

HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

Help with rent and Council Tax for people of working age



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We have written this leaflet for people of working age. In this leaflet, a person of working age is anyone aged between 16 and 60. The rules are the same wherever you live. (If you are over 60, please read the leaflet 'Help with rent and Council Tax for pensioners'.)

If you don't know which council covers the area you live in, you can find this information on your Council Tax bill.

What is Housing Benefit?

It can often be hard to pay your rent. We can give people on low incomes help to pay their rent. Please see the graphs in this leaflet that give examples of what you may be entitled to claim.

What is Council Tax Benefit?

If you are on a low income we may be able to give you help to pay your Council Tax.

What is Second Adult Rebate?

Second Adult Rebate is for people who cannot get help with their Council Tax but who have other people living with them who are on a low income. To get it, you must be the person responsible for paying the Council Tax for your home.

Can you reduce my Council Tax any other way?

Yes. As well as Council Tax Benefit and Second Adult Rebate, we can reduce your Council Tax with:

- discounts;
- exemptions; and
- reductions for people with disabilities.

What is a Council Tax discount?

You can get a discount of 25% if you are the only adult living in a property. We do not count some adults when we look at the number of adults living in a property to award a discount.

Adults we do not count include:

- full-time students;
- people with severe mental-health problems or learning difficulties;
- carers;
- some 18- and 19-year-olds who you receive Child Benefit for; and
- people in prison.

What are Council Tax exemptions?

When a property is empty, there may be a time when it is 'exempt' from Council Tax. This means that nobody is responsible for paying Council Tax for that property. Also, certain properties may be exempt even when people are living in them, for example, if all the people living there are full-time students.

What are Council Tax reductions for people with disabilities?

If a disabled person living in a property has to use a wheelchair indoors or has an extra room because of their needs, we may reduce their Council Tax.

How do I claim a Council Tax discount, exemption or reduction?

You will need to fill in a form to claim one of these reductions. Please contact us. You can find our contact details on your Council Tax bill.

What are Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance?

The Department for Work and Pensions pay Income Support to people on low incomes who are unable to work. Anyone who works less than 16 hours a week or has little or no income may also get it (as long as they meet certain other conditions).

Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) is paid to people who are not working and are looking for work. It is paid as either:

- income-based (IB) JSA – we do not need any details about your income; or
- contribution-based (CB) JSA – we need to know your income and savings.

If you get Income Support or JSA, there are only certain changes that you need to tell us about. We will explain this later on in this leaflet.

What are tax credits?

Tax credits are paid by HM Revenue & Customs and can also be used to top up your income. You may get tax credits if you have children, or are working and on a low income (or both). You may get extra tax credits if you are over 50 and working, or are disabled and working (or both). You can claim tax credits from HM Revenue & Customs on their website at www.hmrc.gov.uk, or by phoning 0845 3003900. You can use the on-line calculator on the HM Revenue & Customs website to see if you may be entitled to tax credit.

How do I claim Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit (or both) if I get Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance (income-based)?

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) pays Income Support and JSA (IB), but we pay Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. At the time you claim for Income Support or JSA (IB), you may receive a Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit claim form (HCTB1). You need to fill in this form and send it back to the DWP, who will pass it to us.

If you have not made a claim through the DWP, you will need to fill in an application form and return it to us.

If you have not heard anything within one month of sending your Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit claim form, please contact us.

How do I claim Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit (or both) if I am not on Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance (income-based)?

You must claim Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit (or both) directly from us by filling in a claim form. You can ask us for a form.

Once you have filled in the form, send it back to us as soon as possible. If you delay sending us your form you may lose benefit.

How do I claim Second Adult Rebate?

You claim Second Adult Rebate from us. Once you have filled in the form, send it back to us as soon as possible.

How much Second Adult Rebate will I get?

The most Second Adult Rebate you can get is normally 25% of the full Council Tax bill before any discounts are taken off. However, if there is a student in your household you may (in some circumstances), get up to 100% discount. The amount depends on the gross weekly income (your income before tax and National Insurance are taken off) of your second adult.

Could I get Council Tax Benefit and Second Adult Rebate?

When you fill in an application form we will assess whether you qualify for Council Tax Benefit or Second Adult Rebate and give you whichever is the higher amount.

What information do you need to work out my benefit?

When you claim Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit, we need to know:

- your income and savings, unless you are on Income Support or JSA (IB);
- your family circumstances, including details about who lives with you; and
- your rent, but only if you are claiming Housing Benefit.

