



## Welcome

**Welcome to our latest edition of Landlord Links newsletter from the Council's Benefit Service covering the latest news and developments in Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowance.**



It has been announced that Universal Credit will be launched across the three Job Centres in the Telford & Wrekin Borough on 1 June 2015.

Universal Credit will replace Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowance for certain people renting in either the private or social sector by combining a number of state benefits into one single payment.

Whilst the numbers affected in the first few months at least will be low, I feel it is important to give landlords as much information as possible about this major change to housing benefit and how it will affect them and their tenants.

I have therefore asked the Department for Work and Pensions, who will be administering Universal Credit to attend a forum on 11 May at which they will be giving an overview of the Universal Credit scheme, and taking questions from landlords. Please see the article on Universal Credit for more information about the forums and details of how you can register your place at the event. I look forward to seeing as many landlords as possible at these sessions.

Also included in this newsletter are two articles giving more information on some new services for landlords provided by the Council – the landlord accreditation scheme and the on-line letting agency, Telford HomeFinder. As part of the accreditation scheme landlords who have tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit receive access to the on-line Housing Benefit portal. The portal enables landlords to see details of any Housing Benefit claims paid to them on their tenant's behalf. This includes the latest entitlement, the status of the claim including whether it is suspended, details of historic payments and allows information on latest payments to be downloaded to an excel spreadsheet. Feedback surrounding the portal has been very positive and this is just one of many benefits of the accreditation scheme.

Many of you have already signed up to receive our e-edition of the newsletter, If you haven't done so then please provide your current email address to [landlord.liaison@telford.gov.uk](mailto:landlord.liaison@telford.gov.uk)

**Lee Higgins** Benefit Service Delivery Manager



## In this edition of Landlord Links...

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## Universal Credit Forum for Landlords

### What is Universal Credit?

Universal Credit is a new benefit for people who are unemployed or on a low income, making it easier for people to start work and maintain work. It will help to ensure people are better off in work than on benefits. Universal Credit has been trialed in a number of areas of the North West of England and is now being rolled out across the whole of the UK over the next 12 months.

Universal Credit will replace 6 main working age benefits with one simple payment:

- Income Support
- Jobseekers allowance (income based)
- Employment & Support Allowance (income related)
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit

It is claimed online and paid by the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP), not the Council. It is paid monthly in a single payment to the household. Universal Credit has started to be rolled out nationally from 1 February 2015. The rollout is being carefully managed in stages and will only affect certain claimants initially. At first only single claimants without children who would have been making a new claim for Jobseekers Allowance will be able to claim Universal Credit.

The Telford & Wrekin area will start taking Universal Credit claims from 1 June 2015.

### How will Universal Credit affect landlords?

Once a claimant is awarded Universal Credit any Housing Benefit in payment will stop. If the landlord is receiving Housing Benefit direct the Council will write and tell the landlord.

For private sector tenants, the maximum Universal Credit housing element will be whichever is lower out of the actual rent charge or the Local Housing Allowance rate.

For social sector tenants, the maximum Universal Credit housing element will be their actual housing costs with a deduction for any spare bedroom(s). The housing element cannot include service charges that are not covered by Universal Credit or charges for utilities.

Universal Credit will usually be paid to the claimant, so they will need to have a suitable bank account that ideally accepts standing orders and direct debits.

A key element of Universal Credit is getting tenants to take responsibility to pay their own rent. There will be budgeting support and money management advice available to tenants, but ultimately the intention is that they will learn how to manage their own benefit payment independently. Tenants can use the Universal Credit Personal Planner to check what changes they need to make to get ready for Universal Credit.

In some circumstances tenants can apply for an Alternative Payment Arrangement. This might mean having the housing costs element of the Universal Credit sent direct to their landlord, a split payment, or a more frequent payment. Landlords can ask the DWP to consider an Alternative Payment Arrangement if a tenant has rent arrears of two months or more or there are other circumstances where the tenant genuinely can't manage their monthly payment.

### How can landlords find out more?

We will be hosting two Universal Credit Forums for landlords on Monday 11 May. At these sessions,

Universal Credit Managers from the Department for Work and Pensions will be explaining the new benefit to landlords and taking your questions on how it may affect you and your tenants.

### Social Landlords and Supported Housing Forum

9:30am – 12pm Monday 11 May

To book a place(s) on this forum please visit <http://ucsociallandlords.eventbrite.com>

### Private Landlords and Letting Agents Forum

5:30pm – 8:00pm Monday 11 May

To book a place(s) on this forum please visit <http://ucprivatelandlords.eventbrite.com>

Both sessions will be held at:  
**Telford University Campus**

The DWP has also published information for landlords including more detail on alternative payment arrangements:

Download the document, 'Universal Credit and Rented Housing' To download a copy of "Universal Credit and Rented Housing from the gov.uk website please [click here](#)



## Changes to Local Housing Allowance Rates

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates used to assess Housing Benefit are reviewed each year and any changes come into effect from 1 April.

The Valuation Office Agency updates LHA rates by either a 1% increase or the 30th percentile of local rents, whichever is the lower. In the Shropshire Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA), which Telford & Wrekin falls, the shared room and 2 bedroom rates reduced slightly whilst the other rates have had a slight increase.

