

Orkney Islands Council Housing Benefit Factsheet Removal of Spare Room Subsidy



Since April 2013 there have been new rules in Housing Benefit for working-age people that rent from Orkney Islands Council or Orkney Housing Association Limited. Pensioners aren't affected by this change.

What are the new rules?

Under the new rules you will receive Housing Benefit based on the number of people in your household and the size of your accommodation.

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 (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.

One spare bedroom is allowed for:

- 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 or reserve forces will not be counted as 'spare' if they're away and intend to return home. In addition, you may be entitled to additional bedrooms if you have recently suffered a bereavement in the household.

If you are claiming Universal Credit, the rules about how your benefit is calculated are different. Speak to your Coach at Jobcentre Plus to find out more.

What will change?

If you are affected then the Council will let you know. The Council can also offer advice and support. If you have extra bedrooms, it is possible that the amount of Housing Benefit you get to pay your rent could go down. If you are assessed as having more bedrooms than is necessary for your household you will be considered to be under-occupying your accommodation. Your eligible rent will be reduced by:

- 14% for one spare bedroom
- 25% for two or more spare bedrooms

If you are thinking of moving then it's important you consider the new rules before you renew or agree a new tenancy agreement.

Making up any shortfall

To meet any shortfall in your rent, there are a number of options you could consider:

- downsizing or 'home swapping' to a different sized property
- finding a job or increasing your hours can make you better off
- applying to your council for a Discretionary Housing Payment
- Visit the government's website at www.gov.uk/housing-benefit to find out more.

If you rent out a room

Additional income from renting out a room may affect your benefits. The Council or an advice organisation will be able to tell you more.

To find out more about being a resident landlord you can visit the government's website at: www.gov.uk/rent-room-in-your-home

Citizens Advice provides a useful online guide to renting out a room and whether your room will still be considered spare. Go to www.adviceguide.org.uk and search for 'taking in a lodger'.

To check a potential lodger's suitability you can ask for:

- a reference from their employer including information about pay
- references from previous landlords.

There are a range of additional checks available. If you decide to do these types of checks, you or your potential lodger may have to pay. Search online to find out more about:

- getting a reference from their bank or a credit reference
- checking if they have had any problems paying rent in the past or related financial issues
- checking for criminal convictions, visit www.gov.uk/browse/employing-people/recruiting-hiring/criminal-record-disclosure

Why has Housing Benefit changed?

Before the rules changed, the Housing Benefit system funded people to live in social housing with more bedrooms than they actually need. There is a shortage of social housing across the UK and this change helps to make the best use of our limited social housing. This change helps families who live in overcrowded accommodation to find a new home and helps reduce the number of people on waiting lists.

People who rent from private landlords already receive Housing Benefit in this way, and this makes it fair for everyone.

Where to go for more information about your options

To find out more about your options including financial help visit the government's website at: www.gov.uk/housing-benefit

If you want to know more about how starting work or increasing your hours could affect your housing benefit you can check the Council's factsheet on work at the following weblink: <http://www.orkney.gov.uk/Council/C/housing-benefit-under-occupancy.htm>

You can get access to thousands of job vacancies by using Universal Jobmatch at the following weblink: www.gov.uk/jobsearch

If you have a job in mind then you can check the impact by using the Benefits Adviser at the following weblink: www.gov.uk/benefits-adviser

If you are interested in moving house, or homeswapping with someone else, you can contact Orkney Islands Council or Orkney Housing Association Limited. You can also visit the government's website at: www.gov.uk/apply-swap-homes-council

You can find more about renting a room in your house by visiting the government's website at: www.gov.uk/rent-room-in-your-home

You may be able to get a Discretionary Housing Payment to make up all or some of the reduction – speak to the Council or visit the Council's website at: http://www.orkney.gov.uk/Service-Directory/D/Discretionary-Housing-Payments_2.htm

You can also get free, independent advice about housing matters from several organisations.

Contact the Council

You can contact the Benefits Section, Orkney Islands Council, Council Offices, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1NY

Telephone: 01856 873535 Extension 2116

email: benefits@orkney.gov.uk

Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau

The Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau offers free, independent, impartial and confidential advice.

Telephone: 01856 875266

Anchor Building, Bridge Street, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1HR

Shelter

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

Website: www.shelter.org.uk/scotland

Telephone: 0808 800 4444

Calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks.

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