You will need to provide evidence of your and your partner's National Insurance number and identity (proof of who you are, for example, with a passport, birth certificate or driving licence), unless you are on Income Support, JSA (IB), JSA (CB) or Incapacity Benefit.

What counts as income?

If you get Income Support or JSA (IB), we will not need any details about your income. For everything else, we need to know about any income you or your partner get. When you claim you will need to provide proof of all your income.

Types of income are:

- earnings, wages or salary from your job. We will need to see your last five payslips (if you are paid every week) or your last two payslips (if you are paid every month). Don't worry if you haven't got any payslips – you can ask your employer to fill in a form which you can get from us;
- any pension from your or your partner's previous employer;
- annuities (an income that you receive from an amount you have invested with an insurance company);
- any rent you receive from lodgers or subtenants; and
- maintenance you receive from a former partner.

The claim form asks you about all the income you get. When we work out your benefit we use your gross earnings less tax, National Insurance and half of any pension contributions you make.

For Second Adult Rebate, we need to know the 'gross' weekly income of your second adult or adults – that is, their wages before tax and National Insurance are taken off.

What counts as savings?

If you do not get Income Support or JSA (IB), we need to know about any savings you or your partner have. When you claim you will need to provide proof of all your savings.

This includes:

- bank accounts (all types), building-society accounts and post-office savings;
- PEPs, TESSAs and ISAs;
- stocks, shares, and unit trusts;
- National Savings Certificates;
- cash;
- property or land you own (but not the home you live in).

Normally, if you have savings over £16,000 you are not entitled to claim Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit. This does not stop you claiming Second Adult Rebate.

If you and your partner are under 60, we will not count the first £6000 of your savings or investments (or both). If you have more than £6000, we will add £1 a week to your income for every £250 or part of £250 you have over £6000. So, if you have £6600, we will count that as an extra income of £3 a week.

If you are claiming Second Adult Rebate, we need to know the amount of interest your second adult gets on their savings. We do not need to know how much their savings are.

What about other people who live with you?

To work out your benefit, we need to know who else lives with you. The section 'How much Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit will I get?' gives more details.

If you have a child you do not get child benefit for, or other adults living with you, you may get less Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit (or both). We will assume they pay towards your rent and Council Tax, even if they do not. See 'Do I get less benefit if I have people living with me?' for more details.

If I have a partner, do we both have to fill in a claim form?

No, you only have to fill in one form, but you should both sign it.

If my partner works and I don't, can I claim for myself?

No. When you claim benefit, we need to know about your partner. We work out your benefit using your joint income.

How much rent will my Housing Benefit cover?

If your rent includes charges for services, we may need to take the cost of these from your rent before we work out your Housing Benefit.

We will also check that your rent is not too high. If it is, we will work out your benefit on a lower rent amount. In some cases, we must reduce the rent amount if your home is too large for you and your family.

The rent amount we set (less any service charges) is called the 'eligible rent'.

How do you decide if my rent is too high?

These rules do not apply to council tenancies or regulated tenancies (private tenancies which started before 1989). These rules may apply to tenancies with a registered social landlord (for example, housing associations), if we think your rent is too high.

If you are a private tenant, we will ask the Rent Service to tell us if your rent is reasonable.

We must do this if:

- you are claiming for the first time; or
- you move home.

The Rent Service will compare your rent with average rents for other properties in the same area. If the rent you pay is higher than the average, we will assess your benefit using a lower amount.

The Rent Service is independent from us.

Special rules for people under 25

If you are a single person under 25, we normally work out your benefit using an amount called the 'single-room rent'. This is the average cost of renting a room or a bedsit. Please contact us if you are already renting more than one room.

Can I find out how much rent you will use to work out my Housing Benefit before I move into new accommodation?

Yes. If you are thinking of renting accommodation from a private landlord (not a registered social landlord), you can find out how much rent we will use to work out your Housing Benefit before you decide to rent the property. You can do this by filling in a pre-tenancy determination (PTD) form, which you can get from us. There are more details with the pre-tenancy determination form.

What charges does Housing Benefit not cover?

- **Gas and electricity charges**
Housing Benefit does not cover charges for heating, lighting, hot water or cooking. If these are included in your rent, the Rent Service will tell us how much to take off your rent for each service before we work out your benefit.
- **Water rates**
Any charges for water rates will be taken off your rent.
- **Services**
Housing Benefit does not cover charges for things like meals and laundry. Any charges you pay for these services will be taken off your rent.

