

# Runnymede Borough Council

## Housing Payment

April 2026

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## Introduction

From 1 April 2026, Discretionary Housing Payments will be replaced by the **Housing Payment** component of the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF), providing financial support to those who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs. The Housing Payment component will closely replicate existing DHP guidelines and will transition in a phased approach over a 3-year funding period.

Housing Payments (HP) provide additional financial assistance to customers who are already entitled to Housing Benefit (HB) or the Housing Cost element of Universal Credit (UCHCE) for a rental liability. HP's are not classed as payments of benefit; they are freestanding payments to be made at the discretion of the Council, subject to an annual Government set fund, in cases where the Council considers extra help with housing costs is needed.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is providing funding to Authorities under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. Guidance sets out the basic requirements that must be met before an award can be made but thereafter, local authorities (LA) have wide discretion on the operation of the scheme, including such matters as the method of making the claim, information requirements and the recovery of any overpayments.

### A HP can be claimed by anyone who has:

- An entitlement to HB; or
- An entitlement to Universal Credit (UC) that includes a housing element towards rental liability;
- **and**
- the Council is satisfied they require further financial assistance with housing costs

Entitlement to refers to individuals who are in receipt of, or qualify for one of the benefits listed above, but have not yet received payment.

Although not defined in law, further financial assistance, means someone who is unable to meet housing costs from their available income, having fully explored every available alternative method to close the gap between their household income and their liability for housing costs.

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They can be paid to meet a shortfall caused by any of the following:

- Reductions in HB or UC where the benefit cap has been applied;
- Reductions in HB or UC for under occupation in the social rented sector;

- Reductions in HB or UC as a result of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) restrictions;
- Rent shortfall to prevent a household becoming homeless whilst the housing authority explores alternative options;
- Policy to limit benefit to two children;
- Removal of the family premium;
- Non-dependant deductions;
- Income tapers or any other policy change that limits the amount of HB or UC payable.

They can also be paid where the move is beneficial to the claimant and the Council and by agreement via partnership working initiatives with housing providers to meet some or all of the following:

- Rent in advance
- Deposits
- Other lump sum costs associated with a housing need such as removal costs to secure first time housing or when downsizing

NB: rent in advance and deposits will usually be paid direct to the landlord and cannot duplicate HB/UCHCE already paid for a past period and where the move is beneficial to the claimant and the Council.

## A HP cannot be used to:

- Pay for service charges that would not be ineligible for Housing Benefit (such as water charges, meals or the acquisition of furniture or household equipment) listed in Schedule 1 of The Housing Benefit Regulations 2006
- Cover a service charge UCHCE cannot cover, listed under Schedule 1 Paragraph 7 of The Universal Credit Regulations 2013;
- Cover increases in rent due to outstanding rent arrears;
- Minimize the effect of other benefit sanctions or any HB or UC overpayments;
- Cover a shortfall caused by HB or UCHCE overpayment recovery;
- Make a payment when HB or UC is suspended;
- Pay towards Council Tax liability. Relief is available through Discretionary Hardship Relief under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. (See Runnymede Borough Councils, [Council Tax Discretionary Hardship Policy](#))
- Cover Housing Cost element of UC in respect of mortgage interest payments. Owner-occupiers are not eligible to receive HP;
- When a claimant does not have a minimum entitlement to HB or UC Housing element.

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## Main features of the HP scheme

The main features of Runnymede's HP scheme are:

- It is purely discretionary – there is no statutory right to a payment;

- The amount the Council can pay out in total in any financial year is limited to the amount of grant available in the financial year;
- Subject to the annual approval of the Housing Committee the Council will apply to the Secretary of State for permission to spend £30,000 each year from the Housing Revenue Account, which will be ring-fenced specifically for Runnymede Borough Council tenants;
- The HP policy is designed to comply with the Government's policy whilst making sure Runnymede Borough Council (the Council) has a clear and concise process in place to protect vulnerable residents, sustain tenancies where possible and prevent homelessness.
- It should be noted that HP is short term financial assistance to 'bridge the gap' whilst people improve their personal situations. It is not there to support a lifestyle or lifestyle choice.

