

# Benefits are changing

Information and advice  
on welfare reform



# Benefits are changing for people of working age

**There are big changes to welfare benefits taking place in 2013.**

These mainly affect people of 'working age' who are on benefits or claim benefits from time to time.

For most benefits, working age is defined as below the qualifying age for pension credit – which equals the women's pension age. This has been rising to bring it in line with the men's pension age.

If you were 61 before 6 October 2012, your entitlement to most benefits including housing benefit should not change. However, it's possible that some pensioners who have younger working age partners could be affected when Universal Credit is phased in.

You can check when you will reach the state pension credit qualifying age online at [www.gov.uk /calculate-state-pension](http://www.gov.uk/calculate-state-pension) or ask someone to check this for you.

Please note the change from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) will affect the 16 to 64 age group.



April

2013

## The Benefits Cap

**From 15 July 2013**, the UK government is starting to cap benefits for working age households. The amount of benefits you can receive will be limited to £500 for a lone parent or couple or £350 for a single person.

The Department for Work and Pensions has written to the residents who are affected. There are about 70 in the South Lanarkshire area.

The new cap doesn't apply if anyone living in your household is claiming various disability benefits.

But as child benefit is included in income, it can hit large families on benefit who have four or more children and people in more expensive accommodation.

If you get a letter, it's worth asking Money Matters or Citizens Advice to double check your benefits, especially if you or any of your children have disabilities (see Useful contacts).



## Occupancy rules

Since 1 April 2013, people living in council or other social housing that is bigger than new occupancy rules say they need have had their housing benefit reduced. It is estimated that 70% of social housing tenants in South Lanarkshire receive housing benefit to help with their costs. Of these, more than 5000 tenants with the council, housing associations and co-operatives have been affected by these changes.

The council and housing associations have contacted people thought to be affected to explain what these changes mean for them and to check their current circumstances.

Some people have been found to qualify for exemptions. However, where the rules apply, those with one spare room have lost £8 a week on average, and people with two spare rooms have lost £14.50 on average. Some tenants with higher rents have lost as much as £20 a week. This means they have to make up the difference from their benefits or other income. Even if people are hoping to start a family, they don't qualify for additional rooms until the child is born.

Households are allowed one bedroom each for

- *a couple,*
- *a person over 16,*



- *two children of the same sex under 16 years,*
- *two children under 10 of either sex,*
- *any other child (other than a foster child or a child whose main home is elsewhere),*
- *a carer providing overnight care.*

Most of our housing has two or more bedrooms – and in most cases it is not possible to re-house people even if they want to move to a house that their benefits will cover.

Occupancy rules have applied in private sector rents for some time, but this is the first time they have been applied to council housing and housing associations.



## Coping when you lose some housing benefit

We know that many people losing some of their housing benefit as a result of the occupancy rules will find it very difficult to bridge this rent gap from their existing income.

**But it's very important that you do pay your rent and you don't run up any arrears.**

You can contact your local housing office (see Useful contacts) or your landlord to arrange a meeting to talk things through and see if you can do anything that will help.

At this meeting, you can get advice and help to consider various options, depending on your individual circumstances.

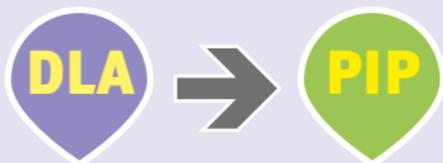


June

2013

## Personal independence payments

**From 10 June** – Personal Independence Payments (PIP) will replace Disability Living Allowance for all new claims from people aged 16 - 64. To qualify for these payments, it's likely you will have to attend a medical assessment. Many disability organisations fear that the new criteria for PIP will mean that a number of people who currently qualify for Disability Living Allowance will not qualify for the new benefit – or will qualify at a lower rate.



From 7 October, people who request an uprating because their situation has got worse or who have fixed term DLA payments due to expire before February 2014 will be asked to claim PIP. It's best to seek advice from Money Matters or Citizens Advice before making these applications. They can also help with appeals.



From October 2015 all remaining claimants in receipt of a DLA award will be invited to make a claim for PIP. The DWP will prioritise recipients who have turned 65 years after 8 April 2013. The DWP will write to people before they need to do anything and you don't need to contact them.

**October**

**2013**

## **Universal Credit**

**From October 2013**, the Department for Work and Pensions will start to introduce a new scheme for paying benefits known as Universal Credit.

This is aimed at simplifying the current system and making it easier for people moving in and out of work.

This brings together a wide range of benefits including

- *Child tax credit*
- *Housing benefit*
- *Income related employment and support allowance*
- *Income based jobseekers allowance*
- *Income support and working tax credit.*



Universal Credit will be paid calendar monthly to one person in the household – and will be paid in arrears.

Your rent will no longer be paid directly to your landlord. Instead your benefits will be paid direct to you and you will have to budget your rent bills and spending every month.

If you don't have a bank account, it's a good idea to get one. Go into any bank that's convenient for you and ask about a basic bank account that will allow you to set up a direct debit to your landlord making rent and other payments easier.

But remember, if there is no money in your account to pay a direct debit, you could run up hefty bank charges.



