



Cuts and changes

The future of supported living

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Looking at the impact of the Government's proposals

The introduction of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) in April 2008, heralded a sea of change in the way that Housing Benefit was administered. Although intended to increase responsibility and place choice firmly in the hands of tenants, LHA has not been universally welcomed, particularly by people with a disability who have often argued that LHA does not adequately account for individual complex needs or micro local housing market variations.

In the June 2010 Budget and the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Government announced a range of proposals

aimed at curbing Housing Benefit expenditure that will be introduced between 2011 and 2013, triggering much concerned reaction.

In this **Issues Paper**, Golden Lane Housing (GLH) looks at the impact (both positive and negative) of the recent and proposed changes to the Housing Benefit system, particularly LHA, on people in supported living housing. Furthermore, GLH proposes new ways to continue offering the choice, independence and flexibility that supported living provides, through its vision of the **Future of Supported Living**.

LHA - Who it applies to

LHA is a flat rate allowance based on the number of bedrooms required by the household and the area you live in.

LHA is applicable to all tenants who live in private rented accommodation (including tenants of charities which do not meet the criteria for 'supported housing'), who since April 2008 have made a new Housing Benefit claim or have changed address. It does not apply to tenants of the local authority or registered social landlords, including those under protected tenancies.

Proposed

Changes announced, which were primarily focussed on the LHA, included:

- 1 The introduction of absolute caps so that LHA weekly rates cannot exceed £250 for a one bedroom property; £290 for a two bedroom property; £340 for a three bedroom property; £400 for a four bedroom property. From April 2011 for new claimants and current claimants from January 2012 onwards.
- 2 The removal of the five bedroom LHA rate so that the maximum level is for a four bedroom property. April 2011.
- 3 The shared room rate will be increased from 25 to 35 years old from April 2012.
- 4 From April 2013 LHA rates will be linked to CPI.
- 5 From April 2014 the Universal Credit will be introduced.
- 6 Setting LHA rates at the 30th percentile of rents in each Broad Rental Market Area rather than the median. New claimants from April 2011 and current claimants from January 2012 onwards.
- 7 The removal of £15 weekly Housing Benefit excess that some customers can receive under the LHA arrangements. April 2011.
- 8 To include an additional bedroom within the size criteria used to assess Housing Benefit claims in the private rented sector where a disabled person, or someone with a long term health condition, has a proven need for overnight care and this is provided by a non-resident carer. April 2011.

These proposals were laid as statutory instruments on 30th November in the Housing Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 2010. The longer term Housing Benefit measures announced in the June 2010 Budget, to come into effect from April 2013, will require primary legislation.

Impact of changes

There has been much publicity and disquiet about the impact of some of the changes to LHA, ...

... particularly the **absolute cap** affecting those in central London. But the real impact of the changes have much more far reaching consequences, particularly for people with a disability when looked at alongside the wider context of national housing shortages and stunted development in the social housing sector as a result of reduced capital grant funding.

Removal of the 5 bed LHA rate will likely have a profound effect on families living with a child with a disability. GLH predicts that families are likely to seek alternative housing for their child with a disability at an earlier stage to alleviate increased pressures on family space in the home and prevent sibling conflict. Alongside a trend towards children with a disability leaving home earlier, this will cause an influx of younger people to the housing market.

People under 35 entering the housing market will be hard hit by changes to the **shared room rate threshold** and will be given little opportunity other than to share. The impact of enforced sharing on people with certain behavioural issues could be profound, for this reason it is vital that new supported living services being modelled reflect the need for individual personal spaces and there are steps to prevent retrograde moves towards high density shared housing.

Furthermore, compounded by reductions in support funding, GLH is very concerned about incompatible individuals being 'placed' together with little regard to individual choice.

Setting LHA rates at the **30th percentile** of rents, linking to CPI and other cuts to the value of LHA means that vulnerable people with a disability will increasingly be pushed to live within areas that may not be of their choosing, thus it will be all the more important that any housing provided is not only good quality and comes with adequate security, but that landlord services adequately take account of the challenges this might present – for example through the response to repairs or working with tenants when issues arise.

In addition personal support may increasingly need to take account of individual's desires to remain connected to their support networks and establish new support networks by spending more time in communities not necessarily proximate to a person's home.

GLH predicts that one of the most likely cultural changes is that individuals will increasingly 'top up' their rent using wages, savings or other benefits in order to obtain housing that truly meets their personal needs. This cultural shift will necessarily involve considerable work with support providers, especially where individuals or families expectations are that the full cost of housing will be met by Housing Benefit.

The future of supported living

It is GLH's view that housing demand will only be met by an increased role of the private rented sector but GLH recognises the challenges, fear and trepidation this may cause many individuals or families with a disability. As such, GLH has enhanced its work with the private rented sector to ensure people with a disability can access supported living housing in a way that they feel confident, ensuring sufficient safeguards are put in place that give individuals the choice, independence and opportunities they have a right to expect.



Providing a quality home around which individuals with a learning disability can build their lives.

GLH's long term view: Great Tenants a service helping people with a learning disability access the private rented sector.

GLH believes that people with a learning disability should have the same equality of access to decent quality housing, so it only works with landlords and properties that meet our rigorous standards.

Recognising that people with a disability often take a long term view when looking for somewhere to live, GLH works with individuals to find a suitable house in the private rented sector. Then, working alongside support providers and the local authority, GLH will aim to secure a long term lease to give individuals the security of tenure they want and need.

Our long term view of properties means that while we seek to find the right property for a person, where making minor adaptations is necessary GLH works with the property owner to ensure these are done professionally and where necessary put back to the original condition at the end of the tenancy.

While financial pressures will push more and more people to share, GLH knows the importance of working with individuals and small groups and responding to specific needs.

If you know of individuals or groups of people with learning disabilities looking for rented housing, please get in touch and GLH will see if we can work within the private rented sector to find a housing solution.

If you would like to discuss what is in this issue paper or enquire about our services please contact us:
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