

Written Ministerial Statement

Tuesday 12 March 2013

THE DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS

Housing Benefit reform

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Rt. Hon. Iain Duncan Smith MP): I am pleased to announce that we intend to lay amending regulations to clarify the size criteria rules for two specific groups of Housing Benefit recipient, Foster Carers and Armed Forces personnel.

People who are approved foster carers will be allowed an additional room, whether or not a child has been placed with them or they are between placements, so long as they have fostered a child, or become an approved foster carer in the last 12 months.

Adult children who are in the Armed Forces but who continue to live with parents will be treated as continuing to live at home, even when deployed on operations. This means that the size criteria rules will not be applied to the room normally occupied by the member of the Armed Forces if they intend to return home. In addition Housing Benefit recipients will not be subject to a non-dependent deduction, i.e. the amount that those who are working are expected to contribute to the household expenses, until an adult child return home.

The intent of the policy was that by using Discretionary Housing Payments, the estimated 5,000 foster carers and rather fewer Armed Forces personnel groups would be protected. We have agreed with local authority organisations improved arrangements through these regulations that puts these protections beyond doubt.

The changes will apply to tenants in both the social and private rented sectors.

I am also issuing guidance to local authorities emphasising that Discretionary Housing Payments remain available for other priority groups including the needs of people whose homes have had significant disability adaptations and those with long-term medical conditions that create difficulties in sharing a bedroom.

Going forward I will continue to closely monitor and adjust the implementation of the policy, including an independent evaluation by Ipsos MORI, the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research and the Institute For Fiscal Studies to ensure that the needs of these groups are effectively addressed in the longer term.

This ensures this policy focuses on the key aim of bringing housing benefit expenditure under control. Under the previous Government, housing benefit almost doubled in 10 years to £20billion, with households living in homes that are too big for them, whilst there are 2 million households in England on waiting lists, and 250,000 families living in over-crowded accommodation.