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1.0 Benefit Cap Introduction and Context

The Benefit Cap was first introduced nationally in 2013 and in Brent during August 2013 and refers to the maximum amount of specified Government welfare benefits that can be received by a household on a weekly basis unless exempt. It equated to £500 per week for working age couples, couples with children and single parents and £350 per week for single persons. These limits were the same for Local Authority areas both inside and outside of London. Where a household receives more in weekly benefits than the current cap permits, their Housing Benefit is reduced by the excess.

The above limits reduce from 7th November 2016 to £442.31 per week for working age couples, couples with children and single parents and £296.35 per week for single persons resident in the London area. Unlike at present, there will be a separate Benefit Cap limit for residents of properties outside of the London area. The Benefit Cap limit for these areas will be £384.62 per week for couples, couples with children and single parents and £257.69 for single persons.

Residents already subject to the benefit cap immediately prior to the 7th November 2016, will experience a further reduction in their Housing Benefit entitlement from 7th November 2016. Residents that will be subject to the benefit cap for the first time due to the reduced limits, will experience a reduction in their Housing Benefit entitlement during January 2017. The precise date of the change will be notified to Brent Council by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in due course but has currently been indicated as being 23rd January 2017 or a week either side of that date.

Exemptions from the benefit cap will apply if the Housing Benefit claimant or their partner receive any of the following:

- Attendance allowance
- Disability living allowance
- Personal independence payment
- Employment and support allowance (support component)
- Industrial injuries benefits
- War widow or war widower’s pension
- Guardian’s Allowance and Carer’s Allowance

Additionally, an exemption from the benefit cap will apply if:

- The Housing Benefit claimant qualifies for Working Tax Credit because they work for at least 16 hours per week if they are a single parent, 24 hours per week between them if they are a couple with one of them working at least 16 hours per week or 30 hours if they are a single person.
- They are responsible for a child or young person getting Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, or an Armed Forces Injuries Payment

The cap will also not apply for a period of 39 weeks if the claimant or their partner, if appropriate, has ceased paid work that lasted for at least 50 of the 52 weeks
immediately prior to their leaving and in the final week, they worked at least 16 hours.

The Benefit Cap applies solely to working age claimants and therefore persons of pension credit age are exempt provided that both members of a couple are of pension credit age.

There are approximately 630 residents currently affected by the existing Benefit Cap within the Brent Council area. This is anticipated to increase to approximately 1,800 following full implementation of the changes to the cap limits.

Approximately 69% of the residents affected by the changes are in privately rented accommodation with a further 21% renting from Registered Social Landlords (i.e. RSL’s). A further 7% of households affected are resident in temporary accommodation and 2% rent their homes from Brent Housing Partnership.

The greatest proportion of Housing Benefit claimants affected by the benefit cap changes are in the age range of 25 to 54 (i.e. 84%).

Of the households affected, 808 (43%) are single persons, 753 (40%) are single parents, 3 (0%) are couples with no children and 314 (17%) are couples with children.

The options most likely to be available to a resident affected by the Benefit Cap are as follows:

- Find work to qualify for Working Tax Credit;
- Make up any shortfall in rent from other money received;
- Find somewhere more affordable to live or negotiate a rent reduction with their landlord;
- Apply for one of the benefits that will exempt them from the cap;
- Apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (may be awarded for a short period of time only).

2.0 Brent Council Web Site

The Brent Council website (www.brent.gov.uk/benefitchanges) includes details of the changes being made to the overall benefit cap from November 2016 including frequently asked questions FAQ’s. These will be maintained and updated in response to enquiries and feedback received.

As an alternative, the ‘rolling banner’ (please see Image 1 below) that may be presented at the top of the main Brent Council web page (www.brent.gov.uk) permits direct access to the Benefit Cap web pages by clicking on it.
There is also a ‘pop-up’ screen (please see Image 2 below) that appears whenever access is sought to any of the following web pages relating to “My Account” (i.e. the customer portal permitting access by a resident to their Council Tax and Housing Benefit details):

- https://www.brent.gov.uk/my-account/
- https://myaccount.brent.gov.uk/Web/IL1_Login.aspx
- https://myaccount.brent.gov.uk/Web/PublicPages/IR1_Register.aspx

This requires the ‘pop-up’ screen either to be closed or by clicking on “find out more”, will permit direct access to the benefit cap web pages.

Image 1 – Rolling Banner
Changes to Housing Benefit

Are you aware of important changes that may affect your Housing Benefit?

Find out more

The following web link will take you directly to the Benefits web page as shown in Image 3 below:

www.brent.gov.uk/benefitchanges

Image 3 – Brent Council Benefits Web Pages
If the tile entitled “Important Benefit Changes” and identified by the arrow is clicked, Image 4 – Important Benefit Changes shown below is presented that has tabs for the “Benefit Cap” and “Benefit Cap questions and answers” both of which include details about the revised cap.

In the case of the Benefit Cap questions and answers, by clicking on the relevant question within that tab, the answer will then be presented.

**Image 4 – Important Benefit Changes**

In the tab entitled “Popular Benefit Questions”, accessible from the web page [www.brent.gov.uk/benefits](http://www.brent.gov.uk/benefits) as shown by the arrow in Image 5 below, (Benefits Questions and Answers), the following additional question has been added in the event that access to the benefit cap questions are sought via this route:

“Where can I find out about the Overall Benefit Cap?”