What services can be covered by Housing Benefit?

Some charges can be included in your rent if you have to pay them under your tenancy agreement.

These include charges for:

- maintaining shared areas; and
- cleaning and lighting shared areas.

Shared areas include areas like staircases and landings.

What if I pay Council Tax in my rent?

If your rent includes Council Tax, we will count this as part of your rent when we work out your Housing Benefit.

How much Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit will I get?

If you get Income Support or JSA (IB), you will normally get the maximum amount of benefit. That is, all of your 'eligible rent' and all of your Council Tax, less any non-dependant charges (see 'Do I get less benefit if I have people living with me?').

If you do not get Income Support or JSA (IB), the amount of benefit depends on the size of your household (how many people live in your home) and your income. If you, or any of your family, are disabled, you may get more benefit.

The size of your household will affect the 'applicable amount' for your claim, which the Government set. The applicable amount is the lowest amount of money the Government think you need to live on.

Here are some examples of applicable amounts.

- **If you are single and under 25**, your applicable amount is £46.85
- **If you are single and at least 25**, your applicable amount is £59.15
- **If you are a single parent and under 18**, your applicable amount is £46.85
- **If you are a single parent and at least 18**, your applicable amount is £59.15

- **If you are a couple and under 18**, your applicable amount is £70.70
- **If you are a couple and one or both of you are at least 18**, your applicable amount is £92.80.
- **If you have a child for whom you receive Child Benefit, add the following for each child.**
- **If they are under 19**, add £47.45
- **On top of that, add one of the following:**

If you have a family or are a single parent, add £16.43.

If you have a family or are a single parent and have a child aged under one, add £26.93.

The amounts we give you may be higher if:

- you or your partner are disabled;
- you look after a disabled friend or relative; or
- you have children aged under one.

Examples

- You are a single person aged 23 and live alone.
Your applicable amount is £46.85
- You are a couple – one of you is 16 and one is 19.
Your applicable amount will be £92.80
- You are a couple with one child aged over one.
Your applicable amount is as follows:

Couple over 18 add	£92.80
Child under 19 add	£47.45
Family (no child under one) add	£16.43
Total applicable amount	£156.68

We work out benefit in the following ways:

- If your net weekly income (after tax and National Insurance are taken off) is not more than your applicable amount, you will get the maximum amount of benefit. This is all of your eligible rent and all of your Council Tax after any discounts or exemptions are taken off.

- If your net weekly income is more than your applicable amount, you will get less benefit depending on how high your income is.
- The amount of Housing Benefit and Council Tax you are entitled to may be less if you have any other adults living in your household.

Benefit you could get each week

The charts on the following page only give you a guide to the amount of benefit you could get. If you are not sure whether you will get any benefit, contact us or make a claim. If the charts do not cover your circumstances, please contact us. The notes below will help you understand the charts. Make sure you use the correct chart for your age.

- 1 Find your level of income down the side of the chart. The weekly income is the income you get after tax and National Insurance are taken off. The income amount includes all types of income, for example, wages, maintenance payments, benefits and savings.

You are allowed to earn a certain amount of money before your benefit is affected. The amount you are allowed to earn is called a 'disregard'. This amount is your net income (your income after tax and National Insurance are taken off). The examples below show how much you can earn before your benefit is affected.

- If you are a single person, we disregard the first £5 of your wages.
- If you are a couple, we disregard the first £10 of your wages.
- If you are on Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance, we disregard the full amount of this benefit.

- If you are responsible for a child, and receive Child Benefit or Child Tax Credit (or both) for them, and work over 30 hours (and in some circumstances over 16 hours) a week, we disregard £15.45 of your wages.
- If you pay childcare for a child under 11, we can disregard up to £175 of your earnings for each child. This increases to £300 for two or more children.
- If you receive maintenance for a child you are responsible for, we will disregard the first £15 of this income.

