

## **Thurrock Diversity Network**



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### **Questions and Answers raised with the benefits team at Thurrock Council on the changes to Housing Benefit and Council Tax - 15/11/12 6pm to 8pm**

#### **Housing Benefit**

#### **WHO**

	<b>HOUSING BENEFIT</b>
<b>SUNNY</b>	<b>1. Who do appeals get sent to and how?</b>
	The changes to Housing Benefit have been decided by National Government and so if having provided all relevant information about your situation and you disagree with how the changes affect you, e.g. you have to make up the shortfall in the benefit because you are under occupying – then this cannot be challenged. However, if you believe that the decision to reduce your HB has been made without the decision maker considering all relevant information that would affect your situation/circumstances – then you can ask Council HB Team to look at their decision again, this time with all relevant information in front of them
<b>NEIL</b>	<b>2. Who is going to help to find people suitable alternative accommodation quickly?</b>
	If you are under occupying and want to move to a smaller property to avoid the cut – then

	your first port of call should be your Landlord or Housing Association
<b>DANNY</b>	<b>3. Who will pay for the cost of moving and for adaptations needed?</b>
	Officers from the housing team will be sending out letters to people who are under occupying (404 properties) and will also visit those individuals to carry out a viability study to see if it is viable/cost-effective to move that individual, particularly with regard to their individual housing circumstances, particularly if the person lives in housing with disability related adaptations already in place. If however it is deemed viable for the person to move then the individual would have to pay for any moving costs (as is the case now). The Council would pay for any adaptations needed in a property to which the person moves. The HB Team took note of the need for a sentence in those letters relating to the possibility of having a friend/relative/advocate present when a HB representative visits people in their homes.

## WHAT

	<b>HOUSING BENEFIT</b>
<b>LESLEY</b>	<b>4. What happens if an individual is living in a 2 bed house/flat and is emotionally or physically unable to move? For example: What allowance is being made for people with sensory impairments who rely on their existing knowledge/layout of a property?</b>
	The HB Team would discuss any alternatives with the individual for example – using the Discretionary Housing Fund to meet the shortfall in the benefit. The HB team acknowledge that they need to link with the Housing Department (allocations) and Adult Social Care when discussing accessibility concerns such as those for people with Sensory Impairments.
<b>MAGGIE</b>	<b>5. What will the Council do if the person is vulnerable and current under</b>

	<b>occupying – if they cannot take in a lodger as they are vulnerable and family is not an option?</b>
	<p>Taking on a lodger is NOT mandatory – it is simply one OPTION suggested by national government. Individuals would have to think carefully about whether taking on a lodger is right for them – consider discussions with landlords to get permission and involve an advocate if you feel you need to use one. Thurrock Council advised that they will have to re-write their tenancy policy across the borough to include provision for lodgers/subletting etc. If someone has a second room and is currently under-occupying but they may have a fluctuating/de-generative condition and may need the second room for a carer in the future – then the HB Team will consider the persons individual circumstances.</p> <p>Asked whether there is a minimum/maximum number of nights that a carer is required to stay over in the extra room – the HB team were not aware of an upper or lower limit. But LM informed the group that she has been told a minimum of 2 nights stay per week is required.</p>
<b>ANNE</b>	<b>6. What happens to housing rights if a lodger moves in, whose job is it to look at these issues? and is this fair on both parties? What are the consequences for the tenant if they take on a lodger? (See Q.5 above)</b>

### WHY

	<b>HOUSING BENEFIT</b>
<b>JOHN</b>	<b>7. Why do the changes discriminate against disabled/elderly people who live in significantly adapted accommodation and those that don't have significantly adapted accommodation? They could have the same needs (adaptations can take years to be completed)</b>
	The changes have come from national government. The levels of adaptations will be looked at on an individual basis

## WHERE

	<b>HOUSING BENEFIT</b>
<b>TREVOR</b>	<b>8. Do Thurrock Council have/what are? (1) The numbers of households affected? (2) The numbers of bedrooms released (potential)? (3) The number of empty properties and number of bedrooms in those? (4) What action on is being taken in relation to empty buildings?</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1700 bedrooms</li> <li>• 274 empty properties</li> <li>• 558 bedrooms in empty properties</li> <li>• 102 rooms in 3 bedroom properties</li> <li>• 404 under-occupying properties</li> <li>• 950 over-occupying properties</li> </ul>

