

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit

Housing Benefit has changed from 1 January 2012 for single people aged 25 to 34 who rent from a private landlord

Find out how the changes will affect you

The Government has made changes to the way Housing Benefit is calculated for those who are single and aged 25 to 34 and rent from a private landlord. The changes took effect from 1 January 2012.

What will the changes mean?

From 1 January 2012 single people aged from 25 to 34 will only be entitled to the Housing Benefit shared accommodation rate. By single people we mean someone who is **not** living:

- as a couple
- with dependent children.

The shared accommodation rate is based on the level of local rents for properties that are not self contained. This usually means that there is a shared

- kitchen,
- bathroom,
- toilet or
- living room

If you already get Housing Benefit at the one bedroom rate your Housing Benefit will reduce if you move to the shared accommodation rate.

If your Housing Benefit is paid directly to your landlord, the amount your landlord gets for your rent could go down.

If you are getting, or thinking of claiming Housing Benefit, you need to consider this change before you renew or make a new tenancy agreement with a private landlord.

Note - If you are under 25 and single you are not affected by these changes as in most cases you are already only entitled to the shared accommodation rate.

Who will the changes affect?

These changes will affect you if you:

- you are occupying one bedroom self-contained accommodation in the private rented sector
- already get Housing Benefit, or are going to make a new claim
- are a single person
- do not normally have children living with you
- are under 35 years old

These changes **will not** affect you if you are covered by one of the following exemptions: if you

- rent from a local authority or housing association.
- are aged under 22 and have been in care.

- live in supported housing provided by a housing association, registered charity, voluntary organisation or a county council.
- get the severe disability premium in your benefit because you are entitled to the middle or higher rate care component of the Disability Living Allowance.
- need an extra bedroom for a carer who provides you with the overnight care you need but who doesn't normally live with you.
- have spent at least three months in a
 - homeless hostel or
 - hostel specialising in rehabilitating and resettling within the community. To benefit from this exemption you need to have been offered and accepted support services to enable you to be rehabilitated or resettled in the community.
- are an ex-offender who is being managed within the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), to be rehabilitated back into the community).

When will the changes affect me?

The date the change will affect depends on the date you made your claim for Housing Benefit.

Existing claimants (Those who claimed before April 2008)

If you have continuously been in receipt of Housing Benefit prior to the introduction of Local Housing Allowance in April 2008 you will move to the shared accommodation rate (previously known as the single room rent) on the annual review of your claim. E.g. If you claimed in February 2006 your annual review is due in February each year, at your next annual review in February 2012 you will move onto the shared accommodation rate.

Existing claimants (Those who claimed between April 2008 and March 2011)

If have been in receipt of Housing Benefit since April 2008 you should have been told of the changes to the Local Housing Allowance rates from April 2011. You will have been given nine months protection from these changes. You will not be affected by the change to the shared accommodation rate until the nine months has ended.

The nine months start from when the Council carried out your first Housing Benefit yearly assessment after 1 April 2011. For example, if your yearly review was in June 2011 the change to the shared accommodation rate will not affect you until March 2012 (nine months later).

New claimants from April 2011

If you made a claim for Housing Benefit after 1 April 2011, but before 1 January 2012, you will move to the shared accommodation rate on the first anniversary of their claim E.g. If you claimed Housing Benefit in June 2011 you will move onto the shared rate of accommodation rate in June 2012.

New claimants from January 2012

If you live in a privately rented home and make a new claim for Housing Benefit from 1 January 2012, the change will affect you straightaway.

Note

If you are not sure when or if the change will affect you please contact us. Please see page 4 for our contact details.

Shared accommodation rates

We can not tell you the exact Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate for shared accommodation that will apply when you make a new claim /your claim is due to be reviewed as the rate may change from month to month. However the current shared accommodation rate in the Torfaen area is £60 and in the Monmouthshire area is £55.38. This will give you an indication of the likely rate to be included in your claim.

You can find out the local shared accommodation rate on Directgov.uk search under local Housing allowance rates. You can also compare the shared accommodation rate with the one bedroom rate:

What can I do if I can no longer afford to pay my rent?

