

Benefit News

Issue 19

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We know that everyone's life changes so here is a list of the kind of things you need to tell us about:

- ⇒ You or your partner starting work or changing jobs
- ⇒ You or your partner's pay or working hours changing
- ⇒ You start to get Tax Credits or the amount you get changes
- ⇒ You start or stop claiming another benefit or the amount you get changes
- ⇒ Your savings going up or down (if they are more than £6,000)
- ⇒ Your child leaving school, education or training or starting work
- ⇒ Someone moving into or out of your home
- ⇒ You move home, even for a short time
- ⇒ You or you partner go abroad, even for a short time

It's down to you to tell us about changes in your life

**Just call St Albans District Council on
01727 866100 and ask for the Benefits Section**

You can tell us about any changes by;

⇒ **Phoning us**

01727 866100 and ask for the Benefits Section

⇒ **E-mailing us**

benefits@stalbans.gov.uk

⇒ **Visiting our website**

www.stalbans.gov.uk/living/benefits - click on 'Contacting the Benefits Section', complete and submit an e-form

⇒ **Visiting our offices**

We are open Monday -Thursday 8:45am – 5pm and Friday 8:45am – 4:30pm

⇒ **Writing to us**

Benefits Section, St Albans District Council, Civic Centre, St Peters Street, St Albans, Herts. AL1 3JE

Benefits Helpdesk performance

We continue to monitor the waiting times of callers to our helpdesk to ensure that we are meeting the target of seeing 80% of customers within 15 minutes of them taking a ticket for the benefits service. The latest results can be seen in the table below.

Month	Average Waiting Time	% of customers seen within 15 mins.
Dec. 07	3 mins 10 secs	97%
Nov.'07	5 mins 03 secs	95%
Oct. '07	5 mins 16 secs	93%
Sept.'07	5 mins 35 secs	92%

If you are unable to visit the Benefits Service Helpdesk at the Council Offices or would prefer to discuss your claim in private we can accommodate you in various ways.

Did you know?



WE CAN

arrange for a benefits officer to call on you in your home to help you complete a form and see your documents



WE CAN

arrange a private appointment for you with a benefits officer at the Council Offices



WE CAN

do a teleclaim – this is an easier way to claim Housing and / or Council Tax Benefit

Just call us on 01727 819403 and we'll do the rest

Starting Work?

Did you know you can carry on getting your rent and council tax paid for up to 4 weeks?

Extended payments are a continuation of your Housing and/or Council Tax Benefit for up to four weeks when you start a new job or increase your working hours.

You can get an extended payment if;

- you or your partner start working at least 16 hours per week, or increase the hours worked to at least 16 hours per week, and
- this change in working hours is expected to last for at least five weeks, and
- you or your partner have been receiving Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Support continuously for at least 26 weeks, and it will now be ending, and
- You are under 60; and
- You are still liable to pay rent, Council Tax or both.

To claim you just need to tell us and the Job Centre about your job or increased hours within **one month** of the change. We will do the rest.

Also, just because you are working or have increased your hours, it doesn't mean that you can't still get help with your rent and or council tax.

Use our 'on-line' Benefit Calculator at www.stalbans.gov.uk/living/benefits to find out how much benefit you may be able to get.



If you prefer, you can telephone us and we can give you an idea of how much help you may still be able to claim.

Return to Work Credit

If you have been getting Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance or Income Support because of a disability for at least **13 weeks** and you start a job which is more than 16 hours a week and is expected to last for 5 weeks then you may be entitled to a **Return to Work Credit**.

This is a non-taxable payment of **£40 per week** which is paid by the Department of Work and Pensions and you can receive this for up to **52 weeks**. We will **ignore** this payment when we calculate whether you would still be entitled to Housing or Council Tax Benefit.

To receive this payment the salary from your new job must be less than **£15,000** per year and you must make an application within 5 weeks of starting work. You can also apply for this payment if you start self-employment.

For more information about the **Return to Work Credit** please contact your **Local JobCentre Plus Office**.



ALL Benefit fraud is a crime, break the law and you face a criminal record

NO IFS, NO BUTS.

We're tracking benefit thieves in St Albans in every way we can.

We now have access to more ways of tracking down and identifying benefit thieves:

Through Government computer systems that compare information to check if people are entitled to their benefit.

