

Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a new form of social housing support. HAP provides housing assistance to households with a long-term housing need by enabling households to find accommodation in the private rental sector.

HAP provides for the transfer of responsibility for recipients of Rent Supplement with a long-term housing need from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) to housing authorities and provides a new approach in responding to households with a social housing need. Rent Supplement will continue to be available from the Department of Social Protection for people who don't qualify for social housing support – for example, someone who is temporarily unemployed.

The roll-out of HAP brings together all the social housing services provided by the State under the single umbrella of the local government system and removes a barrier to employment by allowing households to continue to receive HAP support even if their income increases or they gain full-time employment.

HAP has been rolled out on a phased basis and is currently operational in 19 local authority areas. It is due to become operational in 9 further local authorities from 1st December 2016 and in the remaining three Dublin local authorities - Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council and Dunlaoghaire-Rathdown County Council from end Q1 2017.

Roll-out of HAP in Dublin Region

Dublin City Council will have a HAP team in place from January 2017 to administer HAP. Training will be provided by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, the Housing Agency and the HAP Shared Services Centre.

The roll-out of HAP to the Dublin region requires careful planning and close collaboration among the key parties in the delivery of the scheme, including the Dublin local authorities, the HAP Shared Service Centre (SSC), the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, to ensure successful delivery.

A National Communications Strategy is being developed and is due to be implemented alongside the roll-out of the scheme to the Dublin Region.

HAP Shared Service Centre

Limerick City and County Council won the bid to operate the financial transactional Shared Service Centre (SSC) for all Local Authorities operating HAP.

A dedicated team of staff is being put in place in the SSC to administer payments for the Dublin Local Authorities

Why is HAP being introduced?

HAP is being introduced to provide a more integrated system of housing supports and aims to:

- allow all social housing supports to be accessed through one body – the local authority, and
- allow recipients to take up full-time employment and still keep their housing support

Who is Eligible for HAP?

Any household that is qualified for social housing support is eligible for HAP.

Four main groups:

- **New social housing applicants** who need housing support
- **Existing households on housing list** who may present to the local authority seeking HAP
- **Rent supplement** recipients **changing tenancies**.
- **Long Term Rent Supplement recipients** – referred from DSP and to be transferred to HAP on a phased and agreed basis.

It is not possible to transfer from any other form of social housing to HAP

How does HAP work?

- In order to qualify for HAP, a household must be qualified for social housing support by their local authority, which means the household must qualify to go on the local authority housing waiting list
- households source their own accommodation on the basis of the HAP rent limits (this is the same as the current rent supplement scheme).
- The landlord must agree to rent their property to the HAP recipient.
- The property must meet minimum standards for rented housing. The local authority will inspect the property within 8 months of the first HAP payment to the landlord.
- The landlord must be tax compliant

- There are no deposits under the HAP scheme available from the local authority. However, the household may apply for assistance with a deposit from DSP, which may be made available under the Exceptional Needs Payment.
- The local authority pays the rent in full directly to the landlord on behalf of the tenant but the local authority is not a party to the tenancy
- The HAP recipient pays a rent contribution to the local authority. The rent contribution is a differential rent i.e. a rent based on income and ability to pay. Payments will be made through An Post's Household Budget Scheme, Standing Order etc.
- In the same way as other households paying a differential rent, the HAP recipient must notify the local authority immediately of any changes in income or household size, so that the rent can be recalculated.
- HAP recipients are expected to stay in the approved HAP accommodation for at least 2 years. In some circumstances a HAP recipient may be able to apply for a new HAP payment elsewhere e.g. if the family grows too large for the property or if HAP recipient has been offered a job in another town

Rent Limits

In general, the rent must be within the HAP rent limits for the size of the household and area applied for. However, there is flexibility where suitable accommodation cannot be found for a household within these limits.

Rent limits from 1 July 2016

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Local authority	1 adult in shared accommodation	Couple in shared accommodation	1 adult	Couple	Couple or 1 adult with 1 child	Couple or 1 adult with 2 children	Couple or 1 adult with 3 children
Dublin City Council	€430	€500	€660	€900	€1,250	€1,275	€1,300
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	€430	€500	€660	€900	€1,250	€1,275	€1,300
Fingal County Council	€400	€440	€660	€900	€1,150	€1,175	€1,200
South Dublin County Council	€430	€500	€660	€900	€1,250	€1,275	€1,300

Benefits of HAP

For HAP recipients

- HAP allows recipients to take up full-time employment, while still receiving housing support.
- The rent contribution payable by the HAP recipient will be based on the differential rent scheme for their local authority. This scheme links the rent contribution a household must pay to the household income and the ability to pay.
- HAP will help to regulate the private rental sector and improve standards of accommodation. Properties will be inspected to make sure that they meet the required standards.
- HAP recipients will be able to avail of other social housing supports and options, if they so choose.
- Local authorities will be responsible for all social housing supports.

For landlords

- The landlord will receive prompt payments directly from the local authority on a monthly basis in arrears, subject to the HAP recipient paying the local authority their rent contribution
- There will be no need for rent collection from tenants who are HAP recipients leading to administrative savings for landlords
- All payments are made electronically
- From the 1st January 2016 onwards additional tax reliefs were available for landlords who rent their properties to tenants in receipt of Rent Supplement or social housing support from a local authority, such as HAP

For Dublin City Council

- Dublin City Council will become a one stop shop for all social housing supports
- Rent and arrears will be collected by the HAP Shared Service Centre (HAP SCC)
- Availability of existing social housing stock will not be impacted
- No property maintenance costs will be incurred

Access to other housing supports / Transfers

HAP recipients will have access to other social housing supports offered by local authorities, such as local authority housing or housing provided by Approved Housing Bodies. Any HAP recipient who wishes to do so will be able to access other social housing supports, not through the current waiting list system, but through the transfer system operated by local authorities.

Where a HAP recipient applies for a transfer within two weeks of entering HAP, the transfer list will reflect the time the recipient previously spent on the waiting list. The HAP recipient will therefore be placed on the transfer list on no less favourable terms than if they had remained on the waiting list.

With the roll-out to the remaining Dublin local authorities, to be completed early in 2017, HAP will have replaced rent supplement as the long-term housing support for those living in rented accommodation; rent supplement will no longer be available thereafter to new households with an identified social housing need.