A link is provided in the answer that will take the user to the web page where they can access the Benefit Cap tab and Benefit Cap questions and answers tab. Additionally, the Overall Benefit Cap Questions and Answers can be accessed directly from the web page [www.brent.gov.uk/benefitchanges](http://www.brent.gov.uk/benefitchanges).
3.0 Brent Council Video Productions

Two short video productions concerning the benefit cap are available from the Brent Council web page (www.brent.gov.uk/benefitchanges) and additionally may be accessed from the links below. These productions can be run in offices and reception areas as appropriate. The first production is being displayed in all Life Channel subscribing GP surgeries across the Borough between August and November 2016.

Life Channel Production about Benefit Cap Changes

Brent Council Video Production for Benefit Cap Changes

4.0 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's)

DHP's will continue to be available to provide short term financial assistance with Housing costs for Housing Benefit and Universal Credit claimants including those affected by the benefit cap. There is a total budget available of £2.9M for 2016/17 for which budgetary allocations have been made as shown in Table 1 – DHP Budgeted Allocations for 2016/17 below.
A DHP may be considered for a claimant in receipt of either Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. There is no specified duration for an award although any award made will only be for a short term. Brent Council operates a DHP policy that is applied to applications although each case is ultimately considered on its own merits. The matters that must be considered when determining whether to award a DHP, can be found in the DHP Policy.

The Brent Council Housing Benefit application form has been updated to include provision for it to also be treated as an application for a DHP where appropriate.

You can make an application for a DHP on this section of our website.

5.0 Calculating Housing Benefit Entitlement and Budgeting

A Benefit calculator is available and can be accessed via the Brent Council website at www.brent.gov.uk/benefitchanges that enables residents, their advisors and other stakeholders to calculate potential entitlement to Housing Benefit (HB), Council Tax Support (CTS) and Universal Credit (UC). This is also available from the links at www.brent.gov.uk/benefits to Housing Benefit Information, Council Tax Support Information, Important Benefit Changes and ‘My Account’ customer portal.

The calculator permits “better off” calculations to be performed based upon details submitted that shows how much better-off someone might be through obtaining work, increasing their hours or increasing their earnings. The calculator includes the provisions of the benefit cap within any calculations made.

The results of a calculation can be saved in a PDF file format, emailed or printed as a web page. Incomplete details can also be saved in the event that further access may be required to them later on. Where this applies, a password will need to be given and a unique ID will be generated for access to the saved details. Image 6 – Benefits Calculator shown below provides a screen shot of the calculator. A budgeting tool has also been purchased as part of the package and is currently being developed and will also be available via the Brent Council website in due course. We will publicise the availability of this once it is ready for use.

Image 6 – Benefits Calculator
There is also access to a **budgeting tool** that enables you to apply details of your income and outgoings and then view your balance in both number terms and pie chart format. There are also helpful links to other organisation websites that provide information and advice that may assist you with reducing your household costs. Your budget details may also be printed, saved or emailed as required.

6.0 **Benefit Cap Changes Presentation**

A presentation that may be used as a training / communication tool within your organisation can be accessed via [Appendix 1](#) to this toolkit.

7.0 **DWP Communications to Residents Affected by the Cap**

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) issued initial notices to residents affected by the changes to the cap in the autumn between the 24th May and 10th June 2016. The content of those letters issued can be accessed via [Appendix 1](#) to this toolkit.
There were two separate letters issued dependent upon whether the claimant was receiving Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. In the case of Universal Credit, Brent Council does not have details of those claimants likely to be affected as the cap will be applied directly by Job Centre Plus (JCP) and as Housing Benefit is not payable, there is no current provision for information sharing in such cases.

Consequently, any enquiries concerning the Benefit Cap applied for Universal Credit cases, will need to be made directly to Job Centre Plus.

A second round of DWP communications was issued to residents affected by the cap between 19th September 2016 and 30th September 2016.

8.0 Brent Communications to Residents Affected by the Cap

Brent Council issued regular communications to Housing Benefit claimants affected by the cap between July and the implementation date.

These were sent via email, text or letter dependent upon the claimant’s preferred choice of contact. The content of the letter issued to residents can be accessed via Appendix 1 to this toolkit.

Email messages issued referred the resident affected by the changes to the Brent Council web site with links to child care arrangements, housing options and employment, skills and training. Text messages issued referred the resident to the Brent Council webpage www.brent.gov.uk/benefitchanges for further information and advice.

In addition to the direct communications outlined above, publicity and communications concerning the benefit cap changes either have or are being promoted via the following means:

- **Social Media** – including Twitter and Facebook;
- **Brent Council’s internal social media** – ‘Yammer’ and weekly publication ‘Get Connected’
- **Brent Connects Meetings** – Meetings held for residents to have their say on local community matters in Harlesden, Kilburn, Kingsbury and Kenton, Wembley and Willesden;
- **BHP’s Partnership News** – a Brent Housing Partnership circulation issued to all its tenants;
- **The Brent Magazine** – a Brent Council circulation issued to all households within the Borough on a quarterly basis and which is also available via the Brent Council website;
- **YourBrent** – a Brent Council electronic newsletter emailed to over 80,000 residents;
- **Life Channel** – display screens at subscribing GP surgeries within the Borough;
- **Press Releases**.
- **Schools** - Children and safeguarding board on head teachers' bulletin and head teachers forum to provide information and advice about changes to the cap;
- **Mental Health Service** - Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL) Park Royal Centre for mental Health;

Presentations and attendance at events in relation to the benefit cap may be arranged on request.

