

# Changes to housing benefit for council tenants and housing association tenants

From 1 April 2013 there will be changes in the way Housing Benefit is calculated for working age tenants and claimants living in social housing. Some people are referring to this as the 'Bedroom Tax'.

This means there will be restrictions on the size of property Housing Benefit will pay for, based on who lives in the property. If you have more bedrooms in your home than is necessary according to the new rules, you will lose some of your benefit.

How will this be worked out?

The new rules will allow one bedroom for:

- ◆ every adult couple (married or unmarried)
- ◆ any other adult aged 16 or over
- ◆ any two children of the same sex aged under 16
- ◆ any two children aged under 10
- ◆ any other child (other than a foster child or child whose main home is elsewhere)
- ◆ a carer (or team of carers) who do not live with the claimant but provide them or their partner with overnight care

If someone is considered to be under-occupying their accommodation there will be a reduction in the amount allowed for rent and any service charges:

- ◆ 14% reduction if they are considered to have one extra bedroom
- ◆ 25% reduction if they have two or more extra bedrooms

If you think you might be affected by these changes, speak to your landlord in the first instance about your options.

## What options are available?

If you are assessed as having one or two more bedrooms than your allocated need and your Housing Benefit is reduced, there are a number of courses of action you may take. You may wish to find a smaller property, or if you stay where you are, you will have to make up the shortfall in rent yourself.

**Move** – Some people may decide that it would be sensible to move to smaller property with fewer bedrooms. If you would like to downsize please contact your landlord to discuss. There is a limited supply of smaller council houses and housing association properties; it may take some time to get a move, so it is best to speak to your landlord as soon as possible.

It may be possible to claim a Discretionary Housing Payment for help with moving costs, please speak to Housing Benefits about this possibility.

**Ask non dependants to contribute** – If you decide to stay in your current home and make up the shortfall in rent yourself you may wish to ask other non dependants (people over 18) living with you to contribute to the additional rent.

**Take in a lodger** – Taking in a lodger to fill an extra bedroom may be a good option for some claimants but you should consider this very carefully before you do this as you may find sharing your home difficult. The lodger would be assessed as part of the household, meaning you would not necessarily be considered to be under-occupying and may have more income due to the extra rent

**Increase hours of work** – If you are in employment you may consider increasing your working hours if possible to make up the shortfall in rent.

**Take a job** – If you are not currently in employment, finding a job could help you pay the additional rent. Please see (link) “Treatment of other income” for more details on this. These calculations may be complicated and you may wish to seek further advice.

### **Other support and advice**

Please talk to your Landlord in the first instance. They should be able to advise you on the prospects for moving to a smaller property. If you decide to stay in your current home you will be able to discuss with them how you will pay the additional rent. Alternatively you can contact:

#### **Shelter**

Shelter offers face-to-face, phone, email and online advice about any housing problems (not just homelessness).

Website **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

Telephone 0808 800 4444 (calls are free from UK landlines and main mobile networks)

### **Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB)**

The CAB offers free, confidential advice face-to-face or by phone. Most CABs also offer home visits, and some give email advice.

Website **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

Telephone for England call 08444 111 444 (5p per minute from a BT landline)

Text Relay users should call 08444 111 445

### **National Debtline**

National Debtline is a free, confidential service offering independent advice about dealing with debt. You can get information online or by calling the free helpline.

Website [www.nationaldebtline.co.uk](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk)

Telephone 0808 808 4000