

WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP RESIDENTS

Local authorities in Surrey are working closely with the voluntary, community and faith sector to ensure that residents get the advice, information and support they need to prepare for the benefit changes.

- Get WISE is a new advice and information service for Surrey residents affected by the welfare benefits changes funded by Surrey County Council (www.getwisesurrey.org.uk).
- Surrey's 14 Citizens Advice Bureaux respond to over 100,000 requests for advice every year, including welfare benefits, debt, housing and employment support (www.citizensadvice.surrey.org.uk).
- Volunteer-run Hubs in Epsom, Redhill and Woking provide information and advice to disabled residents, including welfare benefit information. Five more Hubs are due to open in Surrey this year (www.scpp.org.uk).
- Housing teams in District and Borough Councils are supporting residents to find appropriate and affordable housing, including help with mutual exchanges or finding lodgers.
- Emergency support is available to residents through the Surrey Local Assistance Scheme (www.surreycc.gov.uk), through District and Borough council tax hardship payments, and food banks (www.trusselltrust.org) throughout Surrey.
- SurreySave Credit Union provides access to affordable credit for financially squeezed families (www.surreysave.co.uk).
- Job Clubs operate in most parts of Surrey, helping residents to access job opportunities (www.gbjobclubs.org).



HELP FOR RESIDENTS IN NEED OF SUPPORT

Residents can get free welfare benefits advice from:

- The Department for Work and Pensions, www.gov.uk
- Get WISE, www.getwisesurrey.org.uk, Tel: 0300 030 9432, Text: 07561 392 818
- their local Citizens Advice Bureau, www.citizensadvice.surrey.org.uk
- their local District or Borough Council
- Surrey County Council, www.surreycc.gov.uk search for 'financial advice and benefits'.

To find out more about the changes to welfare benefits

- Department for Work and Pensions, visit www.dwp.gov.uk search for 'reform toolkit'.

This guide was published on behalf of the Leaders of Surrey's 12 councils, made up of the County Council and 11 District and Borough Councils.

SURREY
LEADERS' GROUP



GUIDE TO WELFARE REFORMS FOR ELECTED MEMBERS IN SURREY



THE GOVERNMENT IS INTRODUCING THE BIGGEST CHANGES TO THE WELFARE BENEFITS SYSTEM FOR OVER 60 YEARS. THIS GUIDE EXPLAINS THE MAIN REFORMS AND HOW THEY MAY AFFECT RESIDENTS IN SURREY.

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The welfare benefit changes are intended to simplify benefits and tax credits and increase the financial incentives to work. Changes are being introduced in Surrey from April 2013, however some residents will not be affected until 2017. Some households will be affected by multiple changes, for instance changes to the level of council tax and rent they are required to pay.



THE MAIN CHANGES TO WELFARE BENEFITS

LOCALISED COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT

The Government has ended the national council tax benefit scheme and now requires local councils to implement their own schemes. Funding has been reduced by 10%, with restrictions placed on how councils can allocate the funding. As a result, some residents may experience a reduction in their support that is greater than 10%. Since April 2013, each District and Borough Council in Surrey has agreed a local support scheme after consultation with residents. Further details of the local scheme in your area can be found on your District or Borough Council website.

UNDER OCCUPANCY

Council and Housing Association tenants who live in a property that is considered to have one or more spare bedrooms have had their housing benefit reduced from April 2013. This applies only to working age tenants, not pensioners. The reduction for one spare bedroom is 14% of eligible rent; for two or more spare bedrooms, it is 25%. There are some exemptions, for instance, for foster carers and families with a disabled child. In Surrey, we estimate 3500 families have been affected by under occupancy.

LOCAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME

From April 2013, most of the funding for Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants has been devolved to unitary and county tier local authorities. Surrey County Council, working with Citizens Advice Bureau and Surrey Reuse Network, has set up a new Local Assistance Scheme for Surrey residents with nowhere else to turn in an emergency. The scheme provides support for essential needs such as food and household white goods. We estimate 7,000 residents will use the scheme this year.

PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE PAYMENT (PIP)

Disability Living Allowance is gradually being replaced in Surrey from June 2013 by Personal Independence Payments for disabled people aged 16-64. PIP provides help towards the daily living and mobility costs of disabled people and is not means tested. People receiving DLA now will have to apply for PIP and be assessed for eligibility before 2017. Over 32,000 Surrey residents claim DLA, and estimates are 7,500 could lose entitlement to PIP following assessment.



BENEFIT CAP

From 15 July 2013, the Benefit Cap will be introduced in Surrey. There will be a limit on the amount of benefits a non-working household can receive. If the claimant is a single person their benefits (including payment for rent) will be limited to a maximum of £350 per week. A family will be limited to a maximum of £500 per week. Households with someone in work and entitled to working tax credits, or in receipt of certain disability benefits, are exempt. In Surrey, we estimate around 550 households, mainly families, will be affected by the Benefit Cap.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Universal Credit is a single, monthly payment that will replace a wide range of existing benefits and credits such as jobseekers allowance, housing benefit, income support, child tax credits and working tax credits. It will normally be paid monthly directly to one person in the household. Following pilots elsewhere in the country, Universal Credit will be introduced gradually in Surrey from as early as October 2013.

BENEFIT RISES CAPPED AT 1%

Most rises in working age benefits (excluding pensions, disability and carer's benefits) will be capped at 1% until April 2016. With inflation rising by around 2.5% per year, this will mean a real term drop in income for anyone claiming benefits.

