



Upcoming Welfare Reforms

Importance of Council Tax Reduction Applications

- Universal Credit does not include an amount for help towards Council Tax
- Many Universal Credit claimants could be entitled to assistance with their Council Tax and this should still be applied for directly through the local authority and on the forms provided.

April 2018

LHA rates apply to Social Housing Sector

Housing Benefit paid for rent on Social Housing will be restricted to rates payable under the Local Housing Allowance scheme.

This will have a particularly negative impact on under 35 year olds who are restricted to the shared room rate of Local Housing Allowance, which is currently set at £250pcm.

As of April 2018, the Local Housing Allowance rates will be applied to tenancies signed after April 2016 (after April 2017 for people in Supported Accommodation).

Welfare Reform Update Briefings

If you would like to find out more about upcoming Welfare Reforms or changes to Universal Credit, please come along to one of our Welfare Reform Briefing sessions on;

**21st April 2016
2 - 4pm
Howden Park Centre**

**25th April
10am - 12noon
Bathgate Partnership Centre**

**To book a place please email welfarereformteam@westlothian.gov.uk
or call 01506 283000 (option 4).**

April 2016

Limit on Backdating

From April 2016, the maximum period that a claim for Housing Benefit for working age claimants can be backdated for will be reduced from 6 months to one month.

April 2016

Benefit Freeze

The previously proposed two-year freeze on working age benefits, including Tax Credits and Local Housing Allowance, is now to be extended to four years, beginning in April 2016 and lasting until the 2019/20 financial year.

This is expected to save £4bn a year by then and will not affect payments to the sick and disabled.

May 2016

Removal of the Family Premium

What is the Family Premium and when is it applied?

The Family premium is an amount added to a claimant's applicable amount when calculating their Housing Benefit entitlement.

To qualify for the family premium the claimant must be responsible for a dependent child or qualifying young person aged under 20. The rate of the family premium is £17.45pw.

The family Premium will no longer be applied to new claims for Housing Benefit from May 2016.

Expected Autumn 2016 (Date TBC)

Reduction in Benefit Cap Limits

Once approved, the maximum level of Benefits a household can receive will be reduced from;

**£500pw per couple or claimants with children to £385pw
£350pw for single claimants to £257pw**

Benefit included in the Benefit Cap are;

- Housing Benefit (unless living in supported housing)
- Income Support
- Employment Support Allowance (unless in the support Group)
- Jobseekers Allowance
- Incapacity Benefit
- Child Benefit
- Child Tax Credits
- Guardians Allowance
- Maternity benefits and widows benefits paid by the DWP
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- Universal Credit
- Carers Allowance

Anyone entitled to Disability Living Allowance, PIP, Attendance Allowance, ESA Support Group (or UC equivalent), War or war widows pension, HB for supported accommodation or Working Tax Credits will be exempt from the Benefit Cap.

May 2016

Temporary Absence Abroad & Housing Benefit

From May 2016, the maximum period for which a claimant who is absent from their home and is abroad can continue to be treated as occupying their home, and therefore paid Housing Benefit, will be 4 weeks.

Universal Credit - Impact on Housing Costs

Two Homes Rules

Housing costs for two homes can be paid in following three scenarios;

Large Families in Social Housing

Where a claimant is housed in two dwellings by a provider of Social Housing on account of the number of children the claimant is responsible for. This rule will be applied for as long as the claimant continues to meet the conditions.

Necessary Aids or Adaptations

For a period of up to two months when a claimant, their partner or child is disabled and in receipt of DLA care at middle or high rate, AA or PIP Daily Living Component, and experience a delay in moving into the property due to necessary aids or adaptations being made.

Housing costs can be paid for the new adapted property in the form of a backdate, once they have moved in.

Fear of Domestic Violence

If a claimant is occupying a property other than that which they normally occupy, and it is unreasonable to expect them to return to their normal home due to a reasonable fear of violence.

The claimant must be intending to return to the home and the DWP must find it reasonable to pay costs. If so costs could be paid on two homes for a period of up to 12 months.

Temporary Absence Rules

Where a claimant is expected to be absent from the home for no longer than 6 months, Housing Costs will continue to be paid.

If during that 6 month period it becomes apparent that the absence is likely to last longer than 6 months, housing costs will be stopped as of that point.

Exception to this rule - Where a claimant is absent from the home due to fear of domestic violence, in this situation Housing costs can be paid for up to 12 months.