### 9.0 Benefit Cap Data Sharing – Registered Social Landlords (RSL’s)

Brent Council provides relevant Benefit details to an RSL for any of their tenants that are or may be affected by the benefit cap. This is to enable support and advice to be given to any residents that may be affected by the changes.

If you are an RSL that wishes to share Housing Benefit data with Brent Council for this purpose, you will need to sign a data sharing agreement with the Council prior to the secure transfer of data. Brent Council has contacted many of the RSL’s known to have properties within the Borough that are occupied by tenants that may be affected by the benefit cap changes to make them aware of this requirement.

To obtain the agreement, please email your request for the data sharing agreement to benefitchanges@brent.gov.uk. The relevant documents will then be emailed to you for completion within two working days of the request. You will need to sign two copies of the agreement and return these by post to the following address:

Brent Customer Services, Brent Council, Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley HA9 0FJ.

Brent Council will then sign both copies received and return one to you and retain the other one. Once this has been achieved, data will then be sent securely using the Egress secure email system.

The information that may be given to an RSL under the agreement shall consist of the following:

- Claimant name
- Claimant Address including postcode
- Claim Reference
- Landlord Reference
- Amount of Housing Benefit Award
- Amount of shortfall in Benefit arising from the cap

The agreement also includes provision for an RSL to provide details to Brent Council concerning the number of bedrooms in a tenant’s property where the bedroom tax may apply.

Changes have been made to the Brent Council website “privacy policy”, data sharing provisions and declaration for Benefit claims to facilitate provision of the above.
The organisations and RSL’s for which data sharing arrangements have currently been agreed are as follows:

- Brent Housing Partnership (BHP);
- Octavia Housing;
- Shepherds Bush Housing Association Limited;
- ASRA Housing Association Limited;
- Origin Housing Association;
- Sanctuary Housing Association;
- Genesis Housing Association Ltd;
- Odu-dua Housing Association Ltd;
- Arhag Housing Association Ltd;
- London and Quadrant Housing Trust;
- Family Mosaic Housing;
- Hyde Housing Association Ltd;
- Metropolitan Housing Trust Ltd;
- Innisfree Housing Association Ltd;
- Peabody Trust;
- Catalyst Housing Ltd;
- Network Homes Ltd;
- Southern Housing Group Ltd.

10.0 Benefit Cap Data Sharing – Private Landlords

There is no legal provision for the sharing of Housing Benefit information between private tenants and their landlords for benefit cap purposes. However, where a Housing Benefit claimant has requested this by submitting a signed consent form subject to appropriate conditions, Brent Council will provide the data shown below:

- Name and address of Housing Benefit claimant (“the Tenant”);
- Claim reference number;
- Amount of existing Housing Benefit entitlement;
- Amount of reduction in Housing Benefit as a consequence of the Benefit Cap.

The conditions attached to the application of the consent form are as follows:

- The consent form shall be applicable solely for the purposes of the Overall Benefit Cap where the Housing Benefit claimant is to be subject to a reduction in their Housing Benefit as a consequence and shall cease to have effect if the Benefit Cap no longer applies to the claimant.

- The Housing Benefit claimant may request the cancellation of the consent given at any time by giving written notice to Brent Council.

- The landlord agrees to use the information provided solely for the purposes of assisting the Housing Benefit claimant with the provision of support and advice to deal with the impact of the benefit cap.
The signed consent form which can be found via Appendix 1 to this toolkit, must be completed and signed by both the landlord and their tenant and returned by post to the address below:

Brent Customer Services, Brent Council, Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley HA9 0FJ.

Upon receipt of the fully completed consent form, the relevant data above will be sent to the landlord either via the Egress secure email system or in writing as appropriate.

11.0 Benefit Cap Data Sharing – Brent Housing Partnership (BHP)

Brent Council will provide relevant Benefit details to Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) regarding any of its tenants that are or may be affected by the benefit cap under the terms of its data sharing agreement with BHP for that purpose. This is to enable any appropriate support and advice to be given to residents that may be affected by the changes.

The information that may be given to BHP under the data sharing agreement shall consist of the following:

- Claimant name
- Claimant Address including postcode
- Claim Reference
- Landlord Reference
- Amount of Housing Benefit Award
- Amount of shortfall in Benefit arising from the cap

Changes have been made to the Brent Council website “privacy policy”, data sharing provisions and declaration for Benefit claims to facilitate achievement of the above.

BHP will be directly contacting its tenants affected by the changes and may make referrals to Brent Start and Brent Works for residents that wish to find employment or undertake courses that may improve their prospects of employment. Tenants may also contact BHP directly via the BHP Financial Inclusion Team on telephone number 020 8937 2790 for advice and assistance.

Additionally, BHP offers a volunteering programme for its tenants that is typically three months in duration and for which further details can be found on the BHP website at:

BHP application for volunteers

Whilst such a programme will not entitle a resident to Working Tax Credit and hence an exemption from the benefit cap, if they can demonstrate that the programme may lead to an offer of employment or improve their employment prospects, they may be eligible for a Discretionary Housing Payment.
BHP also has arrangements in place with Citizens Advice Brent (CAB) for making referrals for residents needing budgeting advice. Where a BHP tenant is affected by the benefit cap, they may be referred to CAB under this arrangement.