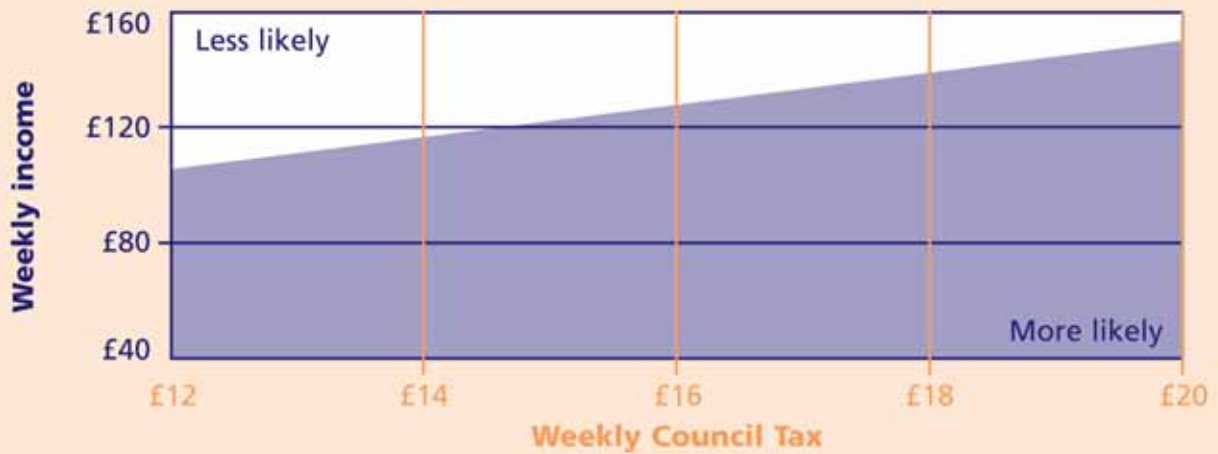
If you don't know whether a 'disregard' applies in your case, please contact us for advice.

- 2 Find your level of rent or Council Tax across the bottom of the chart. If you pay rent to a private landlord, Housing Benefit may be kept to a level which is lower than the amount your landlord charges you. (See 'How much rent will my Housing Benefit cover?'). Please contact us for more advice.
- 3 Read up and across to the inside of the chart.
- 4 If you fall into the shaded area on the Housing Benefit chart, you may get Housing Benefit. If you fall into the shaded area on the Council Tax Benefit chart, you may get Council Tax Benefit. If you fall outside the shaded area, it is less likely you will get benefit, but you are more likely to get benefit if you or your partner are disabled, so you should make a claim.

