



Response to Request for Information

Reference FOI 000335
Date 02 August 2016

Discretionary Housing Payments

Request:

I am seeking information about the number of eligible applicants who unsuccessfully applied for Discretionary Housing Payments to your council in the most recent financial year (April 1 2015 to March 31 2016).

By "eligible applicants," I mean DHP applicants who were in receipt of housing benefit (or the housing component of Universal Credit) and who applied for a Discretionary Housing Payment for help with housing payment problems that DHPs can be used to cover (for example, the bedroom tax, rent shortfall due to LHA caps, rent in advance and tenancy deposit assistance, etc).

Could you send me answers to these questions:

1) How many applications for Discretionary Housing Payments were made to your council by eligible applicants in the 2015-2016 financial year?
[We received 2332 DHP applications from eligible applicants in the financial year 2015-16.](#)

2) How many of those applications were rejected/unsuccessful?
[312 of the applications received were refused.](#)

3) What were the five main reasons that eligible DHP applicants had their DHP applications turned down in the 2015-2016 financial year?
[Financial circumstances assessment suggests sufficient disposal income to meet housing costs.](#)

[Rent charge is fully covered by housing benefit and no other evidence to suggest housing costs hardship.](#)

[No Entitlement \(to Housing Benefit\) for period of request.](#)

[Insufficient information provided to make an award decision.](#)

[Repeat award where applicant has not sufficiently fulfilled requirements of a previous award – for example reasonably activity to secure more affordable accommodation.](#)

4) If one of the reasons that eligible applicants were turned down was that

application forms were not adequately completed, could you please let me know:

An application for Discretionary Housing Payment is not refused purely on receipt of an incomplete/inadequately completed application form.

- if the council follows up inadequately completed forms with applicants and how – does the council contact applicants to ask for missing information, or offer a service to help applicants fill in forms correctly if they have support needs?

In the first instance we would call the applicant to ascertain the answers to the questions and advise accordingly; only requesting proof/evidence if required. If we are unable to contact by phone or email we would write to the applicant giving them a calendar month to respond before making a decision based on the evidence received to date.

We also offer appointments to help complete applications if required by the applicant. For those that are housebound due to disability or ill health we offer a visiting officer service, making arrangements with the applicant to visit the home to assist and collect any information required.

- what information do applicants in these cases generally neglect to include – is it supporting information (such as bank statements) that is left out, or do people not complete fields in the application forms?

We sometimes find that forms are incomplete because the applicant does not fully understand the question or has poor reading and/or writing skills. The applicant generally negates to send in evidence, when they do not understand what is required or have nothing available.

We already have access to the eligible applicants' income, rent and household information via their housing benefit claim therefore we only ask for evidence in regards to a change or anomaly that is identified on receipt of a DHP application. We may also request proof of excessive debts, exceptional circumstances, or evidence to support a repeat application.

- 5) Does your council restrict the number of DHP awards an applicant can receive? If Yes, how many awards can an eligible applicant receive? Are they excluded from multiple applications even if their financial circumstances remain the same/don't improve?

No.

- 6) Are DHPs ever awarded to applicants who do not complete your formal application forms – for example, will your council award DHPs to applicants whose councillors or support workers apply on their behalf by email or phone call? If Yes, how many DHPs were awarded that way in the 2015-2016 financial year?

We do not record this but there is a provision to receive applications from Welfare Rights Officers/Macmillan Support Workers via email for customers who are receiving care in hospital or terminally ill.

We would act on emails/phone call received from representatives of potential

applicants by contacting the person referred by telephone or email and arrange either to send out an application form by post/email or arrange an appointment or home visit where necessary.

- 7) Did your council exceed its government Discretionary Housing Payment allocation in the 2015-2016 financial year? Did your council top up its government allocation?
No
- 8) Did your council return any DHP monies to the DWP as unspent in the 2015-16 financial year? If Yes, what was the total amount returned?
A sum of £524.00 from the 2015-16 fund was unspent and was returned to the DWP. This represents 0.08% of the government allocation for the year.
- 9) How many applications for Discretionary Housing Payments were made to your council by eligible applicants in the 2014-2015 financial year?
1872 applications were received from eligible applicants in 2014-2015.