

Discretionary Housing Payments and Discretionary Reduction in Council Tax Liability

Introduction

If you're finding it difficult to pay your rent or Council Tax, you could get some extra help through a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) or Discretionary Reduction in Council Tax Liability (DRCTL).

Anyone getting Housing Benefit, Universal Credit or Council Tax Rebate is entitled to ask for this help.

DRCTL and DHPs are discretionary and no one has a legal right to a payment.

What is Discretionary Reduction in Council Tax Liability or a Discretionary Housing Payment?

Discretionary Reduction in Council Tax Liability (DRCTL) or Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) are not payments of Council Tax Rebate or Housing Benefit. They are separate payments made at West Somerset Council's discretion when we decide you need extra help with your Council Tax or housing costs.

If you qualify for Housing Benefit, Universal Credit or Council Tax Rebate, but you are still experiencing severe financial hardship, you can apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment to assist with your housing costs and Discretionary Reduction in Council Tax Liability to help with Council Tax payments.

We will decide every claim on its own merits. Making an application does not guarantee an award. We will take into account your and your family's personal, medical and financial circumstances. We will decide if we should give you extra help and if so, how much, based on all your circumstances. Any help we may give could be less than the difference between your Council Tax or rent liability and your Council Tax Rebate or Housing Benefit.

A DRCTL or DHP award does not guarantee we will decide you should get another award at a later date even if your circumstances do not change. Discretionary Reduction in Council Tax Liability does not affect your right to apply for a Council Tax reduction under section 13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

We are committed to working with the local voluntary sector, social landlords and other interested parties to maximise claims for all available state benefits and we will reflect this when we decide on discretionary reductions.

What costs can a DHP or DRCTL help with?

You might need help towards your Council Tax or rent for a number of reasons, including reductions in your Council Tax Rebate or Housing Benefit because of:



- non-dependant deductions
- your income being too high
- restrictions in Housing Benefit, such as your accommodation being considered as too big for your needs, or too expensive
- restrictions for young people's claims

If you are getting Housing Benefit for your current home, a DHP can also help with one-off costs such as help to take up a tenancy like rent deposits, rent in advance or removal costs.

Can you apply for a DHP if you are affected by welfare reform changes?

Discretionary Housing Payment funding has increased to help those affected by local housing allowance reductions, the benefit cap and the size criteria restrictions in the social rented sector. While we cannot guarantee extra help, we will prioritise requests from disabled people living in adapted accommodation or foster carers affected by the social rent sector size restriction to help them stay in their home. We will also look favourably on payments that directly help to keep people in work or for those moving into a property to keep within the new rent restrictions.



What costs are not covered?

You can't get help if you have difficulties paying your costs because of:



- a reduction in your Housing Benefit because we are recovering an overpayment
- water and sewerage charges
- service charges that aren't eligible for Housing Benefit
- your rent payment increasing to cover arrears of rent
- certain sanctions and reductions in benefits

Can you apply for a DHP if you get Universal Credit?

You can apply for a DHP if you are getting Universal Credit, have to pay rent and are struggling to meet your housing costs. It's likely that DHPs for shortfalls in rent will not be more than the weekly rent figure used to work out Universal Credit.

Can you appeal a DHP or DRCTL decision?

DRCTL and DHPs are discretionary decisions and don't carry a right of appeal. However, if we refuse your claim, you can ask us to review our decision. We will look at all the information again and we aim to tell you our reasons for our decision within 14 days of your request.

How to apply for a DHP or DRCTL

You must claim DRCTL and DHP separately from Council Tax Rebate, Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. Contact us for an application form or alternatively, download it from our website www.westsomersetonline.gov.uk.

You can also ask us to backdate your award. There are no backdating rules but funds are strictly limited. We can only make an award for periods when you are entitled to Council Tax Rebate, Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit.

Make sure you give a full description of the reasons why you are struggling to pay your housing or Council Tax costs and provide evidence to support your request, for example a letter from a support worker, social worker or housing worker.

You might have more chance of success if you are asking for something realistic and time-limited, rather than something that will commit us to long-term funding. If so, it might be good to show us what you are planning to do to get a longer term permanent solution, for example, taking in a lodger, getting a job or moving to cheaper accommodation etc.

Remember – awards are discretionary.

For more help and advice contact the Revenues and Benefits Service:

Telephone: 01643 703704 (lines open Monday -Thursday 8.30am - 5.00pm, Friday 8.30am - 4.30pm)

Email: benefits@westsomerset.gov.uk

Post: Revenues and Benefits Service, West Somerset House,
Killick Way, Williton, TAUNTON, TA4 4QA

In person: WILLITON : West Somerset House, Killick Way, Williton, TA4 4QA
Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5.00pm, Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm

MINEHEAD: Customer Centre, 1-3 Summerland Avenue, MINEHEAD, TA24 5BP
Monday to Thursday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm - 5.00pm
Friday 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm - 4.30pm

Download: Forms, factsheets and information from our website at www.westsomersetonline.gov.uk



Independent Advice

The West Somerset Advice Bureau can offer a wide range of advice on benefits.

Telephone: 01643 704624

Website: www.westsomersetadvice.org.uk

Department for Work and Pensions

Telephone:

0845 605 7064

Website:

www.gov.uk