The Council recognises the importance of protecting vulnerable residents and also the possible adverse effect on individuals of the changes imposed by the Government's Welfare reform agenda. This policy has been developed to ensure the level of protection and support is available to those residents in most need. As there is no specific category of person for whom this applies, all applications will be treated on their merit and will purely be based on that person and/or their family's specific financial and personal circumstances.

## Funding

The amount of funding for Housing Payments will not fully compensate for the loss of benefit income to all tenants across Runnymede. It is the Government's and our intention that tenants take positive action to improve their financial situation through finding work, increasing the hours they work and/or move to more suitable accommodation.

Any payment made will be at the total discretion of the decision maker having due regard to the regulations and guidance issued by the DWP. Whilst payments will be discretionary, the Scheme will ensure a level of consistency and transparency in decision making and that no unfair treatment or discrimination will be recognised through this process.

All applicants will be given the opportunity to have a full welfare check to ensure they are receiving the correct levels of help through discretionary funds and benefits. However, there is a requirement that the applicant will work with the Council and its partners to improve their financial and personal situation where at all possible. Failure to comply can be grounds for refusing to make a Housing Payment.

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## Armed Forces Covenant

This policy recognises the Armed Forces Covenant and will ensure that those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past or are currently

serving, will face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the application of this policy. Special consideration may be appropriate in some cases, especially for those injured or bereaved.

## Policy Details

The Council is committed to assisting claimants in long term financial planning and will assist or signpost to Citizens Advice (CA), Department for Work and Pensions, Money Advice Service, Child Maintenance Service and other appropriate external agencies for budgeting advice and assistance. Where the evidence provided indicates that the claimant is not claiming appropriate state benefits, social tariffs, or discounts to which they may be entitled, the decision maker may refer them to those entitlements and provide details of other agencies that may be able to help with such a claim, before considering a claim for HP.

The decision maker will consider making a Housing Payment to those claimants who meet the qualifying criteria as specified in this policy. The Council will treat all applications on their individual merits and will seek through the operation of this policy to:

- Alleviate poverty
- Encourage residents to obtain and sustain suitable accommodation
- Safeguard residents in their home
- Support those escaping domestic violence or racial abuse
- Support disabled people
- Help those who are trying to help themselves
- Keep families together
- Help claimants through personal crises and difficult events
- Work closely with the relevant housing officers to ensure the Council's Homelessness Strategy is taken into account

It is not and should not be considered as a permanent way around any current or future entitlement to restrictions set out within HB or UC legislation.

## Claiming a HP

In applying for a HP, the claimant is expected to commit to working with the Council and its partners to improve their financial and personal circumstances. They will be expected to accept assistance from either the Council or third parties such as Citizens Advice (CA) or similar organisations to enable them to manage their finances more effectively including where appropriate the termination of non-essential expenditure.

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An application for HP may be made at any time, although it will not normally be considered until the actual rate of HB or UC has been determined. The application will be made where possible through the Council's website or on the Council's formal application form and should include any relevant supporting evidence including full details of the claimant's income and expenditure.

The Council reserves the right to verify any information or evidence provided by the claimant and may request additional evidence as appropriate. The evidence has to be provided within 10 working days of such a request, although this will be extended in appropriate circumstances. If the claimant does not or cannot provide the requested information, the application will be considered based on the evidence that is available at the time.

