

Big benefit changes and news

Here are some significant benefit changes taking place and some important news

This benefit bulletin has been produced by Newcastle City Council's Active Inclusion Newcastle Unit

In this issue

Housing Benefit

News on the spare room subsidy commonly known as the 'bedroom tax'

Child Tax Credit – annual reporting for a child staying on in education

Otherwise benefit will stop

Personal Independence Payment replacing Disability Living Allowance claimants

So near yet so far!

Disability and carers benefits

Online claims for Carers Allowance, telephone changes for disability benefits, home visits and travel costs

Further restrictions to benefits for people coming from abroad

A roundup of changes in this complex area

Extras

Universal Credit red button, DWP's welfare reform toolkits, foodbanks and the next Budget

Heads up! Big changes for jobseekers and other Jobcentre Plus benefits and sanctions

Important changes due in April

Further information

More details on the following pages

The changes in more detail:

Housing Benefit under occupation rules, commonly known as the 'bedroom tax'

Temporary exemption

The Government have agreed that a 'loophole' in the law, means that tenants are exempt from the 'bedroom tax' since April 2013, if they had lived in and received Housing Benefit for the same property continuously since before 1 January 1996. Short breaks of less than four weeks are acceptable. However, they will close this loophole from 3 March 2014.

The City Council's Housing Benefit section are checking to see who may be entitled to a refund. However, anyone who thinks this might apply to them should contact them on 0191 278 7878 or email benefits@newcastle.gov.uk

See the DWP guidance HB Circular A1/2014: <http://tinyurl.com/A1-2014-PDF>

Extra help for families hit by the 'bedroom tax'

Families struggling with welfare changes will receive extra help after Newcastle City Council won a major share of Government money. They put together a bid to the DWP for £861,000 based on the level of need in the city and were awarded the full amount.

The money will be used for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) which they give to those who cannot afford the shortfall between their Housing Benefit level and their rent as a result of the 'bedroom tax' or spare room subsidy.

The Council's Housing Benefit section are already checking previous DHP claims but the additional funding must be spent before this April so professionals are being encouraged to make appropriate claims. For more details and how to claim:

See the web page: <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/benefits-and-council-tax/council-tax-support-and-housing-benefit/difficulty-paying-my-rent-or-council-tax>

Phone: 0191 2787878 and ask for 'benefits'

Email: DHPandvulnerabilityteam@newcastle.gov.uk

Also see the press release:

<http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/news-story/extra-help-families-hit-bedroom-tax>

Child Tax Credit – annual reporting for a child staying on in education

If a child aged between 16 and 19 stays on at school or college (called full time non advanced education, such as up to A levels) Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC) must now be notified **every year** by 31 August. Otherwise Child Tax Credit will stop. The Tax Credits helpline is 0345 300 3900.

It is also important to notify HMRC of a child staying on in education for Child Benefit. Phone 0300 200 3100.

Personal Independence Payment replacing Disability Living Allowance

Since April 2013 last year, people aged 16 to 64 with care or mobility needs have been able to make new claims for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) instead of Disability Living Allowance (DLA). However, the move to PIP for those already on DLA is only taking place in certain areas of the country like the Midlands, Carlisle and Darlington but not yet in Newcastle. At the moment, the Government say it will be 2015 for the rest.

To stay informed, DLA claimants should be advised to read any letters they get and check out these websites:

- Disability Rights UK: www.disabilityrightsuk.org/personal-independence-payment-pip
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP): www.gov.uk/pip

Disability and carers benefits: Online claims for Carers Allowance, phone changes for disability benefits, home visits and travel costs

Carers Allowance

Now carers can claim Carers Allowance online in addition to other ways

<https://www.gov.uk/carers-allowance/how-to-claim>

New numbers for disability benefits

There has been a bit of rearranging, so here they are:

Attendance Allowance: 0345 or 0845 605 6055

Disability Living Allowance: 0845 712 34 56

Personal Independence Payment:

- New claims: 0800 917 2222
- Enquiry line: 0845 850 3322

Medical assessment at home for PIP claims

The Minister for Disabled People has confirmed when home assessments can take place in the claimant's home. These are:

- at the claimant's request, if the assessor agrees that their health condition or disability means they are unable to travel;
- when the claimant provides confirmation, through the professional providing evidence to support their claim, that indicates they are unable to travel on health grounds; or
- at the DWP's request, although these will be exceptional circumstances.