Housing Benefit chart for single people aged under 25



Council Tax Benefit chart for single people aged under 25



Housing Benefit chart for single people aged 25 and over

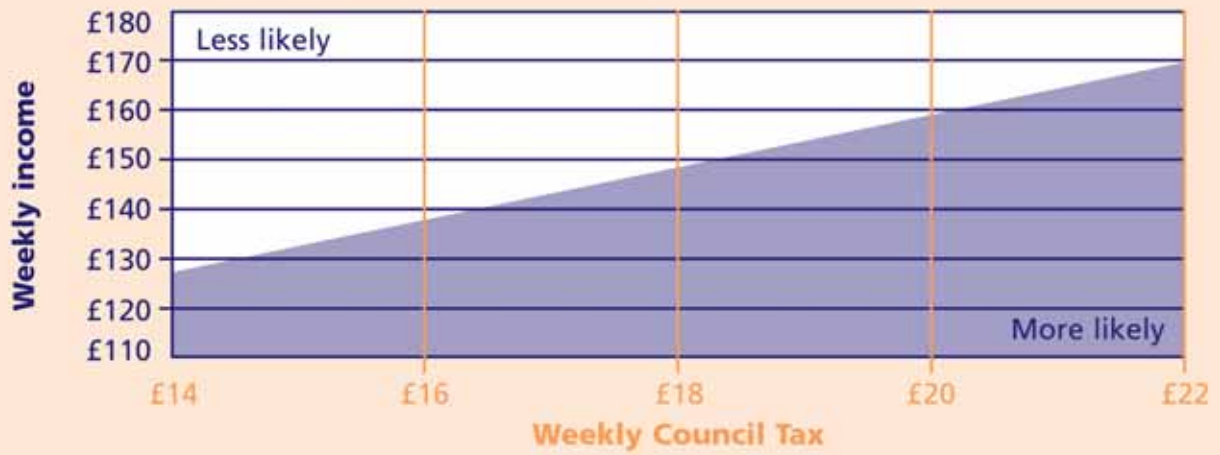


Likely to be entitled



Less likely to be entitled

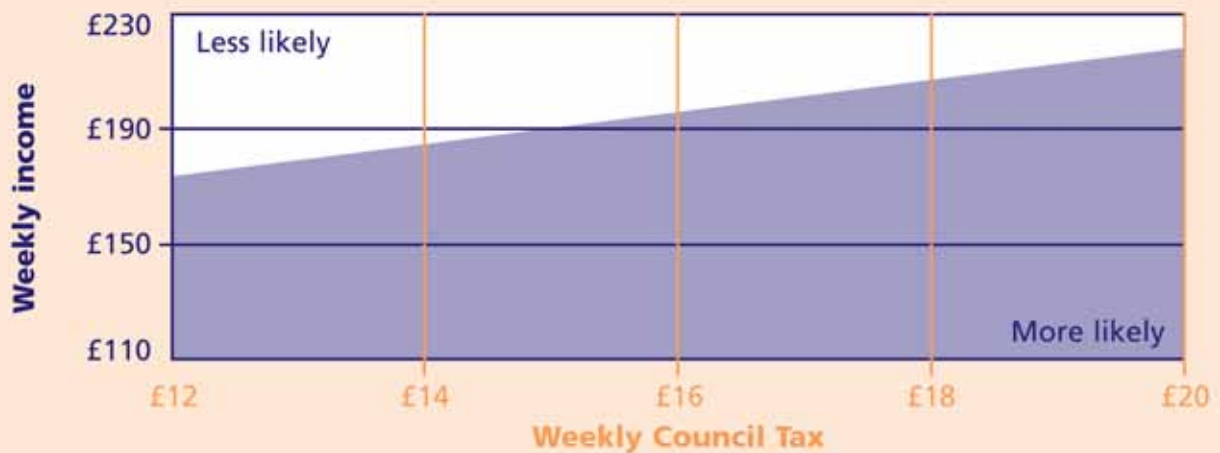
Council Tax Benefit chart for single people aged 25 and over




