



**Shetland Islands
Council**



This leaflet is a reproduction of the **Housing Options Guide – Housing Benefit** section.

If you would like this information produced in any other format, please telephone 01595 744360 or email housing@shetland.gov.uk.

Useful Links

Housing Benefit
www.shetland.gov.uk/benefits/

Citizens' Advice Bureau
www.cas.org.uk/

Citizens' Advice Bureau Advice Guide
www.adviceguide.org.uk/scotland

Housing Benefit

The Housing Benefit Scheme in Shetland

Most people who rent their homes, and are on incomes that are significantly below average, are entitled to receive the Government rent rebate called Housing Benefit. Over 1,000 households in Shetland - renting houses from the Council, Hjaltland Housing Association and private landlords - have their rents paid in part or in full by Housing Benefit.

The Housing Benefit Scheme in Shetland is administered by experienced Council staff at:

Shetland Islands Council
Executive Services Department
Finance
Charlotte House
Commercial Road
Lerwick
ZE1 0LX

Telephone: 01595 744682
Fax: 01595 744661
Website: www.shetland.gov.uk/benefits

You can access information on benefits at www.shetland.gov.uk/benefits.

It is particularly important that anyone interested in claiming Housing Benefit entitlement should contact the Council's Housing Benefit staff *as soon as possible*, because there is a risk that the claimant may not be entitled to receive Housing Benefit for any rent paid before the Council was informed of the claim. Potential claimants are therefore strongly encouraged to visit the Council's Charlotte House office to register their claim and discuss the Housing Benefit claim procedure. Claimants visiting the office will be seen right away by staff.

The Housing Benefit claim procedure

Every Housing Benefit claimant must submit and sign a detailed application form. Council staff are happy to explain the application to applicants and to help them complete the form.

Verification of the applicant's financial resources is essential, so evidence of both income and capital will be required to support the answers given in the application form. This means that payslips, bank statements, benefit books and so on must be made available for inspection by Council staff. However, as long as the application form is submitted the claim can be made payable in full from the submission date, even though the evidence on the applicant's resources may take some time to produce and be verified.

It is also worth noting that a single application form is used to claim Council Tax Benefit as well as Housing Benefit, which means that the end result of the application process could result in the applicant receiving *both* Benefits.

The Council staff then work out how much Housing Benefit is due according to the answers to 4 questions:

- how much money the applicant has coming in from his or her earnings and any other income *and* from his or her partner's earnings and income.
- how much money the applicant and, where applicable, partner have saved or invested (no Housing Benefit will be paid where savings amount to £16,000 or more and it will usually be reduced on a sliding scale if savings are over £6,000).
- the applicant's personal circumstances e.g. the numbers of dependants living in the same household, whether the applicant is disabled etc).
- the *maximum rent level* which the Housing Benefit system will support (see below for explanation).

The Maximum Rent Level

If the applicant is a Council or Hjaltland Housing Association tenant then the rent can be paid in full by Housing Benefit. However, if the applicant is a private tenant and the rent charged is considered by the Rent Service to be too high then the Housing Benefit paid out will be *less* than the rent charged.

It is particularly important therefore that those who are thinking of renting a private property should contact the Council's Housing Benefit staff to find out what level of rent is likely to be met by Housing Benefit. Staff can either make an informal calculation on the basis of their indicative rent levels for similar properties or they can give a precise 'pre-tenancy determination'. However, the determination, which usually takes 3 days to reach, can only be given where the landlord has given written consent. Both the informal and formal advice given by Council staff will give the Housing Benefit applicant a clear idea of whether he or she will be able to afford the rent asked, after any contribution from Housing Benefit has been allowed for.

Restrictions on Housing Benefit for single, under 25 years olds

It is important to note the restrictions have been imposed by Government on the amount of Housing Benefit which can be given to single persons under 25 years old renting privately.

Young single persons on low incomes are therefore advised to speak to Housing Benefit staff before accepting any offer of rented accommodation in Shetland.

Further information

Detailed information and advice on all the assessment procedures for Housing Benefit will be willingly given by the Council's trained staff at:

Shetland Islands Council
Executive Services Department
Finance
Charlotte House
Commercial Road
Lerwick
ZE1 0LX

Telephone: 01595 744682

Fax: 01595 744661

Website: www.shetland.gov.uk/benefits

Right to appeal

Any Housing Benefit applicant has a right to ask the Council to review their decision, if the applicant is not satisfied with it. Any such request must be made within one month of the date of determination. The Shetland Citizens Advice Bureau is also happy to help with any appeal.

Other Services

Shetland Islands Citizens Advice Bureau (SICAB) can also make an informal calculation of the level of housing benefit that may be available. They also offer to undertake a review with the individual of the whole benefit system in order to try to increase the income available to that person. Scottish Power carries out free 'Benefits Health Checks'. This is a free, quick and easy way to find out if you are getting all the benefits you are entitled to. Call Scottish Power free on 0800 072 9009.