

Local Housing Allowance

This leaflet is for information only.

It contains important information for people who rent their homes from a private landlord and claim Housing Benefit.

On Monday 7 April 2008 the new Local Housing Allowance is being introduced throughout Britain.

What is the Local Housing Allowance?

Local Housing Allowance is a new way of working out and paying Housing Benefit for tenants of private landlords.

Who does it affect?

Local Housing Allowance only affects tenants of private landlords from 7 April 2008

- and only if they take on a new tenancy on or after 7 April 2008
- or if they make a new claim for Housing Benefit on or after 7 April 2008.

Local Housing Allowance does not affect council tenants or tenants of social landlords, such as Bield Housing Association, Almond Housing Association or Weslo Housing Management, or tenants of charities like the Abbeyfield Society.

I am a tenant of a private landlord and I already get Housing Benefit. Will it affect me?

No. Not unless you change address on or after 7 April 2008 or if you have a break in your claim (for example, because you get a job) and then have to make a new claim for Housing Benefit on or after 7 April 2008.

Note: If you rent a room and move to rent a different room, even if it is in the same house or building, this also counts as a change of address and a new tenancy.

What are the changes?

There are two main changes to the Housing Benefit scheme under the new Local Housing Allowance.

Firstly – the way the maximum rent is calculated changes.

The Rent Officer, an official who is independent of the council, will still set the maximum amount of rent we can pay benefit on.

The Rent Officer will no longer look at every individual property and the actual rent that is charged by the landlord in each case.

Instead the Rent Officer will set a Local Housing Allowance rate for each size of property in our area (one bedroom; two-bedroom, three-bedroom etc.) and these will be published every month on our website and in our local offices.

If you are thinking of moving address after 7 April 2008 you should check what the Local Housing Allowance rate is for your household.

This will help you to work out if you can afford the rent in the new property.

Secondly – the way Housing Benefit is paid changes under the Local Housing Allowance.

- In almost all cases payment of Housing Benefit will be made to the tenant directly into their bank accounts.
- The tenant will have the responsibility to pay their rent to the landlord.

Further information

Please see our booklet:

Getting the Benefit – A guide to the new Local Housing Allowance for tenants of private landlords

This booklet will be available at your local council office from April 2008.

Further information will also be available on our website from April 2008 at **www.westlothian.gov.uk**

You can get further information and answers to any questions you might have by telephoning our Customer Service Centre on **01506 776 800**

You can also get advice from the council's Advice Shop, Units 9-12 Waverley Street Industrial Estate, Bathgate. Telephone **01506 776 444**