Where the resident appears to be known to another relevant Council service such as Children and Families for example, liaison with the appropriate service will be arranged to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is applied.

The Brent Housing Partnership website has also been updated to include details about the benefit cap changes and to provide a link to the Brent Council website for the changes.

12.0 Benefit Cap Data Sharing – Temporary Accommodation

Brent Council will provide relevant Benefit details to its Housing Service responsible for the provision of Temporary Accommodation regarding any of its tenants that are or may be affected by the benefit cap. This is to enable any appropriate support and advice to be given to residents that may be affected by the changes.

The information that may be given to the Temporary Accommodation Team shall consist of the following:

- Claimant name
- Claimant Address including postcode
- Claim Reference
- Amount of Housing Benefit Award
- Amount of shortfall in Benefit arising from the cap

Changes have been made to the Brent Council website “privacy policy”, data sharing provisions and declaration for Benefit claims to facilitate achievement of the above.

The Temporary Accommodation team will be directly contacting its tenants affected by the changes and may make referrals to Brent Start and Brent Works for residents that wish to find employment or undertake courses that may improve their prospects of employment and provide assistance in relocating to more affordable areas where appropriate.

Where the resident appears to be known to another relevant Council service such as Children and Families for example, liaison with the appropriate service will be undertaken to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is applied.

13.0 Benefit Cap Data Sharing – Children and Families

Residents affected by the benefit cap changes that are known to the Children and Families team will be referred to their practitioner who will facilitate the provision of direct job centre support and / or referral to Reed caseworkers, as appropriate.
Additionally, the Brent Council Early Help service provides a range of assistance for families with children aged 0 to 18 years old (up to 19 if the young person has a disability or additional needs).

The service includes the following:

- **Early Support & Portage Team** – they work with families who have a child under five with additional needs or disabilities.
- **Family Solutions Team** – supports families with children aged 0 to 18 years old (up to 19 for young people with disabilities) on a range of issues including support to access employment, every day parenting challenges, helping parents managing their children’s behaviour and much more. A [leaflet](#) giving more details about this option is also available.

Key workers from each of these teams work in partnership with families to provide the right support at the right time, so that any concerns or issues may be dealt with at an early stage and prevented from getting more serious.

Once the support required has been determined, the key workers plan a package of support for the family and agree how long they will work together with the family and may involve other organisations. Any support package is put in place only with the consent of the family concerned.

Children’s Centres also offer the opportunity for a parent and child to benefit from a wide range of services such as:

- Early Education and Family Support;
- Parental advice;
- Helping a child’s development and behaviour.

If a resident is seeking to return to work, or go on a training course, they will be able to obtain information and advice from the centre. Additionally, if they want advice and support regarding benefits, housing or employment they can ask for an appointment with Citizens Advice Brent (CAB) at the centre. Baby clinics, healthy eating sessions and fathers groups are also run from Children’s Centres.

The location of centres within the Brent Council area can be found via the link below:

[Location of Children’s Centres](#)

Further details of childcare options and potential sources of funding for these can be found via the following link:

[Children and Families Services and Potential Sources of Funding](#)

Assistance in finding a childminder and paying for childcare can be found via the following two links respectively:

[Finding a childminder](#)
Paying for childcare

Where the resident appears to be known to another relevant Council service such as Brent Housing Partnership tenant or Adult Social Care Children for example, liaison with the appropriate service will be undertaken to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is applied.

14.0 Vulnerable Persons

Briefings and information about the benefit cap changes have and will continue to be provided to organisations and their representatives who provide support and assistance to vulnerable persons. Additionally, short video productions about the changes can be downloaded and displayed in reception areas for clients to view via the links below:

- Life Channel Production about Benefit Cap Changes
- Brent Council Video Production for Benefit Cap Changes

Brent Council Mental Health Caseworkers, Substance Misuse Sector Managers and their teams and Brent Council employees providing support to Care Leavers, have been briefed about the changes and will assist clients wherever reasonably practicable by for example assisting with applications for exemptions, finding employment through referrals to Job Centre Plus, Brent Start and Brent Works and applying for Discretionary Housing Payments.

Additionally, Remploy offers specialist employment support for Brent residents with mental health conditions, who are ready to return to work for a minimum of eight hours, as well as helping people to prepare for, find and stay in employment. Remploy contact information can be found on the Brent Council website.

Whilst such a programme will not entitle a resident to Working Tax Credit and hence an exemption from the benefit cap, if the resident can demonstrate that the programme may lead to an offer of employment or improve their employment prospects, it may improve their eligibility prospects for a Discretionary Housing Payment.

The Brent Council DHP policy and an application form can be obtained via the Brent Council website at www.brent.gov.uk/benefitchanges.

Liaison with other services and organisations that may be able to provide support, assistance and advice will also be provided to mitigate against the effects of the changes as far as reasonably practicable.

Where the resident appears to be known to another relevant Council service such as Brent Housing Partnership or Children and Families for example, liaison with the appropriate service will be undertaken to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is applied.

15.0 Benefit Cap Data Sharing – Brent Council Adult Social Care
Brent Council Adult Social Care supports:

- people with physical disabilities;
- people with learning disabilities;
- older people;
- people with mental health needs;
- young people with a disability aged 14-25 in their transitional journey into adulthood;
- people caring for others;
- people who need help to keep living at home;
- people at risk of harm;
- anyone who just wants information and advice about social and community support;
- people being discharged from hospital.

