

# Discretionary Housing Payments Policy



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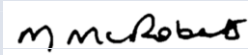
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26.4.16	1.10	CLC	Update: re Carers

## Approved By:

Name	Title	Signature	Date
M McRoberts	Assistant Treasurer		22 Feb 2013

## **Introduction**

The Benefits Service is committed to ensuring that the citizens of Blackpool are aware of the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme and are able to quickly and easily apply for assistance from the funding available.

For an award of DHP to be made, the applicant must:

- Be in receipt of Housing Benefit or the housing costs element of Universal Credit
- Have a shortfall between the level of Housing Benefit/housing costs element and their rent liability
- In the opinion of the Council, be in need of further assistance with housing costs.

Funding for the scheme is provided by central Government each year. The amount allocated is cash limited and no carry over of unspent amounts is usually allowed.

Blackpool is a town with areas of high deprivation and unemployment and the funds made available by central Government for DHP can and do have a real effect on the lives of those granted assistance through the scheme.

This policy sets out the aims of the Benefits Service in ensuring maximum take-up of Discretionary Housing Payment for rent in appropriate circumstances.

## **Background**

Requests for DHP are made to the Benefits Service. The DHP scheme is administered by benefit officers. A DHP will only be considered from the date the application is made. Only in exceptional circumstances would a backdated award be considered.

Where arrears of rent are involved, a DHP will normally only be considered for arrears accrued in the three month period prior to the date of application.

Where the Benefit Officer decides not to make an award the applicant is given the right of review. Reviews are dealt with by senior managers.

## **Aims of this policy**

- alleviating poverty
- encouraging and sustaining people in employment
- tenancy sustainment and homelessness prevention
- safeguarding residents in their own homes
- helping those who are trying to help themselves
- keeping families together
- supporting the vulnerable or the elderly in the local community
- helping customers through personal and difficult events
- supporting young people in the transition to adult life
- promoting good educational outcomes for children and young people
- supporting Foster Carers
- supporting Carers

## **Desired Outcomes**

- Ensure that 100% of the funding supplied by central Government for DHP is allocated each year.
- Ensure that DHP funds are available to and can be easily accessed by the most needy and vulnerable members of the community.
- Work closely with other organisations (both within the council and external) to encourage involvement in, and promotion of the scheme to ensure all resources are utilised to maximise take-up
- Ensure that the service reflects the needs of the community and identify areas and reasons for low take-up.

## **Target Customer Groups**

### **1. "Over accommodated" cases**

Benefit recipients living in rented property, which is larger than required under the size criteria rules:

- Those requiring additional space for medical equipment
- Support for disabled children or non dependants who need an additional bedroom for an overnight carer
- Those requiring specific accommodation (e.g. ground floor, bungalow) due to a medical condition or because they are housebound or elderly
- Divorced/separated parent requiring additional rooms for visiting children (in exceptional circumstances).
- Expectant mothers and approved prospective adoptive parents
- Foster Carers where the numbers/ages/sexes of the children still leaves a gap in entitlement due to size criteria rules
- Foster Carers who are not current carers receiving remuneration, for a period of up to 6 months
- Claimants who have had their property significantly adapted due to disability
- Tenants who require short term help whilst awaiting suitably sized accommodation
- Tenants identified as unlikely to be able to increase their income and a move is not appropriate
- Claimants who have found suitable alternative accommodation but require assistance with a rent bond, or removal costs

### **2. Other**

- Those unable to manage their own affairs because of medical or social problems
- Benefit recipients with a Disability or Severe Disability premium included in their applicable amount (including where there is a disabled child)
- Benefit recipients fleeing domestic violence
- Benefit recipients who are disabled and require support to remain in adapted properties
- Benefit recipients who have responsibility for a disabled child
- Social Housing tenants with significant rent arrears
- Benefit applicants affected by the introduction of the Benefit Cap
- Lone Parents
- Customers living in the most deprived wards
- Customers with mental or physical disability
- Other exceptional circumstances to be decided by the local authority on a case by case basis

The above are examples of target customers only. Each case will be decided on an individual basis and decisions will be based on the circumstances applicable to that application.

## **Action Plan**

### **1. Ensure that 100% of the funding supplied by central Government for DHP is allocated each year.**

- Issue regular bulletins to “front line” staff, reminding them of the availability of the scheme and criteria.
- Regular briefing notes and bite-size training for assessment staff to promote the scheme and qualifying criteria and encourage staff to identify potential cases
- Promote awareness to Members.
- Provide effective DHP overview training to non-benefits staff to promote take-up and awareness of DHP.
- Identify target client groups from records held by the Benefits Service.
- Identify claimant’s from records held by other Council Services:
  - Social Housing Tenants with significant rent arrears
  - Direct referrals from Blackpool Housing Options
  - Children’s Services records of Foster Carers
- Continue to develop the Blackpool Council website facility to ensure that up to date information is provided and that relevant benefit forms can be completed online.
- Promote the scheme via leaflets and posters in Council offices (Customer First, Housing Options)
- Encourage welfare advice groups and other stakeholders to promote the scheme by:
  - Continued working with existing service partners and stakeholders
  - Encouraging new partners to become involved in referring into the scheme

### **2. Ensure that DHP funds are available to and accessed by the most needy and vulnerable members of the community.**

- Ensure that customers with special needs, disabilities or people from ethnic minority groups can access the scheme
- Provide a facility to visit customers to assist them in making an application for DHP and provide supporting documents
- Conduct regular sample checking to ensure consistency of decision making
- Provide written Guidance for Decision Makers, which is regularly reviewed and updated in order to improve the operation of the scheme and the processes involved
- Work closely with other Council Directorates to promote greater access to the scheme e.g. Adult Services
- Provide a specific contact point and direct referral process for DHP enquiries from partner organisations

### **3. Monitor and evaluate the administration of the DHP scheme to ensure that the service reflects the needs of the community and to identify areas and reasons for low take-up.**

- Quarterly reporting of DHP expenditure to the Divisional Management Team meetings.
- Conduct a quarterly review of source, demographic and type of application to ensure targets and processes are appropriate and relevant
- Regular reporting to the Department for Work and Pensions in line with their requirements.
- Conduct an annual analysis of applications to identify the reasons for an award or a refusal and the origin of an application in order to improve processes
- Invite and action feedback on processes and procedures from partners and stakeholders.

#### **Sources of Information to assist LA with Take-Up Initiatives**

- Housing Benefit records
- Council Tax Hardship applications
- Discretionary Discount Scheme applications
- Percentage of referrals by partner organisations
- Applications for Discretionary Support
- Debt referrals

#### **Promoting Take Up**

- Information and online application form posted on the website
- Referral arrangements with third sector organisations
- Referral arrangements with other Council services
- Integrated Discretionary Awards Team
- Centralised Advice Team