

Housing Benefit Appeal leaflet

What to do if you think the decision
about your Housing
Benefit is wrong

IF YOU THINK A DECISION ABOUT COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT IS
WRONG, PLEASE SEE DETAILS ON HOW TO APPEAL ONLINE:

<https://www.harrow.gov.uk/appeals>

If you think the decision about Housing Benefit is wrong

If you do not understand the decision, you can ask us to explain it. If you think it is wrong you can ask us to look at it again.

For some decisions you can appeal to The Tribunal Service who will hear your appeal to see if the decision should be changed.

There are time limits for asking for decisions to be looked at again and for appealing. We tell you about these time limits in this leaflet.

Check what do to

Do you want more information about a decision?

Go to Section A

Do you want us to look at the decision again?

Go to Section B

Do you want to appeal against the decision?

Go to Section C

After you have made an appeal

Go to Section D

If you disagree with the tribunal's decision

Go to Section E

Other organisations that can help

Go to Section F

The Decision

When you get a decision in writing from us about Housing Benefit, you can ask us to look at it again. If we do not change our decision you may be able to appeal to The Tribunal Service.

The letter telling you about the decision will tell you if you can appeal.

If you receive a decision in writing it is usually because you have

- claimed Housing Benefit
- had a change of circumstances which affects your benefit
- been told you have to pay back benefit

There are special rules if you are not claiming the benefit yourself. For example, if you are a landlord and a decision is made about whether Housing Benefit is to be paid directly to you, or if you are a landlord and a decision is made to recover an overpayment of Housing Benefit from you.

If you are an appointee for another person you can ask us to look again at a decision about their benefit and you may be able to appeal for them. The letter telling you about the decision will tell you if you can appeal.

An appointee is someone acting for a person who cannot act for themselves.

SECTION A

Do you want more information about the decision?

You have received a letter telling you about your Housing Benefit decision. You want more information about that decision.

Contact us about the decision letter straight away

You must do this straight away because if you want us to look at the decision again, or if you want to appeal against it, you must do so within **one month** of the date on the decision letter, not the date you contact the office.

You can phone, write to or visit us.

When you contact us you have a choice:

You can ask us to explain the reasons for the decision

or

If you want more information to help you decide what to do, ask us for a written statement of reasons. We will send the statement of reasons to you as soon as possible. If after the explanation you still disagree with the decision you can

- ask us to look at it again
- appeal against the decision

If you ask for a written statement of reasons, the one month you have to ask us to look at the decision again or to appeal against it will be extended by the time we took to send the statement of reasons.

SECTION B

Do you want us to look at the decision again?

You have received a letter from us telling you about your Housing Benefit decision, or a written statement of reasons explaining the decision, or we have explained our decision and you still think it is wrong.

Let us know within **one month** of the date of the letter. If you ask for an explanation first, the one month is still counted from the date of the decision letter. If you ask for a written statement of reasons you will have one month from the date of the decision letter, plus the time we take to send you the statement of reasons.

If there are special circumstances which mean you cannot contact us within one month, we may still be able to change the decision. Tell us what the special circumstances are when you contact us.

If you ask us to look at a decision again more than one month after the date of the decision letter and you do not have special circumstances, we may still be able to change the decision, but this will usually only be from the date you wrote to us.

What happens next?

When you ask us to look at a decision again, we will check that the decision is correct. A different member of staff will do this.

If the decision is wrong

If you asked us to look at our decision again within one month, or had special circumstances which meant you could not, we will change the decision from the date of the original decision.

If you do not agree with the new decision, you can ask us to look at it again.

If you asked us to look at our decision again after one month and did not have special circumstances, the decision will usually be changed from the date you asked us on.

We will send you a letter telling you what the new decision is.

If the decision appears not to be wrong

If the decision is not changed, we will send you a letter telling you why. The letter will confirm the original decision.

The letter will tell you if you can appeal against the original decision.

If you can appeal, the **one-month** time limit starts again from the date of the letter confirming the decision.

SECTION C

Do you want to appeal against the decision?

You have received a letter from us telling you the decision, or a written statement of reasons explaining the decision, or we have explained our decision and you still think it is wrong.

The letter telling you about the decision tells you if you have the right to appeal against it.

Please complete and return pages 9, 10, 11 and 12 of this leaflet to appeal.

The Tribunals Service will decide your appeal at a tribunal hearing. The tribunal is made up of people who are not from the Local Authority.

Complete all relevant boxes on the form. You can get help from an advice centre or a solicitor.

Write down the reasons for your appeal. This is important because the tribunal does not have to look at anything you do not mention. Make sure that you sign the form. Send the form back to the office shown on your decision letter within **one month** of the date of the decision letter. Remember, if the appeal's officer finds you have been getting too much money your benefit will be reduced.

If you cannot appeal against the decision you can still ask us to look at it again. See

Section B - Do you want us to look at the decision

again? What the tribunal looks at

The tribunal can only look at the evidence, the law and the circumstances at the time we made the decision you are appealing against.

