

Discretionary Housing Payment Policy 2024/25

What is the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) scheme?

DHPs provide financial support towards housing costs for those in rented / part-rented accommodation. An award can be paid by a Local Authority when it is satisfied that an applicant needs further financial assistance with their housing costs, and that they are in receipt of either:

- Housing Benefit (HB) or
- The housing element of Universal Credit (UC)

Owner-occupiers are not eligible to receive DHPs apart from those in Shared-Ownership properties, as they also have a rental liability.

The DHP fund is cash limited and consists of funding from Central Government and the Council. In order to maximise available resources, applications may be referred to other council departments that are responsible for the prevention of homelessness and may be able to offer financial assistance.

What we mean by 'housing costs'

Housing costs usually refer to the rental liability, but could also include:

- rent in advance
- tenancy deposits
- other lump sum costs associated with a housing need, such as removal costs.

What we mean by 'further financial assistance'

The phrase 'further financial assistance' is not defined in law. We will take into consideration the applicant's financial circumstances and any other relevant factors.

However, in most cases, an applicant will need to demonstrate that they have a shortfall in meeting their housing costs and that they are unable to meet that shortfall from their available income.

What are the main objectives of the South Gloucestershire Council scheme?

South Gloucestershire Council's overriding objective for awarding a Discretionary Housing Payment is to prevent homelessness and to maintain the applicant's tenancy.

It is unlikely that a DHP will be awarded if the award will not prevent the ending of the tenancy or support people to access a new tenancy.

The scheme is also intended to encourage and support people into employment by helping them to maintain their tenancy.

What DHPs can cover

A DHP can be considered for:

- A shortfall between the housing element of UC / Housing Benefit, and the actual rental liability; for example, where Benefit Cap or 'Social Sector Size Criteria' (SSSC) deductions have been applied.
- A rent deposit, or for rent in advance (but not if you are moving between housing association properties),
- Limited costs associated with taking up a new tenancy, for example removal costs.

What DHPs cannot cover

There are certain elements of an applicant's rent that the HB and UC regulations exclude, so they cannot be included as 'housing costs' for the purposes of a DHP assessment. We are not able to award DHP's for:

- Ineligible service charges of any type
- An increase in rent due to outstanding rent arrears
- Any deductions which are as a result of sanctions or a reduction in benefit
- Benefit suspensions
- Shortfalls caused by HB or UC overpayment recovery

The DHP award

The Housing Benefit/Universal Credit Regulations state that the level of DHP cannot exceed the weekly HB or UC housing element.

In deciding whether to award a DHP or how much to award, the council will take the following into account:

- The amount of money available within the DHP budget
- The shortfall between the applicant's HB / UC housing element and rent liability
- Any savings or capital that the applicant or partner hold and, if appropriate, members of their family
- The income and expenditure of the applicant, their partner and anyone else within the household
- Any steps that the applicant has taken to reduce their rental liability
- Any steps that the applicant has taken to reduce their expenditure or to maximise their income (including their employability and employment)
- The medical circumstances of the applicant, their partner or anyone else within their household
- The longer-term sustainability of the applicant's tenancy
- The potential length of the DHP award being requested
- Other circumstances brought to the council's attention that may be relevant

Length of the award

The DHP scheme should be seen as primarily for short term assistance.

Discretionary Housing payments may be made as either a one-off payment or an on-going weekly award for a fixed period and are dependent upon the personal circumstances of the applicant.

An award may be made for a longer period in exceptional circumstances.

Payment of the award

Payment will be made by electronic transfer (BACS), and it will usually be made to either the applicant or their landlord.

Please note that any ongoing awards will be paid 4-weekly in arrears.

How to apply

DHP application forms are available:

- On our website: www.southglos.gov.uk/advice-and-benefits/benefits/discretionary-housing-payment/dhp
- From our [One Stop Shop](#) sites
- Via the Contact Centre (01454 868002)

Applications may be made by an applicant or someone else on their behalf, where they have the applicant's permission.

Information to support the application

The applicant must provide any information and supporting evidence the Council requires in order to make their decision, for example, details of income, rent, savings and expenditure.

If an applicant fails to provide the information or evidence requested, the application will be refused.

How will I be notified of the decision?

The Council aims to notify the applicant of its decision within four weeks of receiving all the information necessary to process the application for the DHP.

Applicants are notified of decisions in writing. Their notification will confirm:

- The outcome of the application
- The reason for the decision
- What to do if you do not agree with the decision

And, where applicable:

- The amount of the award
- The period of the award
- How, when and to whom the payments will be made
- The requirement to report changes in circumstance promptly
- Any relevant advice which supports our decision

What to do if you do not agree with the decision?

Discretionary Housing Payments do not carry a right of appeal.

If the applicant is not happy with our decision, they must write to us within one calendar month of the date of their decision letter, telling us the reasons why they do not agree.

An officer of the Council will review the decision. This will not be the officer who made the original decision.

What happens next

Where appropriate, we will signpost applicants to other support organisations who are able to assist with debt, financial management and homelessness concerns. We may also offer advice about other financial assistance/support available.

When the award of DHP comes to an end, the applicant may apply for a further award, if they still require further financial assistance with their housing costs. However, consideration

will be given to what steps the applicant has taken since the last application, to assist them in meeting their housing costs themselves.

Even if their circumstances remain the same, there is no guarantee that a further award will be granted.

How does the Council prevent fraudulent claims for the DHP scheme?

The Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all forms.

Any customer who fraudulently claims a DHP, through false declaration of circumstances, providing false statements or evidence in support of their application may have committed an offence. Any resulting overpayment will be deemed recoverable.

Where it is suspected that fraud may have occurred, the matter will be investigated as appropriate, under the Fraud Act 2006. This may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.

The council will investigate allegations of fraud and retains the right to prosecute such cases under Section 222 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Accessibility

If you would like a hard copy or large print version of this document, please contact the Council on 01454 868002.

You can also e mail the Council on HousingBenefit@southglos.gov.uk

By post:

**South Gloucestershire Council
The Benefit Service.
PO BOX 1953
BRISTOL
BS37 0DB**

Equalities

We will monitor this policy to ensure no one is subject to disproportionate adverse treatment because they have a [protected characteristic](#).

The general equality duty requires that the Council has due regard to the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic

- Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it

The policy will be reviewed on a two-yearly cycle or at such time or occurrence where a review is appropriate.