## HOW

	<b>HOUSING BENEFIT</b>
<b>JEANETTE</b>	<b>9. How will the changes affect people who have signed to say they won't move house (due to adaptations made within the last 5 years)?</b>
	The HB Teams were not aware of such arrangements – they would talk to colleagues in housing allocations/ASC to clarify. But reference was made to the DHF – but it's application in this instance isn't clear
<b>BECCY</b>	<b>10. How will the Council support vulnerable people to rent their spare rooms? Will the Council help people who are willing to take on lodgers – which the Council is encouraging. How will this affect safeguarding issues – dangerous lodgers/CRB</b>

	<b>checks?</b>
	Taking on a lodger is NOT mandatory – it is simply one OPTION suggested by national government. Individuals would have to think carefully about whether taking on a lodger is right for them – consider discussions with landlords to get permission and involve an advocate if you feel you need to use one. CRB Checks would have to be funded by the individual – the Council will not fund such checks.
<b>SUSAN</b>	<b>11. How many people will be affected? How many (%) are vulnerable?</b>
	Statistics provided above. 120 people will be affected by the benefit cap in Thurrock. There is no definition of who is to be regarded as a Vulnerable Adult in this context (housing).
<b>IAN</b>	<b>12. How will the number of rooms [spare] be monitored?</b>
	This will be monitored via the Housing Allocation Policy and through new claims coming in to the system.
<b>NEIL</b>	<b>13. How will this affect households who are recently bereaved?</b>
	There will be no change in current 'HB levels for a period of 52 weeks after the bereavement
<b>SANDRA</b>	<b>14. How will the Council help people who agree to move but have to wait for a suitably sized property? – will they experience a cut in their housing benefit whilst they wait?</b>
	Yes, these individuals will experience a cut in their housing benefit whilst they wait but will be considered for the DHP. Housing Officers will be visiting people who may be affected in this way from December 2012. However, concerns were raised that this only provides a 4 month window to prepare for the changes from April 2013
<b>JOHN</b>	<b>15. How much (£) is the Discretionary Housing Payment Fund?</b>
	The HB Team do not know yet for next year – they have not been told by national government. The HB Team will look at people's circumstances and expenditure. Depending upon people's circumstances they could receive between e.g. £5-10 per week from the DHP

	to meet the shortfall following the HB cut.
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***Thurrock Diversity Network***

**Council Tax**

***WHO***

	<b>COUNCIL TAX</b>
<b>STEVE</b>	<b>16. Who can people go to for support if any disputes arise? Who do we go to if we want to appeal? (See Q.1 above)</b>

***WHAT***

	<b>COUNCIL TAX</b>
<b>SUNNY</b>	<b>17. What will the Council do to explain these changes to those with learning difficulties and mental health issues?</b>
	The Council will be running a series of Road shows in 2013 and also undertaking individual visits
<b>IAN</b>	<b>18. What will happen if the removal of the “second adult rebate” affects anyone’s ability to pay their Council Tax?</b>
	This rebate is only based upon the income of the second adult. The primary adult is considered to already be in a position to pay their council tax – the reduction in tax because of the rebate is minimal. The Council will be looking at mapping economics and demographics on a map and making this publicly available.

**WHERE**

	<b>COUNCIL TAX</b>
<b>PENNY</b>	<b>19. Which areas of the borough and groups of the population are most affected by the changes to Council Tax in Thurrock?</b>
	The figures that the Council have used are based upon the current financial levels and not the levels at which they will be in april 2013. The areas affected will become clearer nearer the time.

**WHEN**

	<b>COUNCIL TAX</b>
<b>MAGGIE</b>	<b>20. When exactly will these changes start to affect people's lives? Will there be a transition period?</b>
	1 <sup>st</sup> April 2013. Scheme not passed by full Council yet The DWP have only given the Council indicative figures at this stage Once the Council know they will initiate publicity, road shows and letters.