## Awarding a HP

In deciding whether to award a HP, the decision maker will take into account:

- Whether the HP fund is the most suitable funding stream for the applicant. An award from the HP fund should only be made if all other reasonable sources of help have been exhausted.
  - The shortfall in income to consider for a Housing Payment shall be the total monthly household income including the whole value of UC award less the total monthly household expenditure (which the Council deem reasonable)
  - The local rental market (the cost and availability of alternative accommodation)
  - Any steps taken by the claimant to reduce their rent or remedy the situation themselves
  - The financial and medical circumstances (including ill health and disabilities) of the claimant, their partner and any dependents and any other occupants of the claimants home
  - All income received by the claimant, their partner and any member of their household irrespective of whether the income may be disregarded under the HB/UC schemes
  - Any savings and capital that the customer and/or partner or member of the household can reasonably access.
  - The steps being taken and ability to improve their financial situation, and whether anyone else in the home can help financially
  - The prevention of homelessness taking into account the Council's homelessness strategy
  - Possible impact of the Council not making such an award e.g. pressure on Council's finances
  - Maintaining the family as a unit and also taking into account the accommodation needs of absent parents
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- The exceptional nature of the claimant and their family's circumstances especially vulnerability

In making the award, the amount of HP will never be higher than the weekly eligible rent shortfall.

Decisions on the level and duration of an award will take into account past awards, value and length of time for the previous awards, and what is affordable within the allocated budget.

The Council reserves the right when awarding a HP to advise claimants to consider seeking alternative accommodation if it felt that the current home is not appropriate to their needs having considered all the information provided to them.

## Notifying a decision

Once the application is complete, it will be considered on its own merits, in accordance with the legislation, available funding and stated objectives of the scheme.

Once a decision has been made, the applicant will be notified in writing within 10 working days of receipt of all the necessary information or as soon as practicable thereafter.

Where the application is successful, the decision maker will advise:

- The weekly amount of HP awarded or total amount for a one-off payment
- Whether it is paid in advance or arrears
- The period of the award
- How the award will be paid and to whom
- The requirement to report a change in circumstances

Where the application is unsuccessful, the decision maker will set out the reasons why this decision was made and explain the right to review.

## Conditions attached to an award of HP

The Council may stipulate conditions for an award of HP to be successful.

Failure to adhere to any conditions stipulated may result in applications being determined as unsuccessful.

Conditions which may be attached to any successful award may include.

- Taking steps to move into work or increasing hours at work
- Working with an accredited debt advice service provider

- Making changes to items of expenditure as advised by the Welfare Team with a view to reducing items considered non-priority or excessive
- Actively seeking cheaper alternative accommodation
- Maintaining and actively bidding on properties available through the Housing Register
- Applying for and maintaining claims to other welfare benefits e.g., Universal Credit, employment and Support Allowance, Personal Independence Payments or Pension Credit
- Making and maintaining payment arrangements towards any rent arrears

The intention of applying conditions to any award of HP is to assist the customer to identify ways in which they may improve their circumstances, whilst seeking to support them through the limited funding available for HP. It is not intended to be a punitive measure and in certain exceptional cases, no conditions would be applied to an award. However, where a condition is considered a reasonable outcome for a customer, taking into account all the support that is available, or has been offered, it will be applied to each case.

Where any such conditions have been attached to an award of HP, the applicant will be asked to provide evidence of activity related to them during the period of award for those of 6 months or more for any subsequent application if an award was for less than 6 months to be considered. It may also be necessary for the applicant to attend a meeting with a Welfare or Financial Inclusion officer, or equivalent, to consider what steps could be taken to reduce reliance on further HP funding.

## Expenditure

It is reasonable to expect claimants to reduce spending on non-essential items such as mobile telephones, satellite television, broadband or social entertainment. The decision maker will consider personal circumstances when identifying what is non-essential spending.

Where expenditure appears excessive the decision maker may at their discretion assume a figure, they deem to be more reasonable or may ask the customer to provide evidence of said expenditure before the application can proceed.

If a reduced expenditure figure is assumed, the notification of the decision will contain a statement explaining why a reduced figure has been assumed and invite the customer to provide evidence of the expenditure within 1 month should they disagree.

Where expenditure appears to be non-essential the decision maker may at their discretion exclude said expenditure from the assessment. If expenditure is excluded from the assessment, the notification of the decision will contain a statement explaining why it has been excluded.

Where expenditure appears too low the decision maker may at their discretion assume a figure, they deem to be more reasonable.

