

Discretionary housing payments

This factsheet looks at how you can get an additional payment from the council to help you pay for your housing costs if you are already getting housing benefit.

If you are receiving housing benefit or the housing costs element of universal credit and you still need help with paying the rest of your rent or certain other housing costs, you can apply to the council for a discretionary housing payment.

Many people have a shortfall between the housing benefit they get and the rent they have to pay. If your landlord does not reduce the rent, you must ensure that you pay the shortfall or you will build up rent arrears. You may find that even if you have moved to somewhere cheaper, other costs may have increased (for example travel costs to work or school), meaning it is still difficult to pay the rest of your rent.

What can I get it for?

You can apply for a discretionary housing payment for many reasons, including if you:

- have a shortfall between rent and housing benefit
- need support to continue to live in specially adapted accommodation
- need help to pay rent in advance or a deposit, especially if you are moving because the maximum housing benefit you can get has been reduced
- need to pay rent arrears, if you have not received housing benefit to pay that rent.

What can't I get it for?

You can't get a discretionary housing payment for:

- service charges that are part of your rent but are not covered by the housing benefit scheme, such as heating, hot water, or water charges
- making up for a reduction in housing or other benefits resulting from an overpayment or a penalty
- rent arrears if you have already received housing benefit to pay that rent
- council tax liability.

How do I apply?

You must apply to your local council, normally to the housing benefit office. Every council has its own policy, some have an application form, others don't. You will need to provide evidence of your outgoings and details of any circumstances that cause you financial difficulty. You should provide as much information as possible. The council should take into account any special circumstances that contribute to your financial difficulties, for example, if you:

- have additional living costs because you are disabled or a foster carer
- are likely to become homeless if a shortfall in your rent is not paid
- need to stay living near your job because of poor public transport
- must pay the rent until your fixed-term tenancy expires and you can't move to somewhere cheaper before then.

Will I get it?

Making a discretionary housing payment is not obligatory for the council. Every council has a certain amount of money to make payments every year. Once this is used up you cannot get a payment. Unlike housing benefit it isn't an entitlement that you must get if you meet certain conditions.

If it is paid you may get regular payments or a lump sum, depending on why you need the money. Payments can also be backdated. Usually you will have to reapply after a period of time, the council will tell you when.

If the council refuses to make a payment you can ask it to have another look at its decision, but if the decision isn't changed, you probably can't take the matter further.

Further advice

You can get advice from Shelter's free* housing advice helpline (0808 800 4444), a local Shelter advice service or Citizens Advice bureau, or by visiting shelter.org.uk/advice

*Calls are free from UK landlines and main mobile networks.



Specialist support on housing advice

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