

Discretionary housing payments

This factsheet looks at how you could get an additional payment from the council to help you pay for your housing costs if you are already getting housing benefit or universal credit.

You can apply to the council for a discretionary housing payment if you are getting housing benefit (or universal credit to help with your housing costs) and you still need help to pay your rent. You can also apply if you need help to pay certain other housing costs.

Will you get a payment?

The council does not have to give you a discretionary housing payment. Every council has its own policy on making these payments.

Your council has a certain amount of money to make payments every year. Once this is used up you cannot get a payment.

Reasons for a discretionary payment

You can apply for a discretionary housing payment for many reasons, including if you:

- have a shortfall between your rent and the housing benefit you receive
- need support to continue to live in specially adapted accommodation
- need help to pay rent in advance or a deposit, especially if you are moving because the maximum housing benefit you could get has been reduced where you are living now.

You may have more chance of getting a payment if the reason for the shortfall between your housing benefit and your rent is because of the benefit cap or the bedroom tax.

When you can't get a payment

You can't get a discretionary housing payment for:

- service charges that are part of your rent but are not covered by the housing benefit scheme, such as heating, hot water, or water charges
- making up for a reduction in housing or other benefits resulting from an overpayment or a penalty
- rent arrears if you have already received housing benefit to pay that rent
- paying your council tax.

How to apply

You must apply to **your local council**, normally to the housing benefit office. You may have to fill in an application form.

You will need to provide evidence of your regular spending. Provide as much information as possible. Give details of any special circumstances, such as if you:

- have additional living costs because you are disabled or a foster carer
- are likely to become homeless if a shortfall in your rent is not paid
- are a single parent with a child under two who is affected by the benefit cap
- need to stay living near your job because of poor public transport
- must pay the rent until your fixed-term tenancy expires and you can't move to somewhere cheaper before then.

How is it paid?

If you get a discretionary housing payment, it may be paid as a lump sum, or in regular instalments depending on why you need the money. It does not have to be repaid. Payments can be backdated.

You will usually have to reapply after a certain time, the council should tell you when.

Challenging a decision

The council should give reasons if it refuses you a payment. You can ask them to look again at the decision. You can only challenge the council's final decision in court in some circumstances, for example, if it doesn't:

- follow its own policy on making discretionary housing payments
- take your personal circumstances into account.

Further advice

You can get further advice from Shelter's free* housing advice helpline (0808 800 4444), a local Shelter advice service or local Citizens Advice office, or by visiting [shelter.org.uk/advice](https://www.shelter.org.uk/advice) or [adviceguide.org.uk](https://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

*Calls are free from UK landlines and main mobile networks.



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Note
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