

Information on changes to housing benefit

April 2011



What is changing?

From April 2011 the government is making changes to housing benefit, for tenants renting from a landlord in the private sector.

Will this affect me?

Yes, if you are renting a property from a private landlord and receiving housing benefit and you made your claim for your current address on or after 7 April 2008.

When is it changing?

From 1 April 2011, the maximum £15 weekly housing benefit excess that some people can get now will end. This means you will not be able to get more money from housing benefit than the amount you pay in rent.

There will be maximum rate caps, which should only affect tenants in the London area. There will no longer be a five bedroom local housing allowance rate. The maximum level is for a four bedroom property.

The government will reduce local housing allowance rates to a lower amount, so that about three in 10 properties for rent in your area should be affordable to people on housing benefit. At the moment about five in 10 properties in your area are affordable to people on housing benefit.

How will this affect me?

It is possible that the amount of housing benefit you get to pay your rent could go down. If your housing benefit is paid directly to your landlord, the amount your landlord gets could go down. If you are getting or thinking of claiming housing benefit, you need to consider these changes before you renew or make a new tenancy agreement with a private landlord.

When will this affect me?

- If you are making a new claim to housing benefit or moving home, the changes will affect you from 1 April 2011.
- If you are already claiming housing benefit, you will normally have more time before your rate changes. If your circumstances don't change, you will have nine months based on your current rate after your local authority next assess your housing benefit on or after 1 April 2011.
- For instance if your next assessment is due in June 2011 the changes will not affect you until March 2012. You cannot get more money in housing benefit than you pay in rent after we assess your claim.
- The changes may affect you sooner if:
 - You are getting housing benefit and move home.
 - Your household changes, such as someone leaves or comes to live with you.

When will my claim next be assessed?

You can work this out from the date you made your original claim for housing benefit, or from the date we last assessed your housing benefit amount.

For example, if you made your first claim for housing benefit on 5 September 2010 your yearly review date will be 5 September 2011.

Where to go for more information

- You can get more information at www.direct.gov.uk, Directgov provides information on public service in one place including up to date information on the housing benefit changes.
- Local authority housing benefit and housing service. Your local authority can help you to find out exactly how these changes will affect you either call 01934 888 144 or go to www.n-somerset.gov.uk. The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) is an exclusive agency of HM Revenues and Customs and holds information on local housing allowance, fair rents and council tax and many other related topics, visit www.voa.gov.uk.
- The Citizens Advice service provides a wide range of advice. To find your local Citizens Advice Bureau, look in the phone book or Yellow pages, or visit their website at www.citizensadvice.org.uk.

Shelter offers confidential housing, welfare benefits and debt advice through a network of advice services; free phone the housing advice helpline on 0808 800 4444 8am – 8pm Monday-Friday and 8am-5pm Saturday and Sunday and online, visit www.shelter.org.uk.