The tribunal cannot look at changes of circumstances that happened after we made the decision.

If a change of circumstances could affect your benefit or mean you could claim again, you should report it straight away. Do not wait for the appeal hearing. Contact us using the details shown on your decision letter.

Late Appeals

The Tribunals Service may not be able to accept your appeal if it is received more than one month after the date on the decision letter.

They can only accept a late appeal if there are special circumstances that caused the delay. These could be a death, a serious illness, absence abroad, a postal strike or some other special circumstance.

You should include an explanation of why you could not appeal within one month on **page 10** of the leaflet.

A legally qualified tribunal member will look at the reasons you have given for not appealing in time and will decide if your appeal can be accepted.

They will look at

- whether there were special circumstances for the delay
- the length of time since you received the decision
- whether it is in the interests of justice that your appeal is accepted, and
- whether your appeal is reasonably likely to succeed.

The Tribunals Service cannot accept a late appeal if the only reason is that you misunderstood the law, or interpretation of the law has changed since the decision was made.

Your appeal cannot be accepted if you appeal **13 months** or more after the date on the decision letter.

YOUR APPEAL

Complete this form and return it to us at the address given on your decision letter

About you

Title

Your surname

All other names

Your date of birth

National Insurance Number

Your address

Daytime telephone number

Have you arranged for someone to help you with your appeal

Their full name

Their address

Sign this box to authorise this person to act for you.

Your claim number

About the decision

Date at the top of the letter about the decision.

About your appeal

Use the space on **page 11** to say why you do not agree with the decision.

You must say why you think the decision is wrong. It is not enough to say, "I do not agree with the decision" or "the money is not enough".

The reasons you give should be like these examples

- My rent was £75 per week but you have stated it was £35 per week
- I moved into the property on 1 November not 1 December
- You have used the wrong wages to work out by benefit. I received £250 only during the Christmas week

If you are appealing against more than one decision you must say why you do not agree with each one.

If you are appealing more than one month after the decision was made, you must say why your appeal has been delayed.

Your signature

Date

If someone has been officially appointed to act for you or someone has the authority to act for you, they should sign here.

What to do now

Make sure you have said below why you do not agree with the decision.

Take or send this form to us.

It will help if you write Appeal on the front of the envelope.

Remember your appeal must reach our office within one month of the date at the top of the letter telling you about the decision.

Your Appeal

Use this space to say why you do not agree with the decision. You must say why you think the decision is wrong. Use BLOCK CAPITALS.

If you need more space, use another sheet of paper. Please put your name and NI number on any extra sheets of paper.

Make sure you have filled in all parts of this form and signed it.

Take or send this form to the address below:

***Housing Benefit Manager, Housing Benefit
Section London Borough of Harrow***

***Civic Centre
PO Box 730
Station Road
Harrow
HA1 2DU***

For Office Use:

Appeal form issued

Appeal received

Claim reconsidered

Appeals Tribunals

Tribunals are made up of up to two members neither of whom is from the Local Authority.

Tribunal members will be experts on the issues involved in your appeal.

All tribunals have a legally qualified member to help apply the law to your appeal.

Tribunals may also include someone with financial experience.

SECTION D

After you have made an appeal

After you have made an appeal we will offer you an explanation of our decision if we have not already done this. We will look at the decision again if we have not already done this.

If we agree that the original decision is wrong and the new decision is to your advantage, we will send you a new decision and your appeal will stop. If you do not agree with the new decision you can appeal against it.

If we agree that the original decision is wrong but the new decision is not to your advantage, we will send you a new decision. Your appeal will continue against the new decision. You will have another month to comment on the decision before we send your appeal to The Tribunals Service.

If we do not change the decision, we will send your appeal and an explanation of the law and facts used to make the decision, to The Tribunals Service straight away. We will also include any other relevant papers.

A copy of the appeal papers will be sent to you and your representative if you have one. Read the appeal papers very carefully. If you do not understand something, ask us, an advice centre or a solicitor to explain.

You will receive a form from The Tribunals Service. You must complete this form and send it to The Tribunals Service within **14 days** of the date the form was sent to you. **If you do not, your appeal will stop.**

The form also asks you questions about how you want your appeal to be looked at. You can choose between an **oral hearing** and a **paper hearing**. If you choose to go to an oral hearing you will be able to deal with any questions or issues that arise. People who go to their hearing usually do better than those who do not.

Oral Hearing

This is an appeal hearing which you can go to.

The tribunal may ask you questions.

You can ask questions.

You can take someone with you to represent you.

You can call witnesses to give evidence to the tribunal.

One of our representatives may be at the hearing. They may ask you questions and call witnesses.

If you choose an oral hearing but find you cannot go, you must let The Tribunals Service know straight away. You must have a good reason why you cannot go, such as illness. You may be able to arrange another date. If you do not let The Tribunals Service know you cannot go to the hearing, the tribunal may hear your appeal without you.

