

## HOW DO I TELL TENANTS ABOUT WELFARE REFORM?

Whatever your role in delivering housing services, it's likely that at least some of your working age service users will be affected by one or a number of welfare reform measures including:

- penalties for tenants who are considered to be under-occupying their homes
- a cap on the total amount of benefits that households can receive
- reducing the amount of council tax benefit that working age people can receive leaving them to make up the shortfall
- introducing personal independence payment to replace disability living allowance - with a harder eligibility test
- combining in and out of work benefits into a single universal credit – with any support for housing costs included in this and paid directly to the tenant.

DWP doesn't plan to do any major publicity to make people aware of the changes ahead. Given the potential negative impact that some of these measures will have on income collection, housing professionals have a key role in making sure that tenants understand what's planned, how it affects them and what they need to do.

### GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS – TOP TIPS

- Don't try to tell people about everything all in one go – bite-size messages will be easier for them to absorb and remember
- Use what you know about your customers and how they like to be contacted to target and tailor messages for maximum impact – when preparing for the bedroom tax, most landlords reported that they found direct, personal contact most effective
- Consider the best way to communicate with your vulnerable tenants – face-to-face may be best
- Work with tenants to develop clear, easy to read, attractive leaflets and newsletters – consider the needs of tenants who may have difficulty reading
- Be imaginative and, depending on your target audience, consider using social media including Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube
- Update existing materials for down-sizing schemes and rent payment information
- Run information sessions and advice surgeries in accessible locations, for example, you could target parents through sessions at local schools timed for when they drop children off
- Use community shops, pubs, libraries, GP surgeries, community centres and leisure centres for surgeries and posters
- Prominently display posters and information in housing offices and flat communal areas
- Include regular articles in tenant newspapers and magazines
- Include information about welfare reform and advice services in rent statements and on your website
- Provide briefings and training to tenants and residents groups so that they can spread the word and advise you on the best way to communicate with those affected
- Make effective use of your local media including community radio stations
- Develop a strategy for dealing with the local press and other media to avoid 'scare stories'
- Bear in mind that the roll out of Universal Credit is due to continue until October 2017 – so you'll need to keep communicating.

## IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

- **Affinity Sutton** has recruited tenants to act as ‘benefit buddies’ to spread the word about welfare reform.
- **Wulvern Housing** has produced handy, pocket-sized guides on welfare reform for repairs staff to refer to if needed when visiting customers.
- **Halton Housing** and other providers have developed YouTube films on welfare reform.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsSgiggqDtY>
- **Gentoo** has a comprehensive customer communications plan along with fact sheets, leaflets and posters for offices encouraging customers to speak to a member of staff if they are worried. All material directs customers to a dedicated welfare reform section on the Group’s website.

## RESOURCES TO HELP YOU

CIH has produced a range of useful resources on welfare reform exclusively for CIH members including:

### Briefings

- [What you need to know about welfare reform](#), and a range of further [‘what you need to know about’ briefings](#) on specific aspects of the changes, such as the bedroom tax, the overall benefit cap and the uprating of benefits.
- [Welfare reform: Practical approaches](#)

### Webinars

Watch recordings of our recent webinars online, including:

- [Understanding the latest changes to housing and council tax benefit](#)
- [Practical responses to welfare reform](#)

### Coming soon

We will also be producing further ‘how do I’ briefings, exclusively for CIH members covering:

- How do I...make sure tenants pay their rent?
- How do I...help tenants move to another home?
- How do I...help tenants find work?