
Housing Benefit and Starting your Tenancy

Information for applicants and new tenants

This helpsheet outlines important information if you intend to claim Housing Benefit for your new tenancy as well as how Housing Benefit will be calculated now and in the future which may affect your decision to rent a home. It will not apply if you are a self funder.

If you are going to claim Housing Benefit you should apply in writing to your local council benefits section as soon as possible, ideally before you move to ensure you get maximum help.

I have heard about the Bedroom Tax, what does this mean?

If you are over the minimum pension age you will not be affected by the bedroom tax. If you are below minimum retirement age and moving into a property, which the rules deem is bigger than you need, you may find that your Housing Benefit is reduced from the start of your tenancy.

Your Housing Benefit will be reduced by a set percentage depending on how many 'spare' bedrooms you have – for example most Hanover residents in a 2 bedroom property would have one spare room which would mean a 14% reduction in their housing benefit. There are some exceptions to this rule and you can contact our Financial Rights Team on 0800 023 4477 for more information.

Claiming Housing Benefit for two homes

This applies to all tenancies where you need Housing Benefit to help pay your rent. You can usually only receive Housing Benefit for the home you are living in, but in some situations you may be able to get Housing Benefit paid for two homes at once.

You may be able to get this if:

- You have moved into your new home but you still have to pay rent for the notice period on your old home
- You (or someone who lives with you permanently) have a disability and you are waiting for adaptations to be carried out in the property you are due to move into

To get Housing Benefit paid on both your old and new properties you must:

- Have already moved into your new home or be awaiting adaptations. You cannot get Housing Benefit for your new home whilst you are still living in the old one;
- Be in a situation where you cannot avoid paying rent for both properties. For example, if you delay in telling your old landlord that you are moving, having agreed a tenancy start date with Hanover, the extra notice period that you will have to pay for could probably have been avoided, and Housing Benefit will not pay for this.
- Claim as soon as possible, preferably before you move in or within the first week, to have the best chance of getting the full 4 weeks covered and your new claim started from the correct date.

Housing Benefit will only be paid on both properties for up to four weeks. If your old home is let to a new tenant during this time, payment for that property will end. Notice periods of more than 4 weeks will only receive payment for the first 4 weeks.

If you have a disability and are waiting for adaptations to be completed on your new home you may be able to get Housing Benefit both on your current home and your new home for up to four weeks before you move in but you must meet certain conditions.

Please note that if you transfer from one Hanover property to another but still have to pay for a notice period on the home you have left, you may not be able to claim an overlap of Housing Benefit for both properties however it is worth contacting your local authority or the Financial Rights Team for advice.

When you cannot claim Housing Benefit on two homes

It may be difficult for you to move into your new home by the date the tenancy starts. You may be waiting for a loan to help with the costs of moving. Or you simply want some time to arrange removals or for decoration and new furnishings. You cannot claim Housing Benefit for two homes at the same time in these circumstances.

Usually, if you delay moving in, Housing Benefit can only be paid from the Monday after you apply. It is therefore important not to delay moving if you are relying on Housing Benefit to help pay the rent for your new home.

What if I cannot afford the extra?

Housing Benefit is intended to help you pay your rent, but any amount it does not cover remains your responsibility. Non payment will be treated as rent arrears which could ultimately result in you losing your home. If you are concerned that you cannot afford to pay your rent now or possibly in the future, Hanover will be happy to discuss options and try to assist.

What about my Council Tax?

You can only ever receive Council Tax Reduction for the home you are living in, even if you have moved and are still legally responsible for paying council tax on your old home. You may be able to get an exemption for the empty property and not have to pay council tax on it for up to 6 months. Contact your local Council Tax department for more information.

Your estate manager can give more information and assistance or contact the Financial Rights Team on 0800 023 4477.