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## **Housing Benefit is changing from April 2011 for people who pay rent to a private landlord**

The Government is making changes to the Local Housing Allowance rates from April 2011. These changes are likely to reduce the amount of Local Housing Allowance that we can pay. The information in this leaflet explains more about the changes.

It is important that you read this information to find out if you will be affected by the changes to the Local Housing Allowance

### **Changes to the Local Housing Allowance from April 2011**

- The 5 bedroom Local Housing Allowance rate will no longer exist so the maximum level will be for a four bedroom property.
- There will be national limits so that the weekly Local Housing Allowance rates in any area cannot be more than:
  - £250 a week for a one bedroom property
  - £290 a week for a two bedroom property
  - £340 a week for a three bedroom property
  - £400 a week for a four bedroom property
- All Local Housing Allowance rates will be reduced so that about 3 in 10 properties should be affordable to people on Housing Benefit rather than 5 in 10 properties.
- An end to the additional benefit (maximum £15 per week) some customers can receive because their rent is below the Local Housing Allowance rate.

### **What will the changes mean?**

It is possible that the amount of Housing Benefit you get to help pay your rent could go down. If you are getting or thinking of claiming Housing Benefit, you need to consider these changes before you renew or agree a new tenancy with a private landlord.

### **When will I be affected by the changes?**

If you make a new claim or change of address claim on or after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011, and you are paying rent to a private landlord, we will use the new rules to work out your Housing Benefit.

If you are already getting Local Housing Allowance and your circumstances do not change, you will not normally be affected by the changes straight away. We will use the new rules to work out your Housing Benefit when we first review your Local Housing Allowance rate after April 2011. But there is some protection for people who would then be entitled to less Housing Benefit because of the new limits or the lower rates.

Please turn over >>

**Please contact us if you need this information in Braille, large print, on audio tape or in another language.**

### **What is the protection for people already getting Local Housing Allowance?**

If you qualify for protection it means that we can continue using your current Local Housing Allowance rate for nine months before we have to reduce your benefit. For example, if the review of your Local Housing Allowance is due in June 2011 the lower rates will not affect you until March 2012. But you may lose this protection if your circumstances change during the nine months.

This protection only applies if you are due less benefit because of the new limits and the lower Local Housing Allowance rates. There is no protection against the extra payment of up to £15 per week. This will stop from the date that we first review your Local Housing Allowance after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011.

### **When will you review my Local Housing Allowance?**

We will normally review your Local Housing Allowance on the anniversary date of your claim. Your anniversary date usually occurs each year after the date you made your current claim. For example, if you claimed Housing Benefit on 5 September 2010 your anniversary date is 5 September 2011. But the anniversary date can change if we have to update your Local Housing Allowance rate because of a change in your household.

We will also review your Local Housing Allowance if there is a change in the number of people who live with you that affects the size of the property you need.

### **Where to go for more information and advice**

#### **Local Housing Allowance Rates**

There is information available about the current rates on the [LHA Direct](http://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk) website at <http://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk>. To help you plan for the changes you can compare the current rates against what the new rates are likely to be for where you live at [www.voa.gov.uk/lhadirect/LHA\\_percentile\\_rates.htm](http://www.voa.gov.uk/lhadirect/LHA_percentile_rates.htm)

#### **Housing Benefit**

If you want to know more about how the changes might affect you please

- phone 08456 122 660
- write or visit the Civic Centre, 44 York Street, Twickenham, TW1 3BZ
- look on our website [www.richmond.gov.uk/housing\\_benefits/local\\_housing\\_allowance](http://www.richmond.gov.uk/housing_benefits/local_housing_allowance)
- email [Benefits@richmond.gov.uk](mailto:Benefits@richmond.gov.uk)

#### **Housing Advice**

If you are threatened with homelessness or have another housing query, you can make an appointment to see someone from the Council's Housing Options Team for advice.

- phone: 020 8891 7409
- email: [housingadvice@richmond.gov.uk](mailto:housingadvice@richmond.gov.uk)

#### **Directgov [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)**

This Government website provides information on all public services including up to date information on the Housing Benefit changes.

#### **Richmond's Citizens Advice Bureau [www.rcabs.org.uk](http://www.rcabs.org.uk)**

The CAB provides advice and help with a wide range of issues including welfare benefits