Where expenditure has been omitted from an application and the decision maker either knows or can reasonably assume that the expenditure should exist, a reasonable figure may be assumed for said expenditure.

Where evidence is requested a deadline of 1 month from the date of request for the provision of the evidence must be notified to the customer and state that failure to provide the required evidence within time limits will result in their claim being refused or request more time because the information is not available to the claimant.

Where evidence is not provided within 1 month of the request (or longer where reasonable) the claim will be refused.

Priority is given to the following groups (list not exhaustive):

- Individuals or families fleeing domestic violence;
- Young people leaving local authority care;
- Ex-homeless people being supported to settle in the community;
- Those with kinship care responsibilities;
- Families with children at a critical point in their education;
- The elderly frail who have lived in the area for a long time and would find it difficult to establish support networks in a new area.

## Period of Award

In all cases, the Council will decide the length of time for which a HP will be awarded on the basis of the evidence supplied and facts known.

The start date of an award will be decided based on the individual facts relevant to the case. A HP can only be awarded after the end of the first UC assessment period where the award includes a payment of housing cost element.

Generally, the minimum period for which a HP will be awarded is one week and the maximum will not exceed a period of 13 weeks or to the end of the appropriate financial year at which point the claimant will be able to reapply. During the period of the award, if the applicant fails to take the opportunity to remedy their situation, such as refusing an offer of suitable alternative accommodation the award may be ended.

New applications will be required for any new financial year and repeat applications will not automatically be successful. Where the dwelling has been structurally altered to meet the needs of a resident such as a wet room or lift, those applications will be considered for longer term support.

The Council will consider any reasonable request for backdating an award of a HP but such consideration will be limited to the current financial year. A HP cannot be awarded for any period where HB or UC is not in payment.

An award of HP does not guarantee that a further award will be made at a later date, even if the applicant's circumstances have not changed. Repeat awards will only be agreed where the claimant has taken reasonable steps to work with the Council and its partners to improve their financial position or the Council considers that the claimant is unable to make any further reasonable changes to improve their housing situation.

## Changes of Circumstances

The Council should always review an award of HP where the claimant's circumstances have materially changed. Claimants would be expected to notify the Council of any changes to their circumstances which may affect the award of a HP.

## Appeals

HP awards are not part of the HB or UC schemes and are therefore not subject to the statutory appeal process.

However, if the claimant is dissatisfied with the decision in respect to their application for a HP, they have the right to request a review by a senior officer within the Benefits Team within 1 month from the original decision to refuse HP. The request must contain the grounds on which the claimant is seeking a review.

The claimant will be notified in writing within 21 working days of the outcome of the review or as soon as practicable thereafter. The letter will clearly state the reasons for the decision. If the claimant remains dissatisfied after the review, the applicant can make a complaint through the Council's complaint procedure, or there is the option of applying to the Courts for a Judicial Review.

## Fraud and overpaid HP's

The Council is committed to protecting the public purse and ensures funds are awarded to people who are rightfully eligible for them.

A claimant who tries to fraudulently claim a HP by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under The Fraud Act 2006.

Where the Council suspects such a fraud may have been committed, this matter will be investigated as appropriate and may lead to criminal proceedings.

Where a HP has been overpaid, then the Council may recover the overpaid amount by sundry debt invoice. HP cannot be recovered from any benefits including HB.

## Communicating this policy

The Council will publicise this scheme both on the Council's website and with all other interested partners and organisations. The Council will raise awareness of the scheme with other services and agencies such as CA, Housing Associations, the Family Support Team and Adult Social Care. We will ask our partners to use their own communication and distribution channels to promote the scheme and provide Runnymede Members with information to share with any constituents who contact them.

## Crisis & Resilience Fund

Housing Payment is a component of the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF). Runnymede Borough Council will work with colleagues in Surrey County Council to avoid duplication of payments, and on new initiatives to promote financial wellbeing and resilience and may refer applicants for HP to the Crisis Fund.

**For all information contained within this document contact:**

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