



Nottinghamshire Welfare Rights Service

BENEFIT BRIEFING

APRIL 2008 – Issue 63



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**

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ABOUT BENEFIT BRIEFING

The intention of this Briefing is to raise reader's awareness of new issues relating to social security benefit entitlement, in an accessible format. Although every effort is made to ensure that the items in the Briefing are correct, it only gives what is intended to be general guidance. The information should not be treated as a complete and authoritative statement of the law. Items of interest to readers should be checked and further details sought before acting on the information.

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BENEFITS

This edition of the Briefing is largely devoted to covering the various changes that will be introduced from April 2008.

Changes to Benefits – April 2008

Local Housing Allowance

- This will replace housing benefit for tenants in privately rented properties
- The intention was to create a simpler, fairer system, provide a better service to clients with fewer barriers to work and make fraud more difficult to commit.
- It is intended to give individuals more choice and to ensure those on a low income can afford a decent home.
- Local Housing Allowance will be the maximum rent payable in a broad rental market area which will be set by a Rent Officer.
- Local Housing Allowance will be based on the number of bedrooms required. Claimants will be able to keep a maximum of £15.00 per week if their Local Housing Allowance exceeds their actual rent
- The Housing Allowance will always be paid to the tenant unless they are deemed to be 'vulnerable'.

Young People 16 – 17 years old

- **From 7th April 2008**, the personal allowance payable to young people aged 16-17 who qualify for either jobseekers allowance or income support will be equal to those in the 18-24 age bracket.
- This measure acknowledges that those under 18 have the same expenditure as those over 18.

Jobseekers Allowance/Income Support

From 25th February 2008 childless couples on Job Seekers Allowance, where one or both are born before 28 October 1947 (i.e. under 60's) who are both unemployed, will both be required to attend interviews, sign on as available for work and show that they are actively seeking work.

(This extends the age range from under 50's to under 60's)

From April 28th lone parents on Income Support who are responsible for, and living in, the same household as one or more children aged under five, and partners of claimants on Job Seekers Allowance for at least 26 weeks will be expected to attend work focused interviews at Jobcentre Plus.

Independent Living Fund

From April 2008, all new applicants for the Independent Living Fund must be receiving at least £320.00 per week in care funding from their Local Authority to qualify for up to £200.00 from Independent Living Fund.

This means that councils will have to meet the full cost of increases in care packages up to the threshold, which will place increased cash pressures on Local Authorities. Sue Bott at the National Centre for Independent Living is concerned that the increased eligibility criteria will mean many more people will go without any social care support at all.

Concessionary Bus Travel

From April 2008, holders of bus passes will be entitled to free off peak (9.30am – 11pm all weekend and bank holidays) local bus travel throughout England.

Employment Support Allowance

From 27th October 2008 incapacity benefit is to be replaced by employment support allowance.

Department for Work and Pensions Staffing Cuts

The department for work and pensions will be required to reduce overall staff numbers by 30,000 compared to 2004 figures.

Pension Service and Disability and Carers Service

From 1 April 2008 the Pension and Disability Carers Service are merging to create the Pensions, Disability and Carers Service.

Tax Credits

The Inland Revenue are to introduce a new ID authentication scheme to help reduce tax credit fraud and error.

Standard Interest Rate

With effect from 26/3/08, the rate of interest used to calculate housing costs for Income Support and Pension Credit will be 6.83%

BUDGET 2008 NEWS

- **Child poverty** – from April 2009, the child element of child tax credit will increase by £50 a year above inflation and child benefit in respect of an only or eldest child will increase to £20 a week.
- **Child benefit disregard in HB/CTB** – from October 2009, child benefit will be disregarded as income in the assessment of housing benefit and council tax benefit.
- **Appeals against Revenue decisions** – measures will be introduced, to complement the introduction of Ministry of Justice tribunal reforms, to streamline the way appeals against Revenue decisions are handled, in particular to provide a right to a Revenue review of disputed decisions.

- **Support for pensioners** – alongside the winter fuel payment, an additional one-off payment of £50 will be made to over 60's households, and of £100 to over 80's households in 2008/2009.

Budget Update

Following the 'U-turn' of 23/4/2008, the Chancellor announced that people aged 60 to 64 will be helped through the Winter Fuel Payments to compensate for the loss of the 10p tax rate. When processed any payment will be backdated to April 6th 2008. The Chancellor is also going to look into ways of helping those people on low pay and without children, perhaps through the Tax Credit system.

The Tribunals Service

The tribunal service office in Nottingham has closed. From the 1st April new appeals are being dealt with by Birmingham. Nottingham will retain existing appeals and are likely to transfer any outstanding appeals to Birmingham around September. The Tribunals Service will write to all parties when transferring cases from Nottingham to the Birmingham Office.

The Birmingham Tribunal Service will run with a clerk responsible for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, one for Child Support and all other appeals will be dealt with by one clerk each for Chesterfield, Nottingham and Lincoln.

COMMUNITY CARE NEWS

Residential and nursing care

- the upper capital limit increases to £22,250 (the amount of capital above which a resident is not eligible for local authority support)
- the lower capital limit increases to £13,500 (the amount below which a resident is not required to contribute to his/her accommodation from capital)
- savings credit disregard increases to £5.45 for a single person, and £8.15 for a couple
- the personal allowance increases to £21.45 a week
- nursing funding stays at £101.00 a week

NWRS NEWS

Office Relocation

From June 2008 the NWRS base in the north of the county will be moving from Warsop Town Hall to Ollerton Energy Village.

Staffing

From December 2007 Charlotte Robertson took up the new post of Welfare Rights Assistant with the Home Care team in the north of the county.

From April 2008 Thomas Abdy took up the post of Deputy Information/Admin Manager based at County Hall.

From May 2008 Jane Owen-Pam will take up the new post of Carers Welfare Rights Officer covering the county. She will be working in close conjunction with Nottinghamshire County Council's Carers Unit.

Take-up Campaign

From April 14th – 25th Nottinghamshire Welfare Rights Service have undertaken a campaign in partnership with the Pension Service, city welfare rights team and the city, borough and district Housing Benefit departments, to promote the take-up of benefits by older people, especially Council Tax Benefit and Attendance Allowance. The campaign included a number of radio broadcasts, press releases and publicity material including posters and leaflets, plus a special advice line for people to call that were requiring further advice. We have had a very positive response to the promotion and will report back in the summer with a full evaluation of the project.

If you would like more information about the campaign or a copy of our campaign publicity please call the Welfare Rights Service on 0115 9774018.

Publicity

Most of our leaflets have now been updated to include the April 08 benefit uprating, including our quick guide to benefit and Tax Credit Rates. **This year we have produced a new leaflet about Disability Living Allowance for children.** Our revised Publications lists will be circulated shortly.

If you would like to be added to our mailing list to receive a copy of our publications list please call the Welfare Rights Service on 0115 9774018.

