

## Housing Payment Policy 2026/27

### What is the Housing Payments scheme?

#### **Housing Payments at a glance:**

Housing payments (HPs) are discretionary financial awards to help people in rented or part rented accommodation. They are not available to most owner occupiers except shared ownership cases.

#### **Key points to note:**

- Extra help with rent if you already get HB or UC housing element
- Short-term support only
- Usually covers part of a rent shortfall, or help with moving costs
- Not guaranteed - it depends on your circumstances and the available budget

#### **The main aims are to:**

- Prevent homelessness
- Help sustain or access tenancies
- Support residents into or towards employment

#### **Eligibility is for those applicants who are receiving:**

- Housing Benefit, or
- The housing element of Universal Credit

Awards are made from a limited annual budget (£252,639 for 2026/27)

Funding must be prioritised to those in the greatest need.

Where appropriate, applications may be referred to other Council services that are responsible for the prevention of homelessness and may be able to offer financial assistance.

The Council considers how to allocate this limited budget in a way that is not only fair, consistent, and reasonable, but also supports those the Council considers to be in most need of assistance.

Where the HP budget is exhausted prior to the end of the financial year, it will not be possible to award any further payments under this policy even where an applicant meets the qualifying criteria.

## 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 Housing Payment is to prevent homelessness and to sustain the applicant's tenancy.**

It is unlikely that an HP 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 HPs can cover

An HP can be considered for:

- Rent shortfalls due to benefit restrictions.
- 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 HPs 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 an HP assessment. We will consider the reason for the shortfall when deciding whether an award can be made.

We are not able to award HP'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 Housing Payment award

This policy sets out how HP applications are decided, and the factors the Council considers when deciding whether to grant or refuse an application, it also has the flexibility to allow for unusual cases. Each application is considered individually, ensuring decisions are fair, consistent and reasonable.

### What we expect from you:

Because funding is limited, you must:

- Prioritise your rent payments
- Take steps to increase your income where possible (for example, employment, benefit checks, or other support)
- Reduce non-essential spending
- Engage with any support offered

To manage the HP budget effectively, conditions can be applied to HP awards. These make sure applicants know how to improve their situation and reduce their need for a further Housing Payments. Where conditions have not been met and no reasonable explanation has been provided, a further award is unlikely to be made.

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

In deciding whether to award an HP or how much to award, the Council will take the following into account:

- The amount of money available within the HP budget
- The shortfall between the applicant's HB / UC housing element and rent liability
- The reason for the shortfall.
- 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 HP award being requested
- Other circumstances brought to the Council's attention that may be relevant

## Length of the award

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

Most awards are made for a limited period to allow time for the applicant to improve their situation. 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

We encourage Housing Payment applications to be made online at:

[www.southglos.gov.uk/housing-payment](http://www.southglos.gov.uk/housing-payment)

- You can collect a paper application from our [One Stop Shop](#) sites
- We can arrange to send you a form via the Contact Centre (01454 868002)

Applications may be made by an applicant, or by 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 HP.

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?**

Housing payments are discretionary, and there is no automatic entitlement. Housing Payments do not carry a right of appeal.

If the applicant is not happy with our decision, they should 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 HP 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 Housing Payment scheme?**

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

Any customer who fraudulently claims an HP, 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 large print version of this document, you can contact the Council by:

Phone: 01454 868002

Email: [HousingBenefit@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:HousingBenefit@southglos.gov.uk)

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

[More information about equalities is available on our website.](#)

## Policy reviews and monitoring

The policy will be reviewed annually by officers to ensure it remains valid, effective, and relevant, or at such time or occurrence where a review is appropriate.

All applications for HPs are recorded to allow for the monitoring of performance and expenditure.