

Social Sector Size Criteria

Changes to Housing Benefit

The way that Housing Benefit is calculated for tenants in social housing is changing.

From 20 February 2017 there will be new rules for Housing Executive and Housing Association tenants who are in receipt of Housing Benefit aged between 16 years and state pension age. Pensioners are not affected by this change.

Under the new rules you will receive Housing Benefit based on the number of people in your household and the number of bedrooms in your home. This change is called the Social Sector Size Criteria, sometimes referred to as the 'Bedroom Tax'.

What does Social Sector Size Criteria mean?

The Social Sector Size Criteria allows one bedroom each for:

- every adult couple
- anyone else aged 16 or over
- any two children of the same sex aged under 16
- any two children aged under 10
- any other child (other than a foster child or child whose main home is elsewhere)
- children who can't share because of a disability or medical condition
- a carer (or team of carers) providing overnight care



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Is anyone allowed an extra bedroom?

Some households may be allowed an extra bedroom. One extra bedroom is allowed for:

- an approved foster carer who has a child placed with them
- an approved foster carer who is between placements, but only for up to 52 weeks from the end of the last placement
- a newly approved foster carer for up to 52 weeks from the date of approval if no child is placed with them during that time

- rooms used by students and members of the armed forces will not be counted as unoccupied if they're away and intend to return home

In addition, you may be entitled to an extra bedroom if you have recently suffered a bereavement in the household.

Who won't be affected?



You will not be affected by Social Sector Size Criteria if:

- you, or your partner, have reached state pension age
- you live in supported accommodation
- you live in non-mainstream accommodation, for example, houseboats, caravans or mobile homes
- you live in a shared co-ownership scheme
- you live in temporary accommodation

What will change?

If you are assessed as having one or more extra bedrooms than is necessary for your household it is possible that the amount of Housing Benefit that you receive will go down.

The amount allowed for rent and any eligible service charges will be reduced by:

- 14% if you have one extra bedroom, or
- 25% if you have two or more extra bedrooms.



What support is available to me?

The Northern Ireland Executive has put in place arrangements to provide financial support for people impacted by the changes to the welfare system.

If your Housing Benefit is reduced because of Social Sector Size Criteria, a Welfare Supplementary Payment will be available until 31 March 2020.

You do not need to make a claim for this Welfare Supplementary Payment. If you qualify, the Department for Communities will pay it directly to your landlord, unless your Housing Benefit is paid directly to you, then you will also receive it directly.

What do I need to do?

The letter with this leaflet tells you why the Housing Executive thinks you are affected by this change. It is important that you check the information they hold about your household is correct.

If it is not correct, or you think you are not affected, you should complete the **Household Details Form** and return it to the Housing Executive in the prepaid envelope provided.



Help and Advice

The Housing Executive and your Landlord can offer you help, advice and support.

For Housing Benefit enquiries **telephone: 03448 920 902**

Assistance and advice on the changes to the welfare system is available by contacting the **Independent Welfare Changes Helpline on 0808 802 0020**, which is free to call from any mobile or landline within the UK. The Helpline is available Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm.

For more information, visit nidirect or the Northern Ireland Housing Executive:

www.nidirect.gov.uk/welfarechanges

www.nihe.gov.uk

All information is correct at the time of print. The most up-to-date information can be found on nidirect.