

# Benefit Changes - What are your options?

In April 2013, the Government brought in new rules for residents living in affordable housing who get full housing benefit. The rule changes apply to all residents unless they are a pensioner or live in a shared ownership home.

The new rules are to do with 'under occupancy', more commonly known as 'The Bedroom Tax'. 'Under occupancy' is when you live in a home with more bedrooms in it than the rules say you need for the number of people in your household. (Residents are allowed one bedroom for each adult couple; each person aged 16 years or over; every two children of the same sex under 16 years of age; every two children under 10 years of age, no matter what sex; a carer (who does not normally live with you) or you or your partner need overnight care.)

So, what are your options? Set out below are the options available to you.

## **1. Pay the difference**

You might decide that you can pay the difference from your income or other benefits. You will need to check your income and expenditure to make sure you will be able to manage this in the long term. Please remember that your tenancy will be at risk if you fall into rent arrears.

## **2. Move to a smaller home**

For many people, moving to a smaller home will be a good option. If you decide you want or need to move to a smaller home, please make sure you contact Hexagon to apply for a transfer. Depending on the size of your current home, there are some special schemes and incentives to help people move to a smaller place. Please be aware that it may take a long time before you can get a move, and in the meantime you will have to PAY THE DIFFERENCE (see point 1, above).

## **3. Find a job or work longer hours**

If it is possible or a realistic option, moving into work or increasing working hours could increase your income and help cover any reduction in housing benefit.

## **4. Take in a lodger**

With Hexagon's agreement you may be able to take in a boarder or lodger to fill any unoccupied room. This would mean the room would not be treated as unoccupied for the purposes of applying the size criteria rule and you may find they are better off due to the additional income.

Any income from a boarder or lodger could have an effect on other benefit you may so it is important that you seek advice from the DWP or an advice agency if you are considering this option.

### **5. Ask family members to contribute more**

If you have 'non-dependants' (usually adult children) living with you, you could ask them to cover the drop in Housing Benefit rent by paying more from towards the rent.

### **6. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)**

In certain very limited circumstances, you may be able to get extra money from the Housing Benefit Department to cover the shortfall in housing benefit. This would normally only be payable if:

- a) your home has been built or significantly adapted because you or a member of your family has a disability, or
- b) you are a foster carer (or applying to be a foster carer) but the bedroom reserved for a foster child is not currently in use.

DHP can also be payable under other exceptional circumstances. If you think you may be entitled to a DHP, you should contact your local Housing Benefit Department.