

News release



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New film highlights benefits impact on Barnet families

Hundreds of individuals and families living in council homes in Barnet can find out more about the impact that national benefits changes will have on their lives thanks to a new Barnet Homes film.

The film – ‘Benefits changes – what you need to know’ – looks at new under-occupation rules which will reduce housing benefit payments for hundreds of Barnet households from 1 April.

It sets out how people will be affected by the so-called bedroom tax and options available to them to cover any shortfall in their rent, including advice about exchanging homes and taking advantage of training courses to help them find long-term employment.

The film features a number of interviews with Barnet Homes staff along with resident Karen Hepper, who moved into a smaller home through the social landlord’s Fresh Start downsizing scheme.

The film also covers the benefit cap, expected to be introduced in Barnet later this year, along with the upcoming introduction of a single Universal Credit benefit payment which will require all benefit recipients to open a bank account. Research by Barnet Homes indicates that around one in ten council tenants in the borough do not currently have a bank account.

The film, which is available on YouTube and through the Barnet Homes website at www.barnethomes.org, supports a wide range of efforts to ensure that tenants and leaseholders are aware of the upcoming changes.

These have included 750 personal visits by Barnet Homes staff to residents thought to be under-occupying their homes, with one or two spare bedrooms under the strict new government criteria. Staff are hoping to visit every potentially affected resident – about 1,000 in total – by the end of February.

Barnet Homes has also introduced a benefits calculator on its website, enabling residents to assess the impact on their household, and has published regular items about the changes in its *athome* newsletter for residents.

Barnet Homes Chief Executive, Tracey Lees, said: “We want to ensure that all of our residents know about and understand the effect that the government’s benefits changes will have on their lives.

“We pride ourselves on supporting residents to retain their tenancies and want to do everything possible to ensure that people do not start to default on their rent payments as a result of welfare reform.

“Of course the easiest way to avoid the impact is to find work, and we’re proud of our programme of training and apprenticeships to give residents the best chance of getting into long-term employment. But we’d encourage tenants to look at other options too, such as swapping homes and downsizing or possibly taking in a lodger.”

The new film was produced with support from a number of other arm’s length management organisations (ALMOs) in London – Enfield Homes, Lewisham Homes and Hackney Homes.

It can be found at www.youtube.com/barnethomes1.

More information about welfare reform changes and related advice is available on the Barnet Homes website at www.barnethomes.org.

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Notes for Editors

Barnet Homes is part of The Barnet Group, a local authority trading company which is owned by Barnet Council and also includes an adult social care company, Your Choice Barnet.