If your Housing Benefit has reduced and you are experiencing difficulty in making up the shortfall in your rent please contact us. **Please see page 4 for our contact details.**

More Information

If you are concerned about the changes and how they will affect you or want more information you can contact the **Benefit Section. Please see page 4 for our contact details.**

In addition the Council's Housing Options team are able to provide information and assistance on a wide range of housing, or housing-related, problems e.g. If you find yourself threatened with homelessness. They will also be able talk to you about what your options may be if you are thinking of looking for alternative accommodation or renewing your existing tenancy. For more information you can contact Housing Options.

TORFAEN RESIDENTS

should contact Housing Options Torfaen

TELEPHONE: 01495 742302

E-MAIL: housingoptions@torfaen.gov.uk.

MONMOUTHSHIRE RESIDENTS

should contact Housing Options Monmouthshire

TELEPHONE: 01291 635714

E-MAIL: housingoptions@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Directgov website

You can get more information at www.direct.gov.uk. Directgov provides information on public services in one place including up to date information on the Housing Benefit changes.

Citizens Advice Bureau

The Citizens Advice Bureau provides a wide range of advice. The local contact details for the Citizen's Advice bureaus in Torfaen and Monmouthshire are:

Pontypool Citizens Advice Bureau Castle Mews, George Street Pontypool Tel: 01495 757421	Torfaen Citizens Advice Bureau 21 Caradoc Street Cwmbran Tel: 01633 482464
Abergavenny Citizens Advice Bureau 26a Monk street Abergavenny Tel: 0844 477 2020	Chepstow Citizens Advice Bureau The Gate House, The High Street Chepstow Tel: 0844 477 2020
Caldicot 5a Church Road Monmouthshire Tel: 08444 77 20 20	Monmouth Citizens Advice Bureau 23a Whitecross Street Monmouth Tel: 08444 77 20 20

Shelter Cymru

Shelter offers confidential housing, welfare benefits and debt advice through a network of advice services. They also offer advocacy and representation services.

Shelter Cymru
PO Box 5002
Cardiff
CF5 3YY
Tel: 02920 556120

PLEASE NOTE

This leaflet is only a guide and does not cover every circumstance. We have done our best to make sure the leaflet is correct as of the date below. Some of the information may be oversimplified or may become inaccurate over time, for example because of changes to the law. We recommend that you get independent advice before making financial decisions based on this leaflet.

Our Contact details

If you need more help, please contact us.

TORFAEN RESIDENTS should contact TELEPHONE:01495 766430 or 01495 766570 E-MAIL: revs&bens@torfaen.gov.uk	MONMOUTHSHIRE RESIDENTS should contact TELEPHONE:01633 644650 or 01633 644655 E-MAIL: benefits@monmouthshire.gov.uk	
OUR ADDRESS- Shared Benefit Service Level 3, Civic Centre Pontypool Torfaen NP4 6YB		
IN PERSON at any of our One Stop shops or Customer Centres		
ABERGAVENNY (open normal office hours) Cross Street, Abergavenny NP7 5HD	CHEPSTOW (open normal office hours) Manor Way, Chepstow NP16 5HZ	CALDICOT (open normal office hours) Woodstock Way, Caldicot NP26 5DB
MONMOUTH (open normal office hours) Priory Street, Monmouth NP25 3XA	PONTYPOOL (open normal office hours) Level One Civic Centre, Pontypool NP4 6YB	CWMBRAN (open normal office hours) 1-2 General Rees Square Cwmbran NP44 7NX
BLAENAVON (Tuesday to Friday 9.30 am to 2.30)pm) Blaenavon World Heritage Centre Church Road Blaenavon NP4 9AS		
WELSH TRANSLATION- If you require a copy of this document in Welsh please contact us on the telephone numbers above.		

Online services (This service is currently only available for Torfaen residents)

You are now able to access a full range of online services via the Council's website www.torfaen.gov.uk under online services. Using a secure registration process you can now access the following services:

- Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit claim data for your claim
- Council Tax or Business Rate information for your account including the account balance, payment and instalment details.

The service also allows you to report a change in circumstances, claim a discount or exemption or make a payment towards your account. In addition you can check your potential entitlement to Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit and make a claim for Benefit on-line. The Benefits section will then contact you to obtain the required detail to complete the claim.