Housing Benefit chart for single parent over 18 with one child under 19



Council Tax Benefit chart for single parent over 18 with one child under 19



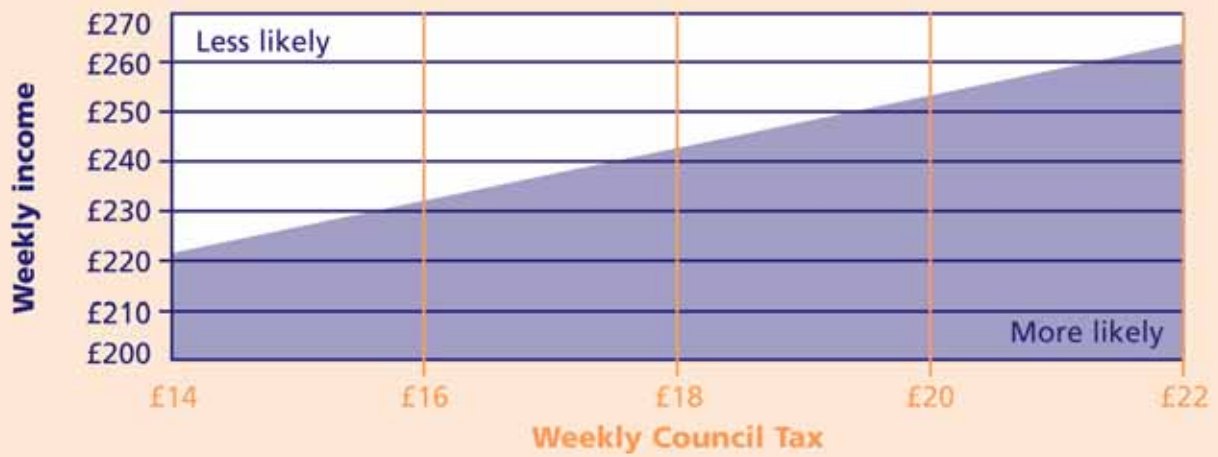
 Likely to be entitled

 Less likely to be entitled

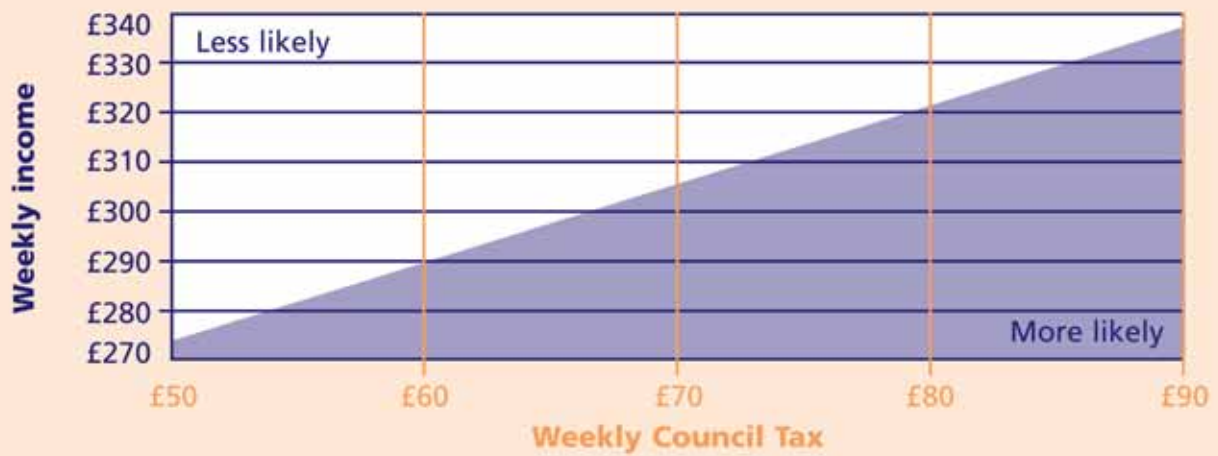
Housing Benefit chart for couples aged 18 and over with one child under 19




Council Tax Benefit chart for couples aged 18 and over with one child under 19



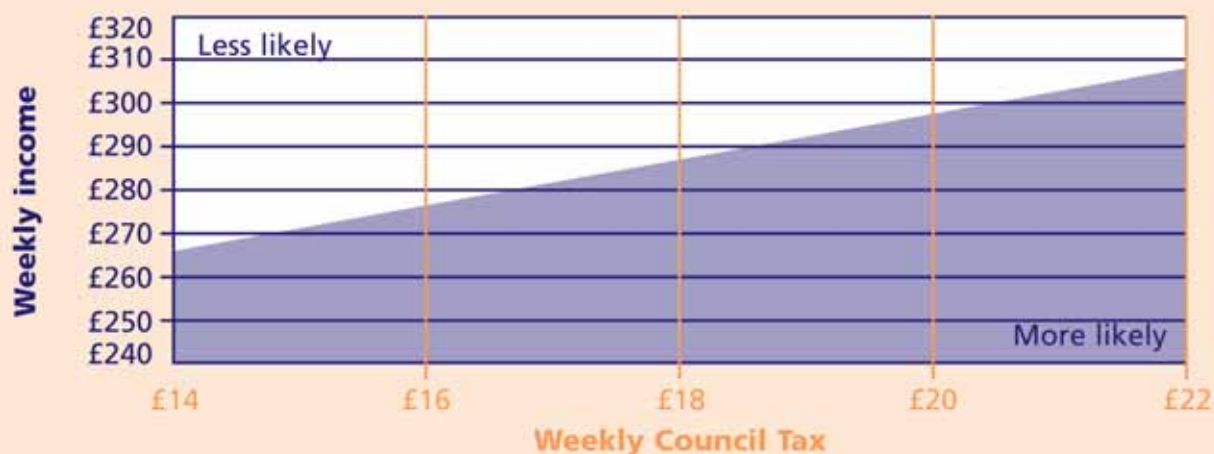
Housing Benefit chart for couples aged 18 and over with two children under 19



 Likely to be entitled

 Less likely to be entitled

Council Tax Benefit chart for couples aged 18 and over with two children under 19



Do I get less benefit if I have people living with me?

We will reduce your Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit if you have grown-up children you do not receive Child Benefit for, or any other adult who does not pay rent, living with you. We call these people non-dependants.

We will usually reduce your Housing or Council Tax Benefit by a fixed amount. This amount does not depend on what the non-dependant pays you, even if they pay nothing at all.

However, there are certain circumstances where we will not take an amount from your benefit. These include if you or your partner receive:

- Attendance Allowance;
- Disability Living Allowance (care component); or
- are registered blind.

From April 2007, we will take the following amounts from your Housing Benefit each week.

We will take these amounts from your benefit if the non-dependant is working 16 or more hours a week. These amounts are based on their gross income (before tax and National Insurance are taken off).