Residents affected by the benefit cap changes that are already known to the Adult Social Care service and subject to a current care package will be contacted directly by their caseworker who will provide support, information and advice to the resident regarding their options.

This may include for example assisting with making an application for an exemption or making a referral where appropriate to Brent Start, Brent Works, Job Centre Plus or Housing Options. Where the resident appears to be known to another relevant Council service such as Brent Housing Partnership tenant or Children and Families for example, liaison with the appropriate service will be undertaken to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is applied.

If you or someone you provide care for is in receipt of Adult Social Care services, and you are concerned about the effect of the Benefit Cap on your finances and / or your ability to provide care, please phone 020 8937 4300 to discuss this if you have not previously been contacted by Brent Council.

16.0 The Living Room – St Raphael's Estate, Stonebridge

Every resident of the St. Raphael's estate in Stonebridge now has the opportunity to access employment skills, training and advice right on their doorstep with the launch of an exciting new employment service called 'The Living Room' based at The Old Boiler House just off Besant Way. Whether facing unemployment, debt problems, housing issues, mental health issues or benefits complications; the Living Room will help residents to access the right support.

The scheme has been launched in partnership between Brent Council, the West London Alliance and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) with the aim of supporting residents into work by providing helpful advice and training on the estate.

The Living Room comprises a multi-agency approach aimed at providing locally focussed holistic support to the residents of St. Raphael's Estate with the aim of moving them into sustainable work. The team comprises staff from DWP Job Centre, Brent Housing Partnership (BHP), Brent Council, Help Somalia
Foundation and Citizen’s Advice Brent. The centre is open Monday to Friday, from 9.00am to 5.00pm.

Brent Council employees located at the Living Room will make direct contact with residents affected by the Benefit Cap in the postcode areas NW10 0**, NW10 8** and NW10 9** to offer any appropriate support and advice.

17.0 Brent Start Adult Education – Courses

Brent Start is an adult education service for anyone who wants to learn new skills, get into employment, find a better job or improve themselves.

The Brent Start course programme for 2016/17 incorporates a specific course for residents affected, or likely to be affected by the benefit cap. “Take control of your money and manage the Benefit Cap” is a five week course with each session being of two hours in duration. A resident may apply for enrolment on the course directly or may be referred by Brent Council or a partner. There are also other relevant courses that may also be of interest to residents including for example “Get online for Universal Credit” and “Start up your own small business”.

Applications for enrolment can be made via any of the following means:

- In person at one of the Brent Start centres with the course fee and / or proof of eligibility for a reduction where applicable;
- By calling 020 8937 3950 and having credit / debit card details ready if a fee applies to the course.

An initial assessment will then be undertaken prior to enrolment to determine course suitability.

The course will be held at the following venues for the dates and times shown:
- Carlton Centre 08/11/16 - 06/12/16 Tue 1-3pm
- Stonebridge 08/11/16 - 06/12/16 Tue 3-5pm
- Brent Works 09/11/16 - 07/12/16 Wed 1-3pm
- Carlton Centre 28/02/17 - 28/03/17 Tue 1-3pm
- Stonebridge 28/02/17 - 28/03/17 Tue 3-5pm
- Brent Works 01/03/17 - 29/03/17 Wed 1-3pm
- Brent Works 26/04/17 - 24/05/17 Wed 1-3pm
- Stonebridge 04/04/17 - 02/05/17 Tue 3-5pm

Fees for the 5 week course are as follows:

**Fee A = £30**
Full, non-concessionary fee.

**Fee B = £15**
Fee for learners who are working or retired and on means tested benefits other than Job Seeker’s Allowance or Employment Support Allowance such as Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, Income Support or Pension Credit.
Fee C = £0
Fee for learners on Job Seeker’s Allowance or Employment Support Allowance (Work Related Activity Group) or Universal Credit

or

Unemployed or earning less than £330 per month and on a means tested benefit and sign a Declaration of Intention to enter employment.

There is a small hardship fund available that may be used to assist learners on low incomes. Please ask a member of the customer services team at the Brent Start reception for more information about this option.

Children are not permitted to accompany learners in the classroom or to be left unattended in any part of the building whilst a learner attends a course. However, there are a range of childcare options available across the borough to support parents that wish to study at a Brent Start centre. Please speak to our customer service team at the Brent Start reception or visit the Children and Family Support section of the Brent website for further details concerning children and family support and childcare.

Where a Housing Benefit claimant affected by the Benefit Cap changes undertakes a course that will either improve their employment prospects or may lead to an offer of employment, they will be eligible to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) that may assist with their Housing costs in the short term. An application form for this purpose and the Brent Council policy for DHP’s is included in Section 4 – Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP’s) and is also available via the Brent Council website at www.brent.gov.uk/benefitchanges.

Full details of the Course Programme 2016/17 including course fees and means of payment are available for downloading.

Referrals will be made wherever appropriate to Brent Start for any residents affected by the Benefit Cap changes where they have completed a Benefit Changes Health Check questionnaire in the Customer Service Centre.

