**Discretionary Housing Payments**

These are extra payments from the council for people who receive housing benefit or universal credit with help with housing costs but who still have to pay something towards their rent (and some other housing costs). They are discretionary – there is no right to an award of DHP, and every council has its own policy and priorities where awards are concerned. There is also only a limited ‘pot’ available each year, so awards may be less generous later in the financial year than earlier (or vice versa if there has been lower demand than anticipated at the beginning of the year).

Reasons to apply for a DHP

* Shortfall between rent and housing benefit – this may be caused for example by non-dependant deductions which are not reimbursed by the non-dependant, income above the applicable amount, the benefit cap, bedroom tax, local housing allowance, etc.
* The need for support to continue to live in specially adapted accommodation
* Help to pay rent in advance or a deposit in order to secure accommodation (particularly where the reason for moving is that the maximum benefit payable for existing accommodation does not cover the costs).

Costs not eligible for DHPs

* Service charges that would not be covered by housing benefit even if it were paid in full, e.g. heating, hot water, water charges
* Reductions in housing or other benefits caused by an overpayment or penalty
* Rent arrears where housing benefit has already been paid for that rent
* Council tax.

Applications

Tower Hamlets council use a form for applications, this is available on <http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/content_pages/online_services/apply_for_it.aspx>. The form can be completed and submitted online.

You should provide as much information as possible to support the claim – this will include details of income and expenditure and reasons for the application, but should also include:

* explanations about any particular expenses that contribute to financial hardship, e.g. additional living costs due to disability or caring responsibilities
* any risk of homelessness if rent is not met
* any special reasons why the applicant needs to stay in that property (like proximity to work, school, or care provision)
* where the shortfall is caused by bedroom tax, any steps being taken to find smaller accommodation.

Awards in Tower Hamlets are generally for six months only. After this time you can apply for another, but the council will expect that steps have been taken to change the circumstances that lead to the first award and you may therefore need to explain in more detail why a further DHP is needed.

Challenging decisions

You should be given reasons for any refusal of DHP and can ask for a review, providing further evidence and reasons if necessary. If it is refused again, the only way to challenge it would be through judicial review if the council has failed to follow its own policy, or has failed to take the applicant’s personal circumstances into account (i.e. failed to exercise a discretion by having a blanket rule about payments).