

A guide to Local Housing Allowance



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Introduction

Local Housing Allowance is a new way of working out Housing Benefit for tenants in private rented accommodation. It is introduced on 7 April 2008.

The maximum Local Housing Allowance is not based on the property in which you live. It is based on:

- who lives with you
- which area you live in

The amount you receive will be affected by:

- how much money you have coming in
- what savings you have.

Local Housing Allowance

This gives tenants more choice in where they live and it's fairer too. This is because:

- with Local Housing Allowance you will be entitled to the same amount of benefit as people in the same circumstances as you
- you can find out how much Local Housing Allowance you can get before you rent a property
- you can decide how much of your benefit you want to spend on renting a property

- if you get Local Housing Allowance you will get your benefit paid to you. You should then pay the rent to your landlord
- if you are looking for a job you will know the maximum benefit you are likely to get when you find one
- you will find out about your maximum Local Housing Allowance quicker than Housing Benefit.

Paying your rent

Usually you will have your Local Housing Allowance paid directly to you. You should then pay the rent to your landlord. If you do not pay your rent you may be evicted from the property.

If the amount of allowance you are entitled to is more than your rent, you can keep up to £15 per week of the difference. Any extra money you get will not be taken into account for benefit purposes.

If you do not already have one, you may want to set up a bank account. That way you can pay the rent to your landlord by standing order. You can get advice about opening and running a bank account from any bank or building society.

If you have difficulty in opening a bank account, please ask us for the Financial Services Authority leaflet 'Just the facts about basic bank accounts'. You can also get advice from a welfare organisation such as Citizens Advice.

If you are worried about managing your money, ask us if we can help. In special cases we may be able to pay your rent to your landlord.

Working out your Local Housing Allowance

To work out how much you may get:

- work out how many bedrooms you are entitled to – this is explained below
- check the Local Housing Allowance rate for the area you want to live in at our First Contact points and/or our website www.barnet.gov.uk
- find out if you can get the full rate of Local Housing Allowance. Any money you have coming in or any savings you have may affect this. Ask your local authority for more details.

How to work out how many rooms you are entitled to

The number of people who live with you is used to work out how many bedrooms you are entitled to. We do not count other rooms such as a living room, kitchen or bathroom.

The number of bedrooms you are entitled to is then used to work out the maximum Local Housing Allowance you may be able to get.

You can use the following information as a guide to work out how many rooms you are entitled to.

You are entitled to one bedroom for:

- every adult couple (married or unmarried)
- any other adult aged 16 or over
- any two children aged under 10
- any two children of the same sex between the ages of 10 and 16
- any other child.

There are some additional rules if you do not live in a self-contained property. By a self-contained property we mean one where you have your own room plus your own:

- bathroom
- toilet
- kitchen (or facilities to cook with)

For example, this could be a one-bedroom flat.

What else might affect your Local Housing Allowance?

If you do not live in a self-contained property and share some facilities you may not get the standard rate of Local Housing Allowance. Shared facilities could be a room suitable for living in, kitchen, bathroom or toilet. If you share any of the facilities you may get the Local Housing Allowance shared room rate. This is for tenants who have a bedroom of their own but share any of the facilities.

Couple with no dependent children

If you are part of a couple who have no children living with you, you will be entitled to the rate for one bedroom if you rent a self-contained property. By couple we mean a man and a woman who are married or are living together as if they are married, two people of the same sex who are civil partners of each other and are members of the same household.

If you are part of a couple who have no children living with you and you choose to live in a property where any of the facilities are shared, you may only get the Local Housing Allowance shared room rate.

If you are 25 or over and live alone or are a care leaver who is under 22 you can get the one bedroom rate. For example, this could be a one-bedroom flat.

If you choose to live in a property where any of the facilities are shared, you may only get the Local Housing Allowance shared room rate.

Claimants aged under 25 years who live alone

If you are aged under 25 and live alone you can only get the Local Housing Allowance shared room rate.

Dependants and non-dependants

If you claim Local Housing Allowance you can only get it for yourself and your dependants. If you share a property with anyone else we will make a deduction for facilities you share with any non-dependants. The rules for this are the same as the rules for Housing Benefit.

Joint tenants

If you claim Local Housing Allowance you can only get it for yourself and your dependants. If you are a joint tenant we will make a deduction for any non-dependants and sub-tenants. By joint tenant we mean someone who has an agreement with the landlord to share the rent with other tenants.

Changes of circumstances

If you move to a new address or other circumstances change, you should tell us straightaway. You may need to make a fresh claim for Local Housing Allowance.

Where to get more information

If you want to know more about the changes and how they affect you:

visit the DWP website at www.dwp.gov.uk

visit the London Borough of Barnet Website at www.barnet.gov.uk