18.0 Brent Works
Brent Works is a recruitment service that matches Brent businesses with residents. If a Brent resident wishes to find a job, they may be able to do this by applying for advertised vacancies via Brent Works. If the resident is registered with Jobcentre Plus, the Work Programme or linked to an employment service in Brent, they should speak to their adviser about the latest opportunities available via Brent Works. Their adviser will send Brent Works their application and help them prepare.
Brent Works is linked closely with Brent Start and the College of North West London, to deliver bespoke training courses for candidates that meet the needs of the employer. In return, Brent Works expects guaranteed interviews for all its shortlisted candidates and where possible a commitment to offering work experience, traineeships and apprenticeship opportunities for Brent residents. In partnership with the employer and Brent Start, a mentoring programme is delivered that aims to equip all candidates with the skills and means to progress and sustain meaningful employment whilst in work.

All opportunities are shared with a network of key employment service providers. If the resident is not registered with a Brent Works partner, they can still view current vacancies advertised via the Brent Works web page. For further help and advice please visit the Brent Works web pages. Please also visit the Brent Works service directory list of partners who can assist with finding employment or providing support.

The Customer Service Centre and other Brent Council services may make referrals to Brent Works for residents affected by the benefit cap changes where the resident has expressed a willingness to obtain employment and requires assistance in doing so.

Where a Housing Benefit claimant affected by the Benefit Cap changes undertakes a course that will either improve their employment prospects or may lead to an offer of employment, they will be eligible to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) that may assist with their Housing costs in the short term. An application form for this purpose and the Brent Council policy for DHP’s is shown in Section 4 – Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP’s) and is also available via the Brent Council website at www.brent.gov.uk/benefitchanges.

19.0 **Customer Service Centre (CSC)**

The CSC at Brent Civic Centre operates a triage service with referrals then being made as appropriate to the relevant service / personnel for addressing the specific enquiry. To assist with benefit cap enquiries and referrals that may arise as a consequence, there are currently two Job Centre Plus representatives co-located in the CSC to supplement the existing arrangements that we have in place with Citizens Advice Brent (CAB) who are also co-located in the CSC. JCP representatives will be available on site for a period of up to six months whilst the benefit cap changes are implemented.

There is also a Housing Service representative and Employment, Skills and Training representatives that are located in the CSC and for which referrals will be made for any residents that visit the CSC as appropriate.

Visitors to the CSC that are of working age and in receipt of Housing Benefit will have a Benefit Changes Health Check questionnaire completed by the interviewing officer. The questions are arranged in an order to minimise the amount of time needed to complete them. Responses will then be used to consider potential support and assistance and to make any appropriate referrals.
to Brent Start, Brent Works, Housing Options, etc. By obtaining and acting on information at an early stage, it is anticipated that a timely intervention may assist in terms of mitigating against the effects of some of the key changes proposed. The format of the questionnaire can be found via Appendix 1 to this toolkit.

20.0 Volunteering

Volunteering Brent is the service provided by the charity Groundwork London on behalf of Brent Council that aims to ‘inspire and support volunteering’ across the borough. Volunteering Brent may be contacted either by e-mail on enquiry@volunteeringbrent.org.uk or by phone on 0300 365 9920, Monday - Friday from 10am - 4pm.

Whilst a volunteer will not generally be entitled to Working Tax Credit and hence an exemption from the benefit cap, if they can demonstrate that it may lead to an offer of employment or improve their employment prospects, they may be eligible for a Discretionary Housing Payment.

21.0 Job Brokerage

Brent Works, the Council’s job brokerage team, will provide support for anyone affected by the Overall Benefit Cap who is seeking employment. Please contact Brent Customer Services by phone on 020 8937 1800 or email customer.services@brent.gov.uk if you wish to find out more about the employment support on offer.

22.0 SUFRA

Sufra NW London is a Community Food Bank and Kitchen, based in the London Borough of Brent, which aims to support residents and families suffering food poverty in the local area.

Welfare surgeries are available for a limited number of local residents who have a food bank voucher or are participating in another programme or activity within Sufra NW London. Food bank vouchers are issued by the Brent Council Welfare Team where qualifying conditions are met and additional support may comprise any of the following:

- Assistance with completing CVs and job applications;
- Assistance with online benefit forms;
- Guidance on matters concerning benefits, housing or employment.

Further information about Sufra NW London and the services they offer is available on their website.

23.0 Translation Services – General

Brent Council has a contract with Pearl Linguistics for which interpreter services can be arranged.

24.0 Translation Services – Website
The Brent Council website has ‘BrowseAloud’ software which adds speech, reading and translation support to the website thereby assisting people with dyslexia, lower levels of literacy, mild visual impairments and those with English as a second language to access information about local services more easily.

The ‘BrowseAloud’ icon shown below is present on each council web page and when it is clicked it displays simple translation options.

Additionally, customers with a hearing impairment can access the sign video BSL live service which is available by selecting “Contact us” from the Brent Council website as shown by the arrow in Image 7 BSL Sign Video below.

It is estimated that almost 150 languages are spoken in Brent and around 20 per cent of local households have no-one who speaks English as their first language.

To assist with access to information through the provision of translation arrangements, the Brent Council website has a translate option that can be used. It is accessed by selecting the “translate” option at the top right hand side of the relevant web page as indicated in Image 8 – Web Page Translate Option shown below.
25.0 Alternative Formats of the Toolkit

If this toolkit is required in an alternative format to that available via the Brent Council website (e.g. braille), please contact Brent Customer Services by phone on 020 8937 1800 or email customer.services@brent.gov.uk with details. Alternatively, please visit our customer services centre at Brent Civic Centre.

