

Commissioner's Advice to Inspectors

Housing Costs: Minor Repairs and Improvements

Directions 23(2)(f) (for crisis loans) and 29(d) (for community care grants) prevent awards being made for:

“housing costs, including repairs and improvements to the dwelling occupied as the home, including any garage, garden and outbuildings... other than:

... minor repairs and improvements...”

This Advice deals with what is meant by the phrase “minor repairs and improvements”. A separate Advice paper deals with the general meaning of [Housing Costs](#).

1. Repairs and improvements

The phrase “repairs and improvements” includes the cost of both materials and labour. A repair will generally put right something that is defective. An improvement will generally upgrade something, or add something to a property that was not there before. For the purposes of the housing costs exclusion, it is not important to distinguish between repairs and improvements, since both fall within the definition of housing costs. However the distinction is still relevant when considering an exclusion under Direction 23(1)(ix), since this excludes ‘repairs’ to council and housing association properties, but not improvements.

2. “Minor”

“Minor” is an essentially relative term, which cannot be precisely defined. The following considerations, however, will be relevant when deciding whether a repair or improvement is “minor” or not:

- the nature and extent of the work;
- the time needed to complete the work;
- the cost of the work.

3. Treating pieces of work individually or together

In most cases, a repair or improvement, however major, is capable of being broken down into a number of jobs or items, which in themselves might be minor. This raises the question of whether Inspectors who are faced with applications for several repairs or improvements should consider them together or individually.

The answer is that the Inspector should focus on the underlying need for the repair or improvement. If the individual pieces of work contribute to the same underlying need for repair or improvement, the Inspector will be justified in treating them together. If, on the other hand, they are needed for essentially different purposes, they should be treated separately.

“Top up” applications

In some cases, the applicant may have other means of meeting part of the cost of a major repair or improvement (e.g. a local authority grant). Their Social Fund application is for the balance. In such cases, the Inspector should look at the whole underlying need, rather than at the amount requested.