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 with effect 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 now restricted based on the number of bedrooms their household requires.

**WELFARE SUPPLEMENTARY PAYMENTS**

4. The Northern Ireland Executive allocated a total of £91 million to mitigate the impact of the Social Sector Size Criteria until 31 March 2020.

5. A Welfare Supplementary Payment is available to anyone impacted by the Social Sector Size Criteria. Payments are equivalent to the amount of the deduction and will normally be payable until 31 March 2020.

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

7. Regulation 2(2) operates to end a person’s entitlement to a Welfare Supplementary Payment if they move property and continue to under-occupy by at least the same number of bedrooms. Regulation 2(2) of the mitigation regulations does not apply where a property is allocated to a claimant under one of the management transfer scheme categories, commonly referred to as “Management Transfer Status”.

• During the period 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2018 a total of 54 Welfare Supplementary Payments came to an end as a result of the application of regulation 2(2) of the mitigation regulations and
• at 30 September 2018, a total of 32,378 individuals were in receipt of Welfare Supplementary Payments to mitigate the impact of the Social Sector Size Criteria.

• At 30 September 2018, a total of 835 individuals were in receipt of Universal Credit administrative payments to mitigate the impact of the Social Sector Size Criteria.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAYMENTS

8. Universal Credit was introduced in Northern Ireland for new claimants with effect from 27 September 2017. In the absence of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Department has not been able to bring forward the appropriate legislation to provide Welfare Supplementary Payments for Universal Credit claimants.

9. However the Department has introduced administrative payments, which are similar to Welfare Supplementary Payments, to ensure that mitigation payments are made to eligible Universal Credit claimants. The Social Sector Size Criteria policy also applies to administrative payments made to eligible Universal Credit claimants.

• During the period 27 September 2017 to 30 September 2018 no administrative payments came to an end as a result of the application of this policy and

HOUSEHOLDS NOT AFFECTED BY THE SOCIAL SECTOR SIZE CRITERIA

10. Claimants 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.

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