26.0 Requests and Suggestions for Changes

If questions or enquiries regarding the benefits cap are not currently addressed within either this toolkit or on the Brent Council website, or if there is any other relevant information that you believe should be available to residents or their advisers regarding the Benefits Cap, please let us know by email on benefitchanges@brent.gov.uk.

27.0 Measuring the Effectiveness of the Toolkit
A range of measures have been identified from which the overall effectiveness of the approaches set out in this toolkit may be monitored and evaluated. These are anticipated in a number of cases to require a co-ordinated approach with a range of stakeholders and partners to be able to effectively collate and review and it is proposed that they be routinely collated and communicated via the Welfare Reform Network Partners Meeting and via the Benefit Cap web pages.

- Number of households subject to the benefit cap in May and the number subject to the cap on the implementation date;
- Number of hits for the benefit cap web page per week;
- Number of occasions where the benefit calculator was used per week;
- Number of households responding to publicity / communications and the source of the publicity or communication concerned,
- Number of households for which work was found or obtained by families, single parents, couples and single persons,
- Number of households for which an exemption was obtained by families, single parents, couples and single persons by exemption type,
- Number of households that moved to more affordable accommodation by families, single parents, couples and single persons,
- Number of households embarking on courses to improve employability and number of these that find work as a consequence,
- Equalities Distribution of households affected by the benefit cap in May and subject to the cap on the implementation date,
- Number of benefit cap affected households that applied for and obtained a Discretionary Housing Payment by families, single parents, couples and single persons and number rejected for the same cohorts.

28.0 Case Studies

Case Study 1

A Housing Benefit claimant living in privately rented accommodation had a partner who had no recourse to public funds and therefore could not take on employment. They also had four dependent children of which one was undertaking GCSE’s at school. Housing Benefit was in payment to the claimant but was £220 per week below the rent payable as a consequence of the overall benefit cap. Significant rent arrears had accrued and the landlord was intending to evict the claimant.

Following referral from a local voluntary organisation, a Discretionary Housing Payment was awarded that cleared the rent arrears created by the benefit cap. The child was able to continue with their GCSE’s at a school within the Borough and the family have been able to continue living in their home. The claimant has been referred for job brokerage to assist in the search for employment that if successful, will permit an exemption from the cap and continued residence in their current home.

Case Study 2
A single parent with four dependent children and 1 non-dependant was subject to the overall benefit cap. Prior to the cap being introduced, they received £374.40 Housing Benefit per week that reduced to £75.42 following the introduction of the cap. A shortfall in their rent payment of £298.98 per week arose as a consequence. The claimant was referred for inclusion on the Reed job brokerage programme and a Discretionary Housing Payment was made to cover their rent shortfall. The claimant has since obtained work and is in receipt of Working Tax Credit and therefore exempt from the benefit cap. Additionally, they have been able to continue residing in their home within the Borough.

**Case Study 3**

A single disabled resident rented their home from a private landlord. They were in receipt of Housing Benefit of £258.06 per week to meet their rent payments. However, following the introduction of the benefit cap, their entitlement reduced to £248.85 per week leaving them with a small shortfall of £9.21 to meet for their rent payments. A Discretionary Housing Payment was awarded whilst the claimant awaited the outcome of an application for a Personal Independence Payment. This was subsequently awarded and the benefit cap ceased to apply to them.

**Case Study 4**

A single parent living in temporary accommodation was subject to the benefit cap resulting in a shortfall in their rent of £68.57 per week. They were referred to Reed for job brokerage and as a consequence, they obtained employment and entitlement to Working Tax Credit. They now receive a higher weekly amount of Housing Benefit entitlement as the benefit cap is no longer applicable to them.

**29.0 Additional Sources of Assistance**

Other potential sources of advice and assistance for residents affected by the benefit cap has been included below and will be maintained and updated, as appropriate.

**Advice4Renters** – A4R is the only advice organisation in London for private renters. Its goal is to improve the private renting sector through support and legal advice services for tenants, as well as through campaigning.

Web address: [www.advice4renters.org.uk](http://www.advice4renters.org.uk)

Contact details:
36-38 Willesden Lane,
Kilburn, London
NW6 7ST
Tel: 020 7624 4327
Ashford Place – is a Brent based resource centre providing a range of programmes including housing, health, training and employment.

Web address: www.ashfordplace.org.uk

Contact details:
60 Ashford Road,
Cricklewood, London, NW2 6TU
Tel: 020 8208 8590
Email: info@ashfordplace.org.uk

Brent Advice Matters (BAM) – A project that brings together locally established advice agencies as a consortium to improve the quality of information, advice and guidance residents can access in Brent.

The BAM consortium includes Advice 4 Renters, Age UK Brent, Ashford Place, Brent Citizen’s Advice Bureau (lead agency), Brent Community Law Centre, Brent Mencap and CVS Brent. BAM will make use of decision trees, self-help literature instructional videos and more, with the aim of helping residents access the information and advice they need. The BAM project is a 2-year initiative as part of the Advice Services Transitions Fund from the Big Lottery and the Cabinet Office.

Web address: www.cvsbrent.org.uk/services/brent-advice-matters/

Contact details:
Email: f.uddin@cvsbrent.org.uk or Tel: 020 3011 1693 or 07825 215 652.
Email: liz.moxon@brentcab.co.uk or Tel: 020 8438 1214

Brent Council Local Welfare Assistance Scheme – a local discretionary scheme that offers financial assistance to people in short-term need because of a crisis or emergency, to support vulnerable people in the community and ease exceptional pressure on families.

