1. As part of the changes to the welfare system, an amendment to the Housing Benefit Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 introduced size criteria into Housing Benefit for working age claimants in the social rented sector from 20 February 2017.

2. The Social Sector Size Criteria are used to decide the extent to which properties are under occupied so that an appropriate percentage reduction can be made to the eligible rent when calculating entitlement to Housing Benefit.

3. The amount of Housing Benefit payable to working-age Housing Executive and Housing Association tenants who are under-occupying their properties is restricted based on the number of bedrooms their household requires.

4. The Northern Ireland Executive allocated £91 million until 31 March 2020 to mitigate against this change.

5. A Welfare Supplementary Payment is available for anyone impacted by the Social Sector Size Criteria to mitigate the impact until 31 March 2020.

6. During the debate on the mitigation scheme Regulations, Minister Givan committed the Department to providing biannual reports on the application of Regulation 2(2) of The Housing Benefit (Welfare Supplementary Payment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017.

7. At 30 September 2017 there was a caseload of 34,114 Welfare Supplementary Payments.
8. In the six month period 1 April to 30 September 2017 a total of 35 Welfare Supplementary Payments ceased due to application of Regulation 2(2) of The Housing Benefit (Welfare Supplementary Payment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017.

9. This provision ceases entitlement if a customer moves property and continues to under-occupy by at least the same number of bedrooms. An exemption to this provision is available for customers when the move has been allocated Management Transfer Status.¹

HOUSEHOLDS NOT AFFECTED BY THE SOCIAL SECTOR SIZE CRITERIA

10. Customers will not be affected by the Social Sector Size Criteria if:

a. they, or their partner, have reached state pension age;

b. they live in supported accommodation;

c. they live in non-mainstream accommodation, for example, houseboats, caravans or mobile homes;

d. they live in a shared co-ownership scheme; or

e. they live in temporary accommodation.

RATES OF REDUCTION

11. Households that are considered to be under-occupying their accommodation will see a reduction in their housing benefit of:

a. 14% of the total eligible rent for under-occupation by one bedroom; or

b. 25% of the total eligible rent for under-occupation by two or more bedrooms.

¹ The Housing Benefit (Welfare Supplementary Payment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017.

Further Information

There is information on all aspects of Welfare Changes and Universal Credit available at www.nidirect.gov.uk/welfarechanges

Available in alternative formats

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