

Housing Benefit Cuts In January 2012: What Are They And What Do They Mean?

An important change for those aged under 35 will begin on 1 January 2012.

From 1 January 2012, the age threshold for the shared accommodation rate will increase from 25 years to 35 years

if you are single, under the age of 35, do not normally have children living with you, and you rent from a private landlord, your Housing Benefit is only likely to cover the cost of renting a single room in a shared house.

This is known as the **shared accommodation rate**.

What does this mean for existing claimants?

As an existing claimant, the date that this change will affect you will depend on whether you are receiving transitional protection from the changes to the Local Housing Allowance rules that took place in April 2011. If you are receiving transitional protection you will move to the shared accommodation rate at the same time as your transitional protection from the earlier changes ends.

If you are not receiving transitional protection, [you made a claim for Housing Benefit after 1 April 2011 but before 1 January 2012], your Housing Benefit will change to the shared accommodation rate on the anniversary date of your claim. [The anniversary date is 12 months after the Local Housing Allowance rate was last set on your claim].

For example, for a claim made on 10 October 2011, the anniversary date is a year later on 10 October 2012.

If you made your claim for HB before 7 April 2008, your benefit will change when your case is due for annual review.

If you are already claiming Housing Benefit as a private tenant, are single, aged between 25 and 35, and do not live in shared accommodation, you are likely to see a cut in your HB. You will need to think about how you can make up any difference in your rent or what your options are if you can't afford to.

What are your options?

- You could try negotiating with your landlord to see if they will accept a lower rent.
- Or Apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment from the local authority.
- You will need to consider getting debt advice if you are in rent arrears or in debt generally.
- Finally, you may have to move to cheaper accommodation.

If you are single, under 35 and make a new claim for Housing Benefit as a private tenant on or after 1 January 2012, you will probably have to live in shared accommodation otherwise your Housing Benefit is unlikely to cover all of your rent. The local authority will not pay you more than the shared accommodation rate.

You can find out the shared accommodation rate for your area on the Directgov website.

For more information visit;

Rother District Citizens Advice Bureau, Bank chambers, Buckhurst Rd, Bexhill-on-sea, East Sussex TN40 1QF.

Tel [01424] 215055 & 734549

Outreach sessions at Battle, Burwash, Northiam, Robertsbridge, Rye & Ticehurst.

www.dwp.gov.uk.