Web address: Brent Council Local Welfare Assistance Scheme

Contact details: Tel: 020 8937 5796
Christians against Poverty (CAP) / Harlesden Methodists – is a national charity that is run through local churches and which aims to tackle poverty and debt. CAP offers free debt counselling, money courses and job clubs. Please check on the website for local provision.

Web address: [www.capuk.org](http://www.capuk.org)

Contact details: [CAP contact details](http://www.capuk.org) are dependent upon the type of assistance required and locality.

Citizens Advice Brent – provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities.

Web address: [www.brentcab.co.uk](http://www.brentcab.co.uk)

Contact details: 270–272 High Road, Willesden, NW10 2EY, Tel: 020 8438 1249

Crisis Skylight Brent – is working with a range of partners to support single homeless people. It offers a range of classes’ and one to one support for single homeless people in Brent, helping them to find a place to live, a job and build their skills.


Contact details: Tel: 020 8965 2561 Email: enquiries.brent@crisis.org.uk

Genesis Housing Association – owns or manages around 33,000 homes across London and the east of England and with a portfolio including a range of properties from temporary housing to rented homes, homes for sale, and supported housing.

Web address: [www.genesisha.org.uk](http://www.genesisha.org.uk)

Contact Details: [Genesis contact details](http://www.genesisha.org.uk) are dependent upon enquiry type and media.
**Global Solution Services UK Ltd** – Offers a variety of services to clients, each tailored to their individual needs providing an exclusive tailored solution to Welfare to work projects, Out Placement, Training, Job Searching, workforce and recruitment strategies, nationally, internationally and across a broad spectrum of disciplines.

Web address: [www.globalsolutionservices.co.uk](http://www.globalsolutionservices.co.uk)

Contact details:
GSS UK Ltd contact details need to be completed on line.

**Help Somalia Foundation** – Help Somalia Foundation is a charity established to provide support for Somali refugees struggling to settle in the UK. Based in Brent, they provide free and confidential advice and help with counselling, translation and interpreting.

Web address: [www.helpsomaliafoundation.org](http://www.helpsomaliafoundation.org)

Contact Details:
Harbi Farah
Moran House,
Suite 6, 449-451 High Road,
Willesden London, NW10 2JJ
Tel: 020 8830 3568
Mobile: 07951 674 840
Email: info@helpsomaliafoundation.org

**Living Room** – a multi-agency approach aimed at providing locally focused and holistic support for the residents of St. Raphael’s Estate with the aim of assisting them into sustainable work. The team comprises staff from DWP Job Centre, Brent Housing Partnership, Brent Council, Help Somalia Foundation and Citizen’s Advice Brent.

Contact details:
The Living Room (The Old Boiler House),
Next to 65-80 Besant Way,
St Raphael’s Estate,
London, NW10 0TY
London and Quadrant – is a Housing Association that owns or manages over 70,000 homes in London and the South East. London and Quadrant works with over 90 local authorities in the parts of London and the South East where they have homes. The areas of operation are divided into seven separate 'neighbourhoods' comprising North, North East, South, South East, South West, Thames and West.

Web address: www.lqgroup.org.uk

Contact details:
Head Office
One Kings Hall Mews
Lewisham
SE13 5JQ
Tel: 0300 456 9998 for business enquiries

Peabody Trust – is one of London’s oldest and largest housing providers owning and managing more than 29,000 homes across London. They are also a registered charity, delivering an extensive range of community programmes.

Web address: www.peabody.org.uk/home

Contact details:
Head office
Peabody
45 Westminster Bridge Rd
London
SE1 7JB
Tel: 0800 022 4040 or 020 7021 4444
Email: peabody.direct@peabody.org.uk

Shaw Trust – A national charity providing employment opportunities, skills development training and health and well-being services.

Web address: www.shaw-trust.org.uk

Contact details:
For general enquires including the Work Programme, Work Choice and SES contact support@shaw-trust.org.uk.
**Toucan Employment** – A not-for-profit charity organisation that supports people with learning difficulties and disabilities and that aims to reduce the social exclusion of people with learning difficulties / disabilities by supporting them to find and retain appropriate supported employment.

Web address: [www.toucanemployment.org](http://www.toucanemployment.org)

Contact Details:
Taylor Huxster
Dephna House, Room 303,
119 Neasden Lane,
London,
NW10 1PH
Tel: 0208 453 7160
Email: taylor@toucanemployment.org

**VoiceAbility** – VoiceAbility works across England with people who are vulnerable or marginalised to raise their voices and have their rights respected.

Web address: [www.voiceability.org](http://www.voiceability.org)

Contact details:
**VoiceAbility contact details** are dependent upon the nature of the specific service required.

**Volunteering Brent** – Volunteering Brent is the service provided by the charity Groundwork London on behalf of Brent Council that aims to ‘inspire and support volunteering’ across the borough.

Web address: [www.volunteeringbrent.org.uk](http://www.volunteeringbrent.org.uk)

Contact details:
Volunteering Brent,
Groundwork London,
18-21 Morley Street,
London,
SE1 7QZ.
Tel: 0300 365 9920
Email: enquiry@volunteeringbrent.org.uk