

Landlords Forum 26 January 2011

Discussion group – Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

Group leaders – Carolyn Whiteley, Senior Housing Adviser and Lisa Hill, Housing Benefit Liaison with the Housing Advice Team.

These notes take the form of the questions that were asked during the discussion period.

Q – Are DHPs periodic or one off payments?

DHPs can be for a backdated period or ongoing. Please note that DHP is not a long-term solution to shortfalls in rent.

Q – How long can the DHP be backdated for?

There are no set rules. Most Local Authorities would not go back for more than a year.

Q – Will DHPs cover shortfalls that come from the forthcoming changes in the Local Housing Allowance?

Yes, a DHP could be applied for in circumstances where it will sustain a tenancy.

Q – Has the budget for DHP decreased?

No, they will rise nationally from £10m to £30m in 2011/12 and will further increase to £60m in 2012/13. The Government realises that some tenants will be affected by the April 2011 changes.

Q – If there are no strict guidelines for DHP, at whose discretion is a decision made?

The DHP application is passed to a caseworker to assess. A recommendation is made and passed to the Manager for a review decision. Haringey have a review procedure in place. Any review is made to the DHP Panel. The Panel sits every 4-6 weeks and has representation from the Housing Departments, not just Housing Benefit. If the decision is disallowed, then no further appeal is allowed. The key to a successful DHP claim is to provide suitable evidence to support it.

Q – Have Housing Benefits done any projected figure of how much DHP they are going to have to pay as a result of the forthcoming changes?

Not that I am aware of. They will be aware that there will be a significant increase in DHP applications.

Q – What is the average DHP claim?

DHP claims vary considerably. We have dealt with claims between £150 - £2,000

Q – If DHPs are not for rent arrears, wouldn't it mean that you cannot make a valid claim?

If a tenant is in rent arrears which have been caused by a shortfall in Housing Benefit, for example if the Housing Benefit is being restricted by the Rent Officer and the tenant cannot meet the shortfall out of their income, then a back dated DHP claim can be made.

Q – How long does a DHP claim take to assess?

Any DHPs that are assessed with the assistance of Housing Advice are processed fairly quickly. We are unsure of the timescale for DHPs that are assessed through the Housing Benefit normal process. This would depend on their workload.

Q – Does the council rehouse people who are evicted for rent arrears?

The council won't house anybody who has wilfully withheld their rent – they would be found to be 'intentionally homeless and would not be assisted, even if they had children.

Q – You mentioned earlier that DHP can be used to assist in the shortfall of rent. How does this apply where a tenancy is converted to a periodic tenancy?

DHP awards cannot be granted indefinitely. They could possibly help to assist the tenant to fulfil their contractual obligations. However, we would look to negotiate with the landlord to reduce the rent to the current LHA rate or assist a tenant to find suitable cheaper accommodation for a long term solution.