Housing Rights

https://www.housingrights.org.uk/housing-advice/help-pay-housing-costs/discretionary-housing-payment

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Discretionary Housing Payment

This information is for people living in Northern Ireland.

What is a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)?

A DHP is a top-up payment. It is available to private renters. It can be paid in addition to the help you get with your housing costs from Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. It is quite common for these benefits not to cover all your contractual rent. This is known as a 'shortfall'.

If you need help to cover this shortfall, you may want to apply for a DHP.

The Housing Executive handles DHP applications and payments. They have an annual DHP budget from the Department for Communities.

DHPs can help if you are in financial difficulty and at risk of falling into rent arrears. Rent arrears can lead to your landlord evicting you. Your landlord must follow the legal procedure if they wish to end the tenancy. Our mediation service may be able to help you and your landlord resolve a dispute over rent arrears. This could help prevent you from losing your home.

Applying for a DHP

You can only apply for a DHP if:

- you are a private renter and

- you get help with your housing costs through Universal Credit or Housing Benefit
- but these benefits don't cover all of your rent, and you need help to make up the difference

You can apply online or call the Housing Executive for a paper application.

If you want help with completing the application form, our advisers can help. The Housing Executive will assess your application and decide how much you can get and for how long.

DHPs are generally only available to private renters. A small number of social tenants might be able to get it. Social tenants can apply for it if they have lost the family premium under Housing Benefit. This can be a complicated area of benefits law. Contact our helpline if you want to find out more.

Getting help if your DHP award ends or is reduced

You might be worried if you've received a letter saying your DHP award has ended or been reduced.

Contact us for advice if you're worried about how this will affect you. We can talk you through your options to avoid falling behind on rent.

Video: Getting extra help with rent with a DHP

Video transcript

If you're claiming Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit and it's not covering your full rent, you might be able to get extra help.

It's called a discretionary housing payment, or DHP, and it's paid by the Housing Executive.

It's not a loan so you don't need to pay it back and it won't affect your other benefits.

You can get a DHP if your benefits don’t cover your full rent and you can’t make up the difference.

Or if your situation changes. For example, if your landlord increases your rent.

But only if you’re already getting housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit.

We help lots of people to apply for DHPs. Get in touch if you need help.

Or you can apply directly to the Housing Executive.

They’ll want to know about your household, your benefits, where you live and why you need the extra payment.

The amount you could get depends on your circumstances.

There’s no guarantee you’ll get a payment, but it really is worth applying as you could get the extra money you need.

Get in touch with Housing Rights for help with applying for a DHP. You can call, email or chat to an adviser online.

Updating your DHP application

Ask the Housing Executive to consider increasing your DHP if you need more help. You might need more help if your situation or needs have changed.

Challenging a decision

There is no legal right to appeal a decision about a DHP.

However, you can ask the Housing Executive to review their decision if:

- you have been refused a DHP or
- you're not happy with the amount you have been awarded or
- you're not happy with how long you will receive the payment for

You should write to the Housing Executive within one month of being told of their decision. You will need to explain why you think their decision is wrong and what you want them to do.

If they don't change their decision, you can make a formal complaint.

More advice

- Claiming Universal Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Changes in your circumstances