You can lose benefit if you don't take steps to find a job. If you are 'sanctioned' for failure to attend an interview or course that Jobcentre Plus has told you to attend, perhaps because you or a child was ill, contact Money Matters or Citizens Advice and they will try to help.



April

2013

## Scottish Welfare Fund

**Since April 2013** the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has not dealt with Crisis Grant and Community Care Grants. These grants now come under a new scheme known as the Scottish Welfare Fund operated by local councils in Scotland.

However, the DWP is continuing to deal with other payments including Maternity Grants, Funeral Payments, Cold Weather Payments, Winter Fuel Payments and Benefits advances.

Applications for Crisis and Community Care Grants in South Lanarkshire should be made by phone to 0303 123 1007. You can also apply online through the council's website [www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk](http://www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk)

## Council Tax Reduction Scheme

A new Council Tax Reduction Scheme was introduced in **April 2013** to replace Council Tax Benefit.

The Scottish Government is now responsible for this scheme but it is operated by councils. The intention is that there will be little change to this in the first year at least, and various discounts, including the single person's discount, still apply.



## Things you can do that might help

For many people on benefits or who need to claim benefits over the next year, the welfare reforms are not going to be easy. But there are a few things you can do that will help you cope better.

**Join a credit union** and try saving a small amount every week. Credit Unions are a safe and convenient place to save your money and allow access to low cost loans. This will help you cope with ups and downs when you are on Universal Credit and have to wait a month for your first benefit payment.

**Open a bank account** if you don't have one, so you can set up a direct debit to pay your rent. But be aware that you could incur high charges if a payment goes out and you don't have funds in the account to cover it.

**Keep a note of what things costs**, like your weekly food shop, electricity bills and rent. This will help you plan your budget. Monthly payments can look quite good, but when you deduct all the things you need to pay for, the money soon goes.



**If debts are mounting up,** contact Money Matters or Citizens Advice and they will help you look at options to make things more manageable.

**Avoid pay day loans,** credit from doorstep lenders and shops doing weekly payments. These can be very expensive. If you need a new washing machine or other essential goods, your local Credit Union is a much cheaper option.

**Try to get online.** Remember there is free access to the internet and advice on courses at libraries and young people can use Universal Connections Centres.

**Keeping yourself healthy and well** can help you cope and get the best out of life even when things are difficult and money is tight. Check out [www.nhslanarkshire.org.uk/HealthyLiving](http://www.nhslanarkshire.org.uk/HealthyLiving)

**If you are feeling low,** Lanarkshire's Well Connected programme makes it easier to take part in activities and services that improve our wellbeing. Visit: [www.elament.org.uk/self-help-resources/well-connected-programme](http://www.elament.org.uk/self-help-resources/well-connected-programme)

**South Lanarkshire Works4U** has a number of schemes that can help you get back to work if you can. Even if you can get some part-time work, it will help. You can phone them on **0800 731 0444**.



# Useful contacts

## South Lanarkshire Council

**Housing enquiries** **0303 123 1012**

*(if you have concerns about your rent payments  
or housing circumstances)*

**Money Matters** **0303 123 1008**

*(for advice on benefits and debts)*

**Money Matters**

**Budget Advice Team** **01698 453156**

**Council tax and benefits** **0303 123 1011**

*(for changes to housing benefit)*

**Scottish Welfare Fund** **0303 123 1007**

*(for Crisis and Community Care Grants)*

**South Lanarkshire Works 4U** **0800 731 0444**

*(for support with returning to work)*

**Minicom service** **0303 123 1017**

*(if you are hard of hearing)*

## Community learning offices

*(advice on local computing and other courses)*

**Clydesdale and Larkhall** **01698 452399**

**Hamilton / Blantyre /**

**Uddingston area** **01698 452154**

**East Kilbride, Strathaven**

**and Stonehouse** **01357 528719**

**Cambuslang / Rutherglen area** **0141 630 2520**



## Citizens Advice

Hamilton	<b>01698 283477</b>
East Kilbride	<b>01355 263698</b>
Rutherglen/Cambuslang	<b>0141 646 3191</b>
Clydesdale	<b>01555 664301</b>

## Credit Unions in South Lanarkshire

**Scotwest** **0845 634 7634**

[www.scotwest.co.uk](http://www.scotwest.co.uk)

*(open to anyone who lives / works in West of Scotland)*

**BSL (Blantyre and South Lanarkshire)**

[www.blantyrecreditunion.org.uk](http://www.blantyrecreditunion.org.uk)

**Blantyre** **01698 711112**

**Larkhall** **01698 884156**

**Cambuslang Credit Union** **0141 641 0888**

[www.cambuslangcu.org.uk](http://www.cambuslangcu.org.uk)

**Hamilton Credit Union** **01698 282200**

**WHEB, Burnbank** **01698 307334**

[www.whebcreditunion.co.uk](http://www.whebcreditunion.co.uk)

**East Kilbride Credit Union** **01355 224771**

[www.ekcreditunion.co.uk](http://www.ekcreditunion.co.uk)

**Rutherglen Credit Union** **0141 647 4756**

[www.rcu.org.uk](http://www.rcu.org.uk)





[www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk/welfare-reform](http://www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk/welfare-reform)

If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us to discuss how we can best meet your needs.

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