Oral hearings are usually open to the public, but anyone who goes to the hearing will usually be involved in the appeal. You can ask to have your appeal heard in private.

If you live abroad and want an oral hearing, let The Tribunals Service know you want to go to the hearing or want to send someone to represent you. The Tribunals Service can arrange for your appeal hearing to be

- as near as possible to the place you arrive in Great Britain
- As near as possible to your representative if you have one
- delayed until you are in Great Britain

Expenses

The Tribunals Service may pay some of your expenses for going to the tribunal, for example travel costs. If you want more information about expenses, contact The Tribunals Service office handling your appeal.

If you live abroad you will have to pay your own fares to and from Great Britain. You may be able to get expenses while you are in Great Britain and the appeal hearing is going on.

Paper Hearing

This is an appeal hearing which you do not go to.

You should use the form we will send you with the appeal papers to add any more information which you think will help your case.

Do not delay sending information as you will not be told the date of a paper hearing. The appeal will be heard and The Tribunals Service will send you the decision.

If the tribunal think they need you to go to an oral hearing they can refuse your request for a paper hearing.

If you choose a paper hearing but change your mind, you can choose to have an oral hearing. Write to The Tribunals Service straight away.

The Result

Whether you have an oral or paper hearing you will be given a decision notice explaining the tribunal's decision as soon as possible after the appeal hearing. A copy will also be sent to us. You can also ask for a statement of reasons. This gives an explanation of the tribunal's decision including the facts and law used. You must ask for a statement of reasons within **one month** of the date you are given or sent the decision notice. You must have a copy of the statement of reasons if you appeal to the Social Security Commissioners. See **if you disagree with the tribunal's decision**.

If you want a record of the appeal hearing, you can get a copy of the record of proceedings up to 6 months from the date of the hearing.

If your appeal is successful, we will usually put the decision right as soon as we receive our copy of the tribunal's decision. We may not put it right straight away if we appeal to the Social Security Commissioners.

SECTION E

If you disagree with the tribunal's decision

If you do not agree with the tribunal's decision you may be able to appeal to the Social Security Commissioners.

The Commissioners are barristers, solicitors or advocates of not less than ten years standing and are appointed by the Queen on the advice of the Lord Chancellor. They are independent of both the Department for Work and Pensions and the Local Authority.

Who can appeal to the Commissioners?

Appeals can be made by

- anyone who has already appealed to The Tribunals Service
- the Local Authority
- the Department for Work and Pensions

What can you appeal to the Commissioners about?

You can only appeal to the Commissioners on a point of law. You cannot appeal to the Commissioners about

- a question of fact
- a tribunal's findings or conclusions

How to appeal

Your decision letter from The Tribunals Service will tell you what to do if you are unhappy with the decision. Read this carefully. It tells you important time limits for your appeal. You cannot appeal unless you first get the statement of reasons for the tribunal's decision.

See **Section D – The Result**

Late Applications

You should read the statement of reasons carefully. If you think the tribunal did not apply the law correctly, you can apply for leave to appeal to the Commissioners. You must do this within **one month** of the date the statement of reasons was sent to you.

If you appeal to the Commissioners, you must send the statement of reasons with your application. If you do not, your application may not be looked at.

A legally qualified tribunal member will decide if your appeal can be sent to the Commissioners or if the appeal should be looked at again by a different tribunal.

You can ask an advice centre, solicitor or another suitable person or organisation to help with your application.

Late applications for a statement of reasons or for leave to appeal to the Commissioners can only be accepted if there are special circumstances or special reasons that caused the delay.

You will need to show why you were not able to make your request on time.

SECTION F

Other organisations that can

help Advice Centres

Advice Centres, like Citizens Advice and law centres can represent you and help you understand the reasons for decisions about Housing Benefit. They can also help you to fill in forms or to write a letter. They will sometimes go with you to the tribunal that hears your appeal.

It will help the advice centre if you show them any letters you have about the decision that you think is wrong. Trade Unions may also offer free advice to their members. They may also be able to speak for you at the tribunal that hears your appeal.

The Citizens Advice address is 4 Gayton Road, Harrow, HA1 2FB
Helpline 0808 250 5705

You can find other addresses for organisations online.

Solicitors

You may be able to get advice from a solicitor under the Legal Advice and Assistance Scheme. You can find out about this from a solicitor. But if you decide to use a solicitor, the scheme does not cover the cost of a solicitor to help you at a hearing. You cannot get any money for things like solicitor's fees from us or The Tribunals Service.

For details of solicitors and advice centres contact
Civil Legal Advice
Legal Services
Commission 4 Abbey
Orchard Street London
SW1P 2BS

Telephone: 0345 345 4 345

If you live abroad

You can ask someone in Great Britain to act for you. They may be able to get help from a solicitor under the Legal Advice and Assistance Scheme. The scheme does not cover the cost of a solicitor to help you at a hearing.