More information on how LHA rates have been calculated can be found on the VOA website or by clicking on the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-local-housing-allowances-rates-broad-rental-market-areas>

### LHA rates for Telford & Wrekin Area for 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016

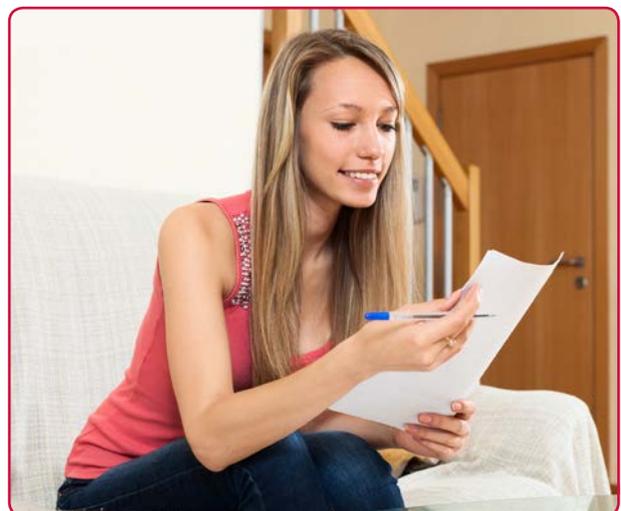
	Weekly	Monthly
Shared Rate*	£69.04	£299.17
1 Bedroom Rate	£87.41	£378.78
2 Bedroom Rate	£109.32	£473.72
3 Bedroom Rate	£128.47	£561.04
4 Bedroom Rate	£170.67	£739.57

\*Shared Accommodation Rate (applies to those in shared accommodation and most single under 35 year olds)



## Consent and Forwarding Addresses

We have started to see an increasing number of consent documents and clauses within tenancy agreements stating that a tenant gives the Council permission to provide their landlord with any future changes of address. Please note that these agreements are not binding on the Council and we will not provide forwarding addresses unless a court order is received which requires us to disclose the information.



## Overpayments

The amount of data matching that takes place between Council's and other Government Departments has increased and become more sophisticated in recent years. This means that we are finding out about an increasing number of changes to customers circumstances that have not been reported to the Council at the time they happened. As a result we have seen an increase in the number of overpayments of Housing Benefit. If you have the opportunity please remind your tenants to inform the Housing Benefit Service of any changes in their income or household circumstances. Landlords are also under an obligation to report known changes to the Council.

## Landlord Accreditation scheme

In July 2014 Telford & Wrekin Council launched our first Borough wide Landlord Accreditation scheme. This has proved very successful, with already 75 landlords and letting agents accredited.

The Council recognised that the Borough has many responsible landlords and wanted to highlight this and publish these to current or prospective tenants looking for good quality homes within the Borough. There had been government talk about mandatory accreditation and we felt a scheme tailored to our Borough would be favourable, to one imposed upon us. The scheme recognises good landlords with good quality, well managed accommodation, giving tenants peace of mind when choosing a home.

It sets out minimum safety, contractual and service delivery standards that tenants can expect when they rent accommodation. These standards are clear, understandable and readily achievable.

As part of the scheme landlords are required to attend a 1 day information session which will

bring them up to date with a number of recent changes both on a local and national level, and the opportunity to discuss concerns or tenants with officers. Feedback on sessions already held has been very positive from landlords.

There are a number of benefits for landlords joining the scheme, these include the ability to advertise their properties on the Telford Homefinder website, to work with the Council to find tenants for their vacant properties, access to the Councils Tenancy Relations Service, who provide advice on all legal issues relating to tenancies including notices and court action, three free passes to the Council's recycling centres and access to the Housing Benefit Landlord Portal, this allows landlords to check online the housing benefit payments due in respect of their tenants. The cost to join the scheme is £50 annually.

For more details on the scheme or to complete an application form visit [www.telfordhomefinder.co.uk](http://www.telfordhomefinder.co.uk) and click on the landlords tab or telephone Telford Homefinder on 01952 381940.



## Telford HomeFinder

Following the closure of the Choose your Home scheme in July 2014, Telford & Wrekin Council launched Telford HomeFinder, an in house, on-line letting agency. We recognised that because of changes to the allocation of social housing in the Borough, the Private Rented Sector would become more pivotal in providing much needed accommodation. The intention of the agency is to offer high quality, accredited landlord accommodation to anyone looking for a property in the Borough including offering, viable, housing options for those in housing need.

Telford HomeFinder has been launched in conjunction with the Telford & Wrekin Landlord Accreditation Scheme. All landlords or letting agents and each individual property registered with the scheme has to meet the Council's accreditation standard. There is an

initial promotional period for accredited landlords and letting agents to advertise their properties free of charge until 1 May 2015, then the following tenant finder fee of £100 will be charged per property. This will include a property inspection, a tenancy agreement and credit check where required. Letting Agents will be able to advertise multiple properties for a monthly fee.

Since the launch of the Telford Homefinder website more than 127 accredited properties have been advertised and over 340 people have requested viewings on properties.

If you would like more information on Telford Homefinder please visit [www.telfordhomefinder.co.uk](http://www.telfordhomefinder.co.uk) or telephone Telford Homefinder on 01952 381940



## Need to get in touch with Revenues & Benefits?

Customer Contact Centre - 01952 383838  
E: [benefit.service@telford.gov.uk](mailto:benefit.service@telford.gov.uk)

Landlord Liaison  
T: 01952 383858 F: 01952 383990 E: [landlord.liaison@telford.gov.uk](mailto:landlord.liaison@telford.gov.uk)

Or write to us at:  
Revenues & Benefits Services, Telford & Wrekin  
Council, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way,  
Telford. TF3 4NT

Further information for Landlords is available at our  
website [www.telford.gov.uk/landlordbenefitinfo](http://www.telford.gov.uk/landlordbenefitinfo)

To report Benefit Fraud please ring 01952 383839  
(24 hour answer machine out of hours) or via our  
on-line form at [www.telford.gov.uk/fraud](http://www.telford.gov.uk/fraud)