

Welfare Reform

Staff Briefing – January 2017

Changes to Benefit Cap

Introduction

There is a limit on the total amount of benefits that most people aged 16 to 64 can claim. This limit is called the benefit cap.

In November 2016, the UK Government reduced the benefit cap, limiting the maximum amount of benefits any individual or family can claim.

With all the changes that the UK Government is making to the benefit system, it's important to know what's happening, how it will affect people and how we can help them.

Who is affected?

The changes apply to all benefit claimants across the whole UK; however anyone whose benefit claims are lower than the new cap will not be directly affected.

The change affects approximately 300 benefit claimants in Fife. It's important to note that this figure is likely to increase each month.

Some people who receive certain benefits are not affected by the new benefit cap. See the 'Who's not affected' section for details.

How much is the Benefit Cap?

The maximum amount of benefit a household can claim is:

- £384.52 a week (£20,000 a year) if their household is made up of a couple, whether their children live with them or not, or if they're single and have children who live with them.
- £257.69 as week (£13,400 a year) if they're single and don't have children, or their children don't live with them.

This reduction is the same across most of the UK. The cap has been reduced by a slightly smaller amount in London, meaning claimants there can claim slightly more before reaching the cap.

What does it mean for benefit claimants?

The changes mean the maximum amount of benefit any household can claim has gone down. However, the change only applies to the **maximum amount** people are allowed to claim, so if their benefit claims were already lower than the new limits then their benefits shouldn't have changed.

The benefit cap applies to the total amount a household (claimant, their partner and any children living with them) can claim from 14 different benefits, including:

- [Bereavement Allowance](#)
- [Child Benefit](#)
- [Child Tax Credit](#)
- [Employment and Support Allowance](#)
- [Housing Benefit](#)
- [Incapacity Benefit](#)
- [Income Support](#)
- [Jobseeker's Allowance](#)
- [Maternity Allowance](#)
- [Severe Disablement Allowance](#)
- [Widowed Parent's Allowance](#)
- and the newly introduced [Universal Credit](#)

For those affected, their Housing Benefit, or the housing element of their Universal Credit, will be reduced so that the total amount of benefit they receive is below the cap limit.

It's important to note that if anyone's housing benefit is cut, they will still need to pay their rent.

Who's not affected?

People are not affected by the cap if anyone in their household qualifies for [Working Tax Credit](#) or gets any of the following benefits:

- [Armed Forces Compensation Scheme](#)
- [Armed Forces Independence Payment](#)
- [Attendance Allowance](#)
- [Carer's Allowance](#)
- [Disability Living Allowance \(DLA\)](#)
- [Employment and Support Allowance](#) (if the claimant gets the support component)
- [Guardian's Allowance](#)
- [Industrial Injuries Benefits](#) (and equivalent payments as part of a War Disablement Pension or the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme)
- [Personal Independence Payment \(PIP\)](#)
- [Universal Credit](#) payment for 'limited capability for work and work-related activity'
- [War pensions](#)
- [War Widow's or War Widower's Pension](#)

How can you help benefit claimants?

You can help people by letting them know that they can get personal 1-2-1 support from their Work Coach in their local Jobcentre.

If someone would like to make an appointment with their Work Coach/local Jobcentre they can contact the most appropriate person from the list below. Alternatively you can allow them to use your phone to make an appointment:

Dunfermline	JANICE.CUMMING@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK	Tel. 01383 813874
Cowdenbeath	MELANIE.YOUNG2@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK	Tel. 01383315454
Kirkcaldy	PENNY.IRELAND@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK	Tel. 01592 253234
Glenrothes	COLEEN.DEMPSEY@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK	Tel. 01592 253003
Leven	GILLIAN.LIDDLE@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK	Tel. 01333 593518
Cupar/St Andrews	MORAG.ROBERTSON@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK	Tel. 01334 413782

They can call the Benefit cap Helpline number if they have any questions on 0345 605 7064 or textphone 0345 608 8551 for people with hearing or speech impairments. The helpline is open Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm.

You can also help people by letting them know that they could also get Working Tax Credit if either of the following apply:

- They're aged from 16 to 24 and have a child or a qualifying disability
- They're 25 or over, with or without children

They must:

- work a certain number of hours a week – 16 for a lone parent or if they get ESA
- 24 hours for couples and 30 hours for a single person

See calculator <https://www.gov.uk/tax-credits-calculator> for more

Where can benefit claimants get support?

As well as speaking to their Work Coach, there are also a number of support services in Fife to help people manage their money and benefits. If they aren't sure if or how they will be affected, they can contact Citizens Advice and Rights Fife (CARF) online at www.cabfife.org.uk or by calling 0345 1400 092. Alternatively people can visit any of CARF's offices across Fife. Full contact details as well as a range of advice and information can be found on their website: www.cabfife.org.uk

Customers can also follow CARF for updates on Facebook at facebook.com/CABfife and Twitter @CABfife

Claimants can also get support from Fife Council Welfare Support Assistants at any of Fife's Community Job Clubs.

Community Job Clubs take place at 38 venues across Fife each week. They're open to anyone looking to get back into work.

Community Job clubs are run by trained welfare support assistants who can help people:

- fulfil their claimant commitment
- access the internet to complete job searches or make applications online
- find out what other support is available to them

Times and locations of Community Job Clubs are available at www.fifedirect.org.uk/jobclubs

Claimants can also get advice and be referred to Community Job Clubs from Customer Service Centres.

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)

In some limited circumstances claimants may be able to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). This is a short term payment which can be awarded to help them pay their rent. Claimants can find more information and make an application at www.fifedirect.org.uk/dhp

Scottish Welfare Fund – Crisis Grants

If the person is in the process of claiming a benefit from The Department for Work and Pensions or at Job Centre and are waiting for their first payment, they should contact them first for a Short Term Benefit Advance or other payment available to them.

If the claimant has exhausted all other options available to them (i.e. DWP short term benefit, DWP hardship, DHP payments, friends and family etc.) the Scottish Welfare Fund can also provide a safety net for vulnerable people on low incomes.

People may be eligible to receive a grant if they are aged 16 or over and on a low income

Anyone who's suffered an emergency or disaster and is struggling with the expense can apply. It can help pay for the things people need to prevent harm to them or their family's health or safety because of an emergency or disaster. Applications can be made for living expenses and essential items such as food, heating costs, nappies, toiletries and temporary accommodation costs.

The grants are designed to help people who are on a low income, so people can apply even if they don't claim benefits. People will receive a grant and not a loan, so they don't need to pay it back.

People can normally only get three crisis grants in a 12 month period.

People can call the team on **0300 555 0265** Monday to Friday: 11.00am to 4.30pm or applications can be made online outwith these times.

Find out more

More information about the UK Government's changes to the benefit cap is available at: www.gov.uk/benefit-cap

And for more information on how the Government's benefit cap changes affect Fife visit: www.fifedirect.org.uk/benefitchanges

