



What is changing?

From 1 April 2013 the Government is introducing new rules that set out the number of bedrooms Housing Benefit will pay for, if you are renting from a registered housing association or other registered social landlord or provider of social housing.

What are the changes?

The new rules will restrict the size of accommodation you can receive Housing Benefit for based on the number of people in your household.

The rules allow one bedroom for:

- every adult couple (married or unmarried)
- any other adult aged 16 or over
- any two children of the same sex aged under 16
- any two children aged under 10
- any other child
- any foster child or children living with an approved foster carer (limit of one extra bedroom)
- a carer (or team of carers) who does not live with you but provides you or your partner with overnight care
- a non dependant
- a sub tenant or boarder
- an adult child who is in the armed forces whilst deployed on operations

If you want to check how many bedrooms you are entitled use an Internet search engine and type under occupation bedroom calculator or bedroom tax calculator. Please bear in mind that when using online calculators do not include foster children and if your child is severely disabled and cannot share a bedroom the result may be wrong. If in doubt, check with us.

How will this affect me?

It is possible that the amount of Housing Benefit you get to pay your rent could go down.

If you are assessed under these rules as having more bedrooms than is necessary for your household you will be considered to be under-occupying that property.

If you are under-occupying there will be a reduction in your Housing Benefit of:

- 14% for under-occupancy by one bedroom
- 25% for under-occupancy by two bedrooms or more

If you are thinking of moving you need to consider these changes before you renew or make a new tenancy agreement.

You may be able to get a Discretionary Housing Payment to make up all or some of the reduction – ask Merton Benefit Service from April 2013, when you know about any April 2013 rent increase.

When will this affect me?

The size limit rules are due to take effect from 1 April 2013.

We will write to you again before then to confirm that you are considered to be under-occupying and how much the reduction in your Housing Benefit will be.

It is important that you start to consider what your options might be now and where necessary talk to your social landlord or us, the local authority.

Where to go for more information

- You can get more information at www.direct.gov.uk Directgov provides information on public service in one place including up to date information on the Housing Benefit changes.
- Merton Benefits Service or our Housing Options Team can give advice on the changes and your options.
- The Citizens Advice service provides a wide range of advice. To find your local Citizens Advice Bureau, look in the phone book or Yellow Pages, or visit their website at www.mertoncab.org.uk or phone 08444 243 8430 or email advice@mertoncab.org.uk
- Shelter offers confidential housing, welfare benefits and debt advice through a network of advice services; freephone Housing Advice Helpline on 0808 800 4444 8am-8pm Monday-Friday and 8am-5pm Saturday-Sunday and online at england.shelter.org.uk/get advice
www.shelter.org.uk
- For this factsheet and others go to www.merton.gov.uk/benefits/hb-ctb

Useful contacts

Merton Benefits Service

To get advice on Housing Benefit and claiming Discretionary Housing Payments:

- Email Housing.Benefits@merton.gov.uk
- Phone 020 8274 4903
- Visit us in person at the ground floor Civic Centre, London Road, Morden, SM4 5DX
- View our website www.merton.gov.uk/benefits/hb-ctb or www.merton.gov.uk/dhp

Merton Housing Options

- Phone 020 8545 3636 to discuss your housing options, or
- Email them at housingadvice@merton.gov.uk

Shelter

Shelter offers face-to-face, phone, email and online advice about any housing problems (not just homelessness).

- Visit their website at www.shelter.org.uk , or
- Phone [0808 800 4444](tel:08088004444) (calls are free from UK landlines and main mobile networks).

Merton Citizens Advice Bureau

Merton CAB offers free, confidential advice face-to-face or by phone. Most CABs also offer home visits, and some give email advice.

- Visit their website at www.mertoncab.org.uk or,
- Phone [08444 243 8430](tel:084442438430)
- Email advice@mertoncab.org.uk

National Debt line

National Debt line is a free, confidential service offering independent advice about dealing with debt. You can get information:

- Online at www.nationaldebtline.co.uk or
- Phone the free helpline number [0808 808 4000](tel:08088084000)

Welfare Benefits Team

- Phone 020 8545 4178 to discuss maximising benefits, or
- Email them at welfarebenefitsteam@merton.gov.uk

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