

*We would like to wish you all a peaceful Christmas and a successful New Year.*



## Our new look newsletter

When you're reading this newsletter, you may notice that it looks a little different from previous issues and hopefully you will find it easier to read. We asked Wealden's Disability Involvement Group (DIG) to comment on the newsletter's layout, content and design and how it could be improved particularly for customers who have visual impairments or reading difficulties.

The DIG is made up of Wealden residents who have a wide range of disabilities and they made a number of suggestions, most of which we have been able to include in this newsletter. We learned a lot from the DIG and would like to thank all of those who helped us.

If you would like more information about the Disability Involvement Group and how it can help improve the way that the Council delivers its services for disabled people, please contact Helen Steele on 01323 443137.

## New look forms

Earlier this year we redesigned two of our forms – the form you fill in if you move and the claim form for Discretionary Housing Payment. We wanted to make the forms easier to complete by making the questions clearer and more understandable and again, we wanted to make the form easier to read.

The first 100 customers who were sent a form were also sent a short questionnaire. 95% of customers who replied said that the forms were clear and easy to understand. Overall, 91% of customers said that the forms were easy to complete.

We would like to thank those of you who took the time to help us – your help will make a big difference to all customers who may need one of these forms in the future. Over time, we will redesign more of our forms and we hope you all find them easier to fill in – please let us know if you have any problems.

**If you, or somebody you know, would like the information contained in this document in large print, Braille, tape/CD; or in another language please contact Wealden District Council on 01323 443322 or [info@wealden.gov.uk](mailto:info@wealden.gov.uk) quoting code number D&P 122943/12.08**

# Welfare reform – for better or worse?

There have been a number of changes to Benefits recently as a result of the Government's Welfare Reform programme, some more favourable to claimants and some more stringent. Some of these changes are summarised below:

■ **Employment and Support Allowance** was introduced on 27th October 2008 and replaces Incapacity Benefit and Income Support for those unfit for work, for new claimants. It aims to provide long term support for those unable to work and help those with 'limited capacity for work' to find jobs.

■ **Lone parents**, whose youngest child is aged 12 or over, will no longer be able to claim Income Support solely on the basis of child care responsibilities, from 24th November 2008. Most lone parents will be expected to work and will be helped to claim Jobseekers Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance until they have found a job. By the year 2010, it is expected that these changes will be extended to lone parents with a youngest child aged 7 years.

■ Income received from **child maintenance** will not be taken into account when working out Housing and Council Tax Benefit from 27th October 2008 and the first £20 will not be taken into account when Income Support or income based Jobseekers Allowance is worked out.



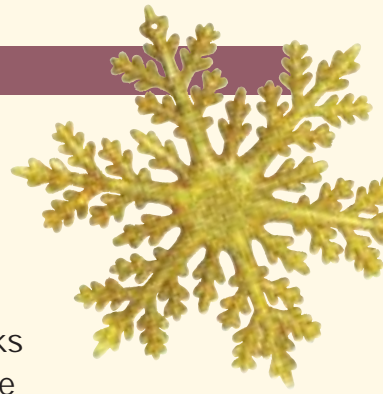
■ The time limit for **backdating** Pension Credit, Housing and Council Tax Benefit for people over 60 has been reduced from 12 months to 3 months from 6th October 2008. The time limit for backdating Housing and Council Tax Benefit for people of working age has been reduced from 12 months to 6 months.

■ In addition to the **Winter Fuel Payment** of £200 for people of 60-79 years and £300 to people over 80 years there will be one-off payment in 2008/9 of £50 for someone over 60 and £100 for someone aged over 80 years.

■ The **Cold Weather Payment** made to people in receipt of a qualifying benefit when the temperature falls below zero degrees Celsius for 7 consecutive days, has been increased from £8.50 to £25 per week....but nobody can remember when this situation last occurred in Sussex!

More information is available on  
[www.dwp.gov.uk/welfarereform](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/welfarereform)  
or [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)





## Christmas housing benefit cheques

Most benefit payment dates remain unchanged over the Christmas period, however, the table below indicates which cheques will be sent out early. Banks Automated Clearing System (BACS) payments are unaffected except for those customers expecting a payment on 26th December 2008. Those BACS payments will be sent on 24th December 2008 instead.

Frequency of cheque payments	Expected payment date	Date cheques will be sent	Period that cheque covers
WEEKLY	25.12.08	22.12.08	29.12.08-05.01.09
FORTNIGHTLY	25.12.08	22.12.08	22.12.08-05.01.09
4 WEEKLY	01.01.09	23.12.08	15.12.08-12.01.09

If you want to have your Housing Benefit paid into your bank or building society account, please phone us on 01323 443500 and we will send you the form you need to fill in.

## Latest Budget changes for benefits

The Chancellor has announced increases in benefits for pensioners and people with children.

Pensioners will be paid an extra £60 each in the New Year, in addition to the £10 Christmas bonus and the Winter Fuel Payment which should be received before Christmas. This is equivalent to bringing forward April's rise in basic State Pension. Next April's planned increase in Child Benefit to £20 per week for the only or eldest child and £13.20 for other children will be brought forward to January 2009.

If we need to change the amount of Housing or Council Tax Benefit you receive, we will write to you but you don't need to let us know about these changes.

## Reviewing pension credit

People receiving Pension Credit usually have a Assessed Income Period (AIP). During this period, customers do not have to report any changes in their capital, annuities or pensions to the Pension Service.

Many pensioners will be coming up for a review shortly, but it is likely that the majority will have had no significant changes. The Pension Service have decided not to request evidence of current income and savings from all customers. Instead, pensioners over the age of 80 will be contacted by post to tell them they have a new AIP based on the circumstances set out in the letter. They will only need to contact The Pension Service if the details are incorrect.

# East Sussex Association for Blind and Visually Impaired People

When people lose their sight they often become increasingly reliant on others to carry out everyday activities for them. This can lead to a loss of independence, which in turn can lead to a loss of confidence, feelings of disempowerment and increasing social isolation.

The aim of East Sussex Association for Blind and Visually Impaired People (ESAB) is to enhance the lives of people living in East Sussex who have sight loss, and enable them to lead more independent and less socially isolated lives. In order to achieve this, ESAB offers the following services:

- Home assessment visits to offer advice, information and signposting to other organisations
- Enhanced Skills Training and cookery courses, designed to develop skills which will promote independence and build confidence.
- A Resource Centre offering demonstrations and advice on a wide range of specialist aids and equipment, aimed at promoting self-reliance.
- Individual support and training to use computer technology
- 14 Social Groups
- A regular Bulletin containing news and useful information
- A free audio library service
- Vision awareness training to help carers, volunteers and employers understand the needs of people with sight loss.

East Sussex Association for the Blind currently supports over 1,500 people who are registered as blind or partially sighted, and live in East Sussex. If you would like more information about these services, or to request a home assessment visit for yourself or someone you know who is visually impaired, please contact ESAB on 01323 832252.

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