, but might provide temporary help when it is most needed.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I CAN GET EXTRA HELP?

By applying. Each case is looked at individually and awards of Discretionary Housing Payments are made according to the circumstances in each case.

HOW MUCH CAN THE COUNCIL GIVE OUT?

The Council has by law a limited budget which it cannot exceed. Once the money allocated for Discretionary Housing Payments has been spent, then no further awards can be made. The Officers therefore assess each claim so that funds are available to help those with greatest need throughout the year.

WHAT IF I DISAGREE WITH THE BENEFIT OFFICERS' DECISION?

The Discretionary Housing Payment scheme is wholly discretionary on the local authority to administer. The Council's Officers therefore must decide the cases and circumstances under which extra help can be given.

There is no formal external appeal mechanism associated to Discretionary Housing Payments. However, the Council has in place a procedure that allows decisions to be reconsidered where a claimant asks for this service. The review of the decision is carried out by other Council Officers not involved in the original decision.