

Factsheet B21: Discretionary Housing Payments

The Government has given local authorities money for Discretionary Housing Payments which can be used to top-up housing benefit for anyone subject to the 'bedroom tax' penalty. Don't forget there are exemptions for foster carers (for up to one year, even if they have no foster child living with them at the time) and for disabled children.

Generally these payments are considered a short-term measure, and the usual length of an award will be for 13 weeks in any period of 12 months. The fund is designed to help you overcome a transition period if you have problems adjusting to a tougher household budget.

Payments can be made to help with the costs of moving to a different property. If you would be able to move to smaller accommodation but are prevented by existing arrears or the need to pay a deposit, it is worth asking for a Discretionary Housing Payment to cover this.

It is also possible to claim a Discretionary Housing Payment if your housing benefit shortfall is likely to cause severe hardship, for example if it places you at risk of becoming homeless.

Longer term awards will be considered for people who may have very good reasons for staying in their current home, for example where:

- there are substantial adaptations to the property to meet the needs of a physical disability
- there are specific medical reasons that make it impossible for you and your partner to share a room.



Most local authorities will have a form on which to request a Discretionary Housing Payment. If your authority does not, write a letter instead. These are national rules, although it is the local authorities that have to apply them. If you need to find out who your local authority is, see www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council.

There is a factsheet specifically about Discretionary Housing Payments, but information can also be found online here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/claiming-discretionary-housing-payments>. There is also online guidance that local authorities are supposed to use at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/discretionary-housing-payments-guidance-manual>.

You do not have a right to a Discretionary Housing Payment. It is up to the local authority whether they give you any payment. They have very little money to support this, so they are only likely to help if families can show they have exceptional need, have a significantly adapted home, or will benefit significantly from short-term support.

The key part of the form that you need to answer as thoroughly as possible is this section:

There is help available for people who are already getting some housing benefit but find it hard to make up the difference in their rent. This help is limited and it is often difficult for us to decide who to help, so please complete the following section with as much information about you as possible. You may wish to tell us about any problems that you have, for example health and family.



Obviously every person applying has different circumstances so we cannot tell you what to put here. However, if you have adaptations to your property you need to explain what they are and perhaps how much they cost to install. You also might want to explain your social networks if you depend on them, how your physical or mental health would be affected by the prospect of moving, or if you need to stay in your current accommodation if it keeps you (or your children) safe, and settled at a particular point in their education.

It is important to tell your story with as much detail as possible so that the person making the decision about you understands your situation.

The remaining section of the form asks for details of your income and earnings, your weekly expenses and any current outstanding debts. You need to show that you cannot meet the additional housing costs without this help.

If you receive Disability Living Allowance care component, it may be taken into account as income by some local authorities. When you list your outgoings, try to be clear about how that money is already being spent on things that are reasonably required to meet your disability needs, such as additional heating or laundry, or to pay a carer. This will also apply to the Personal Independence Payment daily living component.

If you have already made a claim for a Discretionary Housing Payment and it was refused, it may be worth trying again. Some local authorities have money left in their budget. If you need assistance to claim a Discretionary Housing Payment please contact our information and advice service.

If you require further information or would like this Factsheet in an alternative format you can contact us by calling: 01508 491210, by emailing: info@equallives.org.uk, or by writing to: Equal Lives, 15 Manor Farm Barns, Fox Road, Framingham Pigot, Norfolk, NR14 7PZ.