Non-dependant's gross weekly income Amount we will take off

■ Less than £111	£7.40
■ £111 to £163.99	£17.00
■ £164 to £212.99	£23.35
■ £213 to £282.99	£38.20
■ £283 to £352.99	£43.50
■ £338 353 or over	£47.75

If the non-dependant is:

- over 25 and on Income Support, or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Pension Credit, or over 18 and not working £7.40
- under 25 and on Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or under 18, or a full-time student -
We will not take anything off your benefit

From April 2007, we will take the following amounts from your Council Tax Benefit each week.

We will take these amounts from your benefit if the non-dependant is working 16 or more hours a week. These amounts are based on their gross income (before tax and National Insurance are taken off).

Non-dependant's gross weekly income Amount we will take off

■ Less than £164	£2.30
■ £164 to £282.99	£4.60
■ £283 to £352.99	£5.80
■ £353 or over	£6.95
■ Others aged 18 or over	£2.30

If the non-dependant receives Pension Credit, Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance - We will not take anything from your benefit

What if I am a student?

Most students are not eligible to receive Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit. However, some students may get Housing Benefit if they:

- are single parents;
- are a couple with dependent children;
- are disabled; or
- are getting Income Support or JSA (IB).

If you are a student and want to know if you will get any benefit, see the leaflet '**A guide to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for Students**' on our website www.benefit-leaflets.org or, contact us for advice.

What if I have recently entered the country or have visa restrictions on my passport?

If you or you partner have recently entered this country after living abroad, or have entry restrictions on your passport, you may not be eligible to receive Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit. We will give you advice about this when you claim.

How will my benefit be paid?

Council Tax

We will take your Council Tax Benefit from your Council Tax bill.

Second Adult Rebate

We will take your Second Adult Rebate from your Council Tax bill.

Housing Benefit

If you are a council tenant, we will pay the benefit to your rent account. If you are a private tenant, we will pay your benefit into your bank account. We can also pay it direct to your landlord's bank account.

When will my benefit start?

We will normally pay your benefit from the Monday after you make your claim to us or to the Department for Work and Pensions (for Income Support or JSA (IB)).

If you are in doubt, send your claim form to us straight away (even if you are waiting for supporting documents - information we need to process your claim, such as bank statements, proof of rent or wageslips), or you may lose benefit. You should also send us your claim form if you are still waiting to hear about your Income Support or JSA (IB).

How long will my benefit last?

We will pay your benefit until you are no longer entitled to benefit or if your circumstances change. When this happens, we will look at your claim again.

What do I do if my circumstances change?

If your circumstances change at any time, tell us straight away in writing. If you are on Income Support or JSA (IB), you must also tell the Department for Work and Pensions.

Typical examples of changes in circumstances are if:

- you change address;
- your rent changes;
- the number of people living with you changes;
- your income or any member of your household's income changes;
- you stop getting Income Support or JSA (IB); or
- your income or savings change.

If you delay telling us about a change in your circumstances you will have to repay any benefits we overpay you (see the leaflet '**Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit – a guide to overpayments and debt**' on our website www.benefit-leaflets.org, for more information).

What if I do not agree with the amount of benefit I am given?

You should contact us if you would like us to explain how we worked out your benefit. You must do this within one month of the date on the decision letter. We will send you an explanation for our decision as soon as possible.

If you do not agree with the amount of benefit we award you, you should write to us within one month of the date on the decision letter, asking us to look at our decision again.

If you have already asked us for an explanation, you will have one month from the date on the decision letter plus the time we took to send you the explanation, to ask us to look at our decision again. If you delay longer than this, we will normally only change our decision from the date you wrote to us.

If you still disagree with our decision you can appeal to an independent tribunal. You can ask us for a form. (See the leaflet '**What to do if you think the decision about your Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit is wrong**' on our website www.benefit-leaflets.org, for more information.)

Where can I get more advice?

If you want more help or advice, contact us. (You can find our contact details on your Council Tax bill.)

HM Revenue & Customs

You can contact HM Revenue & Customs by:

- phoning 0845 3003900; or
- visiting their website at: www.hmrc.gov.uk

Independent advice

If you need independent advice, contact your local citizens advice bureau. You can find their phone number and other local advice agencies in the phone book, at your local library or by contacting us.

Other formats

You can get the information in this booklet in large print, in Braille and in other languages. There is also an audio version on-line. Visit our website www.benefit-leaflets.org for more information.

