Local Housing Allowance is changing from April 2011 for private tenants

Find out how the changes will affect you

The Government is making changes to the way Housing Benefit is calculated, for private rented sector tenants, from 1st April 2011.

What will the changes mean?

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 for 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 make a new tenancy agreement with a private landlord.

Who will the changes affect?

These changes could affect you if:

- You are claiming Housing Benefit, or are going to make a new claim, under the Local Housing Allowance scheme (LHA).

- You receive more Housing Benefit (up to £15) than you pay for your Rent

When will the changes affect me?

From 1st April 2011 if you are making a new claim for Housing Benefit.

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 at your current Local Housing Allowance rate from when your local authority next assesses your Housing Benefit after 1st April 2011.

It is important to remember that after your assessment the Housing Benefit you get won't be higher than the rent you pay.

For example, if your next assessment is due in June 2011 the changes to Local Housing Allowance rates will not affect you until March 2012. But you will no longer get more Housing Benefit than you pay in rent. The changes may affect you sooner if:

- You are getting Housing Benefit and are planning to move home.
- Your household is changing such as someone leaving or coming to live with you.

If you are claiming or intending to claim Housing Benefit you need to be aware of the changes and when you will be affected before negotiating or entering into a new tenancy agreement with a private landlord.

Local Housing Allowance rates

From 1st April 2011 the Local Housing Allowance rates are going down.

To help you plan for the changes next year you can compare the current rates against what the new rates are likely to be for where you live, on the Valuation Office Agency website:

England:http://www.voa.gov.uk/corporate/RentOfficers/LHADirect.html
(For Bexley, please refer to the rates shown against 'Outer South East London')

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/Housing Service. Your local authority can help you to find out exactly how these changes will affect you.

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) is an executive agency of HM Revenue & Customs and holds information on local housing allowance, fair rents & council tax and many other related topics website http://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 or www.cas.org.uk for Scotland.

Shelter offers confidential housing, welfare benefits and debt advice through a network of advice services; freephone Housing Advice Helpline on 0808 800 4444 8am-8pm Monday-Friday and 8am-5pm Saturday-Sunday and online at
england.shelter.org.uk/get advice
www.shelter.org.uk

Important information about this leaflet

This leaflet is only a guide and does not cover every circumstance. We have done our best to make sure that the information in this leaflet is correct as of November 2010. Some of the information may be oversimplified, or may become inaccurate over time, for example because of changes to the law.

If you wish to discuss these changes in more detail, then please contact us via the following methods: -

By Post – London Borough of Bexley, PO Box 367, Town Hall Erith, Kent DA8 1TL

By Phone – 0345 302 2317

LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY

By Email – Benefits Office
bexley.benefits@secure.capita.co.uk

In person at Erith Town Hall, Erith - opening hours Monday to Friday 8.45am to 5pm (Except Wednesday's when the doors open at 9am. Last appointment every day 4.45pm).