

Welfare Reform

Frequently Asked Questions

Note that Council Tax Support changes, the Social Sector Size Criteria and the Overall Benefit Cap are applicable to working-age customers; pensioners are not affected.

Council Tax Support (CTS)

Q1) Why have I received a Council Tax Bill for £200 - £400 when last year I didn't have to pay anything? I'm on benefits.

A1) Under the new Council Tax Support scheme nearly all Working-Age Customers will be required to pay at least 20% of their Council Tax Bill – this includes those in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance, Income support and Employment and Support Allowance, who would not have had to contribute previously.

Q2) Why am I getting less help / no help paying my Council Tax Bill compared to last year?

A2) If you have any other adults living with you, such as grown-up sons, daughters or elderly relatives, the amount they are expected to contribute towards your household bills has increased – therefore the amount of help Brent gives you has reduced.

Also, if you (and your partner if applicable) have more than £6,000 in total capital you are expected to be able to pay your bill without any assistance.

Q3) I can't afford to pay my Council Tax Bill because of the changes; what will happen if I don't pay my Council Tax?

A3) Brent Council is looking into a number of ways of helping those affected to manage their finances and spread the extra cost throughout the year. In particular, for most customers, the Council Tax payments have now been spread over twelve months rather than the standard ten.

Normal recovery action will be taken against those who don't pay their Council Tax. This means Brent will look to use the most appropriate action to recover any outstanding balance - including deductions from benefits or possible bailiff action depending on the size of the debt.

If you think you will struggle to pay your bill please contact Brent as soon as possible to discuss your options. Not paying is not an option.

Social Sector Size Criteria (Bedroom Tax)

Q4) Why has my Housing Benefit been reduced? I don't have any spare rooms.

A4) Even though all of your bedrooms may be occupied, new government rules mean that any two children aged under 10 and any two children of the same sex aged under 16 are now expected to share a bedroom.

This means you may now be classed as under-occupying your property, and as such the new government rules require that your Housing Benefit is reduced.

If you cannot afford to cover the shortfall you need to contact your landlord – they will try to find a more suitable property for you.

Q5) I need all of my bedrooms / I can't move house. What should I do?

A5) Unfortunately the new rules are applied regardless of any special requirements. However, Brent has some limited discretionary funding that may be awarded in some circumstances, for example when extra rooms are needed due to disabilities.

If you are not capable of moving house and / or sharing bedrooms as the new rules prescribe you should contact Brent to discuss your options.

Overall Benefit Cap

Q6) I've heard there is going to be an overall benefit cap. Will this affect me and when will it start from?

A6) The Overall Benefit Cap will not affect you if you are of Pensionable Age or if you, your partner, or any dependent children are disabled.

The Overall Benefit Cap can affect you if you are of Working-Age and work less than 16 hours p/w (as a single parent), 24 hours p/w (as part of a couple) or 30 hours per week as a (single person)

If you do not work, or work less than the prescribed hours, and currently receive more than £500 p/w (as part of a couple or as a single parent) or £350 p/w (as a single person) in total benefit payments, your Housing Benefit will be reduced to bring your combined benefit payments down to the capped amount.

The overall Benefit Cap will start being applied in Brent during summer 2013.

What help is available?

Q7) After paying my bills, the benefit changes mean I don't have enough money to cover my general living costs. What is Brent doing to help me?

A7) Brent recognises that the introduction of the Welfare Reforms necessitate that many customers will have to contribute more towards their rent and/or council tax.

From 1st April 2013 Brent is introducing a Local Welfare Assistance scheme which aims to support vulnerable people in the community and ease exceptional pressure on families at difficult times. Although the funding for this scheme is limited you may be entitled to some additional help.

Brent is also administering a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme. One of the objectives of the DHP scheme is to support Housing Benefit customers adversely affected by the welfare reforms. Again funding for this scheme is limited, and will be directed at the most vulnerable people or those most affected by the welfare reforms, but support will include some help to cover rental shortfalls for limited periods, or one-off awards to assist with specific costs encountered by Benefit claimants.

We can also put you in contact with other organisations that can help you find work, offer money and budgeting advice and help you gain new skills to get you ready for work.

Q8) Where can I obtain help to get into work?

A8) Your local Job Centre Plus is the best place to get help in finding work. There are four Job Centres in Brent (Harlesden, Wembley, Kilburn and Neasden), all of which have trained job-advisors that will assist you in finding suitable work.

Other Welfare Reforms

Q9) Will I have to claim Universal Credit?

A3) If you are already in receipt of benefits, and continue to receive them, you will automatically be transferred onto Universal Credit. However, the migration process for existing benefit claimants will not start until mid 2014 at the earliest and will not be completed until 2017.

If you make a brand new claim for benefit after October 2013 you may be required to apply for Universal Credit. Full details of how this works will be available nearer the time.

Q10) What is a Personal Independence Payment?

Personal Independent Payments (or PIP's) is a new benefit that will replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for Working-Age customers as follows:

- From June 2013 all brand new claims will be for PIP's rather than DLA.
- From October 2013 any existing DLA recipient that has a change in their health condition, or who reaches the end of their DLA award, will be invited to claim PIP's rather than DLA.
- From 2015 customers still in receipt of DLA will start to be contacted by the DWP in order to be reassessed for PIP's before their DLA award is ended.

Useful links and contact numbers

Brent Benefits Service	0208 937 1800
Brent Council Tax Support hotline	0208 937 1610
Council Tax (payment)	0208 937 1790

Website:	www.brent.gov.uk/benefitcuts
Email:	benefitcuts@brent.gov.uk
Email:	countiltaxsupport@brent.gov.uk

Jobcentre Plus	0845 604 3719
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Brent in2 work	0208 903 6825	www.brent.gov.uk/brentin2work
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