

Discretionary Housing Payments Information leaflet



What are Discretionary Housing Payments?

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) provide claimants with further financial assistance, in addition to welfare benefits, when the Council considers that additional help with housing costs is required.

The applicant must demonstrate that they are unable to meet housing costs from their available income. The level of payment may cover all or part of a shortfall in rent or assist with the cost of taking up or maintaining a tenancy.

Applying for DHPs

To be considered for a Discretionary Housing Payment the applicant must be entitled to: Housing Benefit; or Universal Credit (that includes a housing element towards rental liability); and require further financial assistance with housing costs.

A Discretionary Housing Payment application form must be completed and returned to Corporate Services' - Revenues and Benefits Team, Council Offices, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1NY.

The application form will request information that the Council needs to make a decision and establish if the applicant requires further financial assistance. This will include details of income and expenditure, the reasons for the application, and will take into account unavoidable costs that the applicant may have. Consideration will also be given to any hardship, health problems or special circumstances that the applicant or members of their household are facing.

What will payments cover?

- Shortfalls in rent due to reductions in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit for under-occupation in the social rented sector (for example, tenants of the Council or Orkney Housing Association) ;
- Shortfalls in rent due to reductions in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit where the benefit cap has been applied;
- Shortfalls in rent due to reductions in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit as a result of Local Housing Allowance reductions;
- Shortfalls in rent due to Rent Officer restrictions such as Local Reference Rent or shared room rate;
- Shortfalls in rent due to non-dependant deductions in Housing Benefit, or housing cost contributions in Universal Credit;
- A rent shortfall to prevent a household becoming homeless whilst the housing authority explores alternative options;

- Rent Deposits or rent in advance for a property yet to be moved into;
- Removal costs – this will include helping applicants move to alternative accommodation where their award of Housing Benefit has been restricted following one of the welfare reforms.

Payments of DHP

Payment will normally be made along with any Housing Benefit payment but in some instances will be paid on its own. There is no limit to the length of time over which a DHP may be awarded. However, awards will generally be for a time-limited short-term period to give a claimant time to sort out their financial or housing circumstances.

- Longer-term awards will be considered for applicants who live in significantly adapted accommodation in the social rented sector (the Council or Orkney Housing Association Limited) but who are subject to a reduction in Housing Benefit entitlement due to under-occupancy.
- Longer-term awards will also be considered for foster carers who are subject to a reduction in Housing Benefit entitlement due to under-occupancy but who need to maintain an extra bedroom for a foster child.

Payments are made at the discretion of the Council.

Decision and Review process

Discretionary Housing Payments are not payments of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit and are treated separately. The decision notice will clearly show how much is Housing Benefit and how much is Discretionary Housing Payments.

If the applicant is unhappy with the outcome of their application for DHP they may ask for a review of that decision in writing to the Council's Corporate Services' - Revenues and Benefits Team, Council Offices, Kirkwall within 28 days of the date on which the Council made the decision on which a review or re-determination is being requested.

Where to go for more information

Orkney Islands Council, Benefits Section, Council Offices, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1NY. Telephone 01856 873535; email benefits@orkney.gov.uk or website www.orkney.gov.uk

For advice on financial difficulties or debt you can contact Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau, Anchor Buildings, Bridge Street, Kirkwall, KW15 1HR. Telephone 01856 875266

For employment advice contact Jobcentre Plus – Tankerness Lane, Kirkwall, KW15 1AJ, Tel 0845 600 1506