**Discretionary Housing Payments**

Discretionary Housing Payments are extra payments from the Council for people who receive housing benefit or universal credit with housing costs but who still have to pay something towards their rent (and some other housing costs). These 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**

* When there is a shortfall between rent and housing benefit – this may be caused for example by the benefit cap, bedroom tax, local housing allowance, non-dependent deductions which are not reimbursed by the non-dependent, income above the applicable amount, 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 DHP**

* 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 <https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/advice_and_benefits/benefits/discretionary_housing_payments.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

While the rules do not limit the length of time you can be paid discretionary housing payments, in most cases, DHP will be awarded for a limited period. In Tower Hamlets claims are generally awarded from 3 to 6 months but you can reapply again. However, 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**

While there is no right of appeal against a DHP, you should be given reasons for any refusal 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).