

APPENDIX A

HOUSING BENEFIT



- **The Housing Benefit scheme**

Most people who rent their homes, and are on incomes which are significantly below average, are entitled to receive the largely Government funded Housing Benefit which operates as a housing allowance for private sector and a housing rebate for public sector tenants.

The Housing Benefit scheme is administered by experienced staff of the Perth and Kinross Council's Housing and Social Work Services Bordeaux House 25-33 Kinnoull Street Perth PH1 5GZ tel 01738 476000.

It is particularly important that anyone interested in claiming Housing Benefit entitlement should contact the relevant Housing Benefit staff **as soon as possible**, because there is a risk that the claimant may not be entitled to receive Housing Benefit for any rent paid before the Council was informed of the claim.

- **The Housing Benefit claim procedure**

Every Housing Benefit claimant must submit and sign a detailed application form, which Council staff are happy to help applicants understand and complete.

Verification of the applicant's financial resources is essential, so evidence of both income and capital will be required to support the answers given in the application form. This means that payslips, bank statements, benefit books and so on must be made available for inspection by Council (or Scottish Homes) staff. But as long as the application form is submitted the claim can be made payable in full from the submission date, even though the evidence on the applicant's resources may take some time to produce and be verified. It is also worth noting that a single application form is used to claim Council Tax Benefit as well as Housing Benefit, which means that the end result of the application process could result in the applicant receiving **both** benefits.

The Council (or Scottish Homes) staff then work out how much Housing Benefit is due according to the answers to the following four questions:

- how much money the applicant has coming in from his or her earnings and any other income **and** from his or her partner's earnings and income;
- how much money the applicant and, where applicable, partner have saved or invested (no Housing Benefit will be paid where savings amount to £16,000 or more and it will usually be reduced on a sliding scale if savings are over £3,000);
- the applicant's personal circumstances e.g. the numbers of dependants living in the same household, whether the applicant is disabled etc); and

- the **maximum rent level** which the Housing Benefit system will support (see below for explanation).

- **The maximum rent level**

If the applicant is a Council, Scottish Homes or housing association tenant then the rent can be met in full by Housing Benefit. If, however, the applicant is a private tenant and the rent charged is considered by the Council to be too high then the Housing Benefit paid out will be **less** than the rent charged.

- **Renting privately**

It is particularly important, therefore, that those who are thinking of renting a private property should contact the Council's housing benefit staff to find out what level of rent is likely to be met by Housing Benefit. Staff can either make an informal calculation on the basis of their indicative rent levels for similar properties or they can give a precise 'pre-tenancy determination' (PTD). However, the determination, which usually takes three days to reach, can only be given where the landlord has given written consent. Both the informal and formal advice given by Council staff will give the applicant a clear idea of whether he or she will be able to afford the rent asked, after any contribution from Housing Benefit has been allowed for.

- **Restrictions on housing benefit for single people under 25**

It is important to note the restrictions that have been imposed by Government on the amount of housing benefit which can be given to single people under 25 years old renting privately. The housing benefit is restricted to the equivalent indicative rent in the area for a single room, which locally is assessed as **£35** per week, irrespective of the actual rent charged.

Young single people on low incomes are therefore advised to speak to advice agency or Housing Benefit staff before accepting any offer of rented accommodation.

- **Further information**

Detailed information and advice on all the assessment procedures for Housing Benefit will be willingly given by local advice agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Council's trained staff at Perth and Kinross Council's Housing and Social Work Services Bordeaux House 25-33 Kinnoull Street Perth PH1 5GZ tel 01738 476000.

- **Right to appeal**

Any Housing Benefit applicant has a right to ask the Council to review their decision, if the applicant is not satisfied with it.