See the reply in Parliament: <http://tinyurl.com/ass-at-home>

Travel costs to medical assessments for PIP claims

The Minister has also confirmed that such travel costs can be paid for by the organisation which carries out the assessment – at the moment – Atos Healthcare. He also said claimants should face no more than a 90 minute single journey by public transport to an assessment centre.

See the reply in Parliament: <http://tinyurl.com/med-ass-Parl-reply>

Further restrictions to benefits for people coming from abroad

This is a complicated area so further advice may be necessary. However it is important people and organisations are aware of these new rules.

To receive Income based Jobseekers Allowance many newly arrived claimants have to satisfy the 'Habitual Residence Test'. Many of the following changes involve restrictions to this test.

In December last year the Habitual Residence Test was changed and claimants now have to provide more individual answers about themselves before the test is passed, such as whether their (lack of) English language skills may be a barrier to finding work.

From **1 January 2014**, newly arriving EEA jobseekers (or British nationals returning from more than a short period abroad) cannot pass the Habitual Residence Test and get income based JSA until they have been living in the UK for 3 months. It can also mean that Housing Benefit may not be payable during that period. More details from the DWP guidance Memo 28/13: <http://tinyurl.com/ml0c5db>

Also from **1 January 2014** new Jobseekers Allowance claims from EEA claimants will be stopped after 6 months unless they can provide compelling evidence that they have a genuine prospect of employment. If so a limited extension may be given. This test will begin from **July 2014**.

From **1 March 2014**, before they can claim most benefits, EEA migrants will have to earn at least £150 a week for the last 3 months – equivalent to working 24 hours a week at the national minimum wage. If they earn below this amount, they will have to prove the work was 'genuine and effective' and not 'marginal and ancillary.' More details from the Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/knfefot>, the DWP press release: <http://tinyurl.com/kd9szjy> and guidance <http://tinyurl.com/ol5yucl> (PDF) and <http://tinyurl.com/HBCircA3-2014>

From 1 April 2014, new EEA jobseekers will no longer be able to access Housing Benefit if they are claiming income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. The Government says that these changes "do not affect UK and Irish Republic nationals, or EEA migrants genuinely self-employed or in a job or EEA nationals who have been working in the UK, and are subsequently made redundant." See the DWP press release: <http://tinyurl.com/mqsz9mf>

More information on these general rules for new migrants from the turn2us website: <http://tinyurl.com/kpuovjn>

Extras

Press the Universal Credit red button

Information about Universal Credit via the TV red button

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/universal-credit-on-the-red-button>

Welfare Reform toolkit

The DWP have produced this summary

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/welfare-reform-communications-toolkit>

Foodbanks

See the Government's recent report on foodbanks: <http://tinyurl.com/o3xbmd3> , CPAG's response: <http://tinyurl.com/nhecuyb> , their parliamentary briefing on the subject: <http://tinyurl.com/nm7lqgp> and the letter from Bishops sent to the Daily Mirror: <http://tinyurl.com/q7h7tpt>

Details of **Foodbanks in Newcastle** can be found on this web page:

<http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/benefits-and-council-tax/welfare-rights-and-money-advice/debt-and-money-advice/money-advice-and-budgeting>

The next Government Budget will take place on 19 March 2014

Plans for further "billions of welfare savings".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-25349236>

Heads up! Big changes for jobseekers and other Jobcentre Plus benefits and sanctions

We will provide a Benefit Bulletin in March on important changes due in April 2014 for people claiming benefits at the Jobcentre Plus.

Further information

Can be found on www.newcastle.gov.uk/welfarerights including where to get advice in Newcastle and benefits self-help factsheets.

Information on the impact of welfare reform and what Newcastle City Council and partners are doing to try to mitigate it is in the January 2014 **Business Cabinet report** which can be found at:

www.newcastle.gov.uk/your-council/councillors/meetings-agendas-and-minutes

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