



Benefits Policy Manual

Allocation of Discretionary Housing Payments

1. Aims

- 1.1. To distribute funding granted under the discretionary housing payment scheme in an equitable way to meet given criteria, and to promote the following objectives:
 - alleviate poverty;
 - support vulnerable young people in the transition to adult life;
 - encourage Oxford City residents to seek and retain employment;
 - safeguard Oxford City residents in their homes;
 - help those who are trying to help themselves;
 - keep families together;
 - support the vulnerable in the local community;
 - help claimants through personal crises and difficult events.
- 1.2. To ensure as far as possible all customers are made aware of the availability of discretionary housing payments
- 1.3. To ensure central government funding for payments is spent in full without incurring additional spending that will need to be met from the general fund.

2. References

- 2.1. DWP Guidance manual sections
- 2.2. Legislation
- 2.3. HB/CTB circular

3. Details

- 3.1. The Benefits Service will treat all applications for DHP on their individual merits.
- 3.2. In deciding whether to award a DHP, the Benefits Service will consider:
 - how the award will meet the objectives above (paragraph 1.1.)
 - the shortfall between Housing and Council Tax Benefit and the liability;
 - any steps taken by the claimant to reduce their rental or Council Tax liability;
 - the financial and medical circumstances (including ill health and disabilities) of the claimant, their partner and any dependants and any other occupants of the claimant's home;



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- the income and expenses of the claimant, their partner and any dependants or other occupants of the claimant's home;
- any savings or capital that might be held by the claimant or their family;
- the level of indebtedness of the claimant and their family;
- the exceptional nature of the claimant and his / her family's circumstances;
- the amount available in the DHP budget at the time of the application;
- the possible impact on the Council of not making such an award, e.g. the pressure on priority homeless accommodation;
- any other special circumstances brought to the attention of the Benefits Service.

The Benefits Service will decide how much to award based on all the circumstances. This may be an amount below the difference between the liability and the payment of Housing Benefit and / or Council Tax Benefit. An award of a DHP does not guarantee a further award at a later date even if the claimant's circumstances have not changed.

3.3. The Benefits Service considers the DHP scheme should usually be seen as a short-term emergency fund. The period of the award will be decided based on the criteria above and any evidence supplied. Generally awards will be made for a period of six to twelve months. The start date of the award will normally be:

- the Monday after the Benefits Service receives the written claim for a DHP; or
- the date on which entitlement to HB/CTB starts; or
- another date, where this fulfils the objectives of this policy better than the dates above.

3.4. Where the applicant appears to be entitled to another state benefit that they are not receiving, they will be advised to make a claim, and provided with details of other agencies in the city who may be able to help with such a claim. Any DHP will be awarded in light of the result of this claim.

3.5. The Benefits Service may need to revise an award of a DHP where the claimant's circumstances have materially changed. Any revision to the award will take effect from the Monday following the date of change in circumstances. If a revision of an award leads to overpayment then steps will be taken to recover this money if it is reasonable in the circumstances to do so.

3.6. The Benefits Service will decide the most appropriate person to pay based on the circumstances of each case. This could include paying:

- the claimant;



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- their partner;
 - an appointee;
 - their landlord (or an agent of the landlord); or
 - any third-party to whom it might be more appropriate to pay.
- 3.7. The Benefits Service will pay an award of DHP by the most appropriate means available in each case. This could include payment:
- by cheque
 - by crediting the claimant's Council Tax and / or rent accounts;

Payment frequency will normally be made in line with payments of Housing and/or Council Tax Benefit.

- 3.8. Decisions regarding DHPs will be notified to the claimant within 14 days giving brief reasons for the decision and explaining the right of review the claimant has. Standard wordings for these letters are attached in the appendices.
- 3.9. A more senior officer will review any DHP decision that is disputed by the claimant. If the decision is upheld and remains disputed a panel of senior council officers will meet to further review the decision. If the decision is still upheld, any further dispute must be dealt with by judicial review.
- 3.10. The Benefits Service is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. A claimant who tries to fraudulently claim a DHP by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under the Theft Act 1968. Where the Benefits Service suspects such a fraud may have occurred, the matter will be investigated and this may lead to the instigation of criminal proceedings.
- 3.11. The Benefits Service will publicise the scheme and will work with all interested parties to achieve this. A copy of this policy statement will be made available for inspection and will be posted on Oxford City Council's web site.
- 3.12. The Team Leader/ Manager will extract reports from the DHP software on a monthly basis to ensure that expenditure is within budget and is correctly profiled to ensure no overspend at the end of the financial year. Spending to date and projected annual spending will be reported on a quarterly basis to voluntary groups and housing providers.