Through HM Revenue & Customs who hold information about people claiming social security benefits, including details about tax credits, income, investments/savings, employers and national insurance contributions.

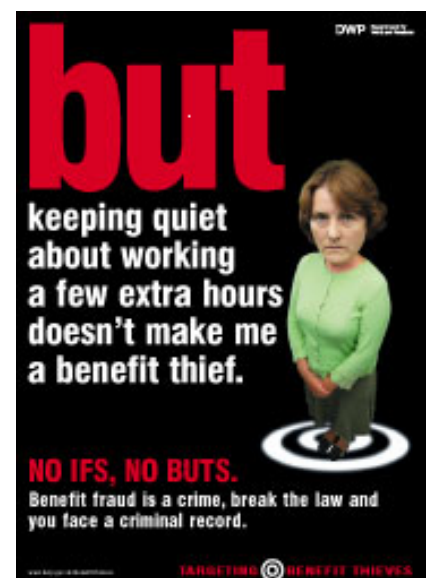
Through banks we can apply for information about people's bank accounts & investments.

Through household utility companies (such as fuel and water companies) where we can apply for information about people's bills.

NO IFS, NO BUTS.

We're targeting benefit thieves with a full range of penalties. People who commit benefit theft face:

- ★ having to pay all the money back
- ★ a taped interview under caution
- ★ prosecution
- ★ a prison sentence
- ★ a fine
- ★ a criminal record
- ★ being named in the local press



Local Housing Allowance in the Private Rented Sector.



From **7th April 2008**, Housing Benefit in the Private Rented Sector is changing due to the introduction of something called Local Housing Allowance.

Local Housing Allowance is a new way of working out new claims for Housing Benefit for tenants renting accommodation from a private landlord. It also affects tenants already getting Housing Benefit who change address or have a break in their Housing benefit after the 7th April 2008.

If you live in council or housing association accommodation or other Social Housing then the Local Housing Allowance will not apply to you.

Local Housing Allowance will make it easier for tenants and landlords to find out in advance how much rent could be covered by way of Housing Benefit.

This is because a tenant would be entitled to a Local Housing Allowance based upon the size of their family and this allowance will be used to work out their Housing Benefit and not the actual rent paid.

There are no changes to the other entitlement rules for Housing Benefit – the amount you will get will still be based upon your income, savings etc

Why is Local Housing Allowance being introduced?

Local Housing Allowance gives tenants more choice in where they live and it's fairer too. This is because with Local Housing Allowance:

- You will be entitled to the same amount of benefit as people with the same circumstances as you.
- You can find out what your Local Housing Allowance is **before** you rent a property.
- If your rent is less than your Local Housing Allowance then you can keep part of the difference (up to a maximum of £15 per week).
- You will usually get your benefit paid to you. It is then up to you to pay the rent to your landlord.
- We will be able to assess your claim quicker as we will not need to refer your rent to the Rent Service.

To find out more about Local Housing Allowance you can visit our web site at www.stalbans.gov.uk/living/benefits or telephone us on (01727) 819459.

Do you need more information about Housing and Council Tax Benefits ?



St Albans District Council has been working in partnership with other local authorities to produce a series of leaflets to help make Housing and Council Tax Benefit more accessible to all and easier to understand.

These leaflets are now available and cover many aspects of claiming Housing and Council Tax Benefit.

You can obtain a copy of any of these leaflets by calling in to the District Council Offices or Harpenden Town Hall or by telephoning the Benefits Service on 01727 819460 and we will send the information out to you.

These leaflets are also available to download from our website at www.stalbans.gov.uk

The leaflets that are available are listed below;

1. How to claim benefit
2. Backdating your benefit claim
3. Change of circumstances
4. Non-dependants
5. Help with child-care costs
6. Self-employed benefit claims
7. Student benefit claims
8. Overpayment of benefit
9. Extended benefit payment
10. Discretionary housing payment
11. Benefit on two homes
12. Temporary absence from your home
13. Home visits
14. Discussing your benefit claim with other people
15. How to appeal

Your Needs



If you are hard of hearing or speech impaired and you use a textphone, you can contact us on 01727 819570.

If you would like to receive this newsletter or any of our leaflets in another format, such as large print, Braille or audio, please call 01727 819460.