

The new Cost of Living Award

Households across the country are struggling with the general rise in the cost of living including higher fuel costs. This is made worse by the 1.25% rise in National Insurance contributions and the increase in interest rates for those with loans and mortgages.

To help with this, the Scottish Government is issuing a **£150 cost of living award** to the following households:

- Those who are liable for council tax, your dwelling falls under **any council tax bands** and who were in **receipt of council tax reduction** or the second adult rebate; on 14 February 2022 or
- Those who are liable for council tax, whose dwelling falls under council tax **bands A to D** and who are **not** in receipt of council tax reduction;
- Those who are **exempt from council tax** and where all occupants are **either** under 18, care leavers, severely mentally impaired, or the property is unoccupied because the resident is providing or receiving care elsewhere.
- Those who are receiving Housing Support Services and/or living in **temporary accommodation** or a refuge on 14 February 2022.

The **payment will be made automatically** by the City of Edinburgh Council so there is **no need to claim it**.

See **Page 2** for more detail on the **UK Budget** and the Scottish Government's recent announcements.



Spring Edition



Welcome to our Spring edition!

This newsletter includes information on benefits and housing news, and money tips to help maximise your income.

Our **Maximise! Team** provides advice & assistance with benefits, housing and debt issues & employability & support for families.

To make an appointment, call 0131 442 2100, email maximise@children1st.org.uk or contact your child's School or Early Learning Centre.

The UK Budget: What does it mean for you?

National Insurance

The planned 1.25 percentage point rise in national insurance contributions will remain. However, **the threshold** (before a worker has to pay NI contributions) will increase by £3,000 **from July 2022**. This equalises national insurance contributions threshold with the personal allowance of **£12,570** (which is used for income tax purposes). Therefore, you won't pay any Class 1 National Insurance contributions unless you earn £12,570 per year.

Income Tax

The basic rate of income tax will be cut **from 20% to 19% in 2024**. This percentage is applied to any income above your personal allowance.

Fuel Duty

Fuel duty will be **cut by 5p a litre** for a full 12 months.

Energy Bills

The UK Government **scrapped VAT on energy efficiency** measures such as solar panels, heat pumps and insulation installed for 5 years.

To help with rising fuel prices, the UK Government had announced (before the Spring Budget) **a £200 rebate on energy bills** for households which will be recouped in future years, through repayments of £40 per year over the next 5 years. The discount will be applied automatically, and it is not possible to 'opt out'.

So far, no other measures have been announced by the UK Government to help tackle the cost of living crisis and address benefit claimants' real financial difficulties, with the exception of the new **Cost of Living Award**, described on [Page 1](#).

The Scottish Government's Announcements

The Scottish Government has announced they will provide £10 million additional funding to the **Fuel Insecurity Fund** (distributed through third sector organisations) to help households at risk of self-disconnection, or self-rationing



their energy use, due to unaffordable fuel costs. Watch this space!

Meanwhile, the Scottish Government's 'Tackling *Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26: Best Start, Bright Futures*' included other announcements such as: -

- a significant increase in employment services for parents;
- an increase in the **Scottish Child Payment (SCP)** from £20 to £25 when the benefit is extended to the under 16s by the end of 2022 (see [Page 5](#) for more detail on the SCP);
- and immediate steps to mitigate the UK Government's **benefit cap through Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)** which are paid by the local authorities (councils);

Contact us if you need help to apply for the Scottish Child Payment or Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to help with the benefit cap or any rent shortfall.

We can also do a benefit check to maximise your income!

Rising Energy Costs: What help is available?



We've put together this checklist to highlight what help might be available to you:

✓ Statutory Benefits

The statutory benefits that help with fuel costs are **paid automatically** by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) **to those who qualify**, so there is no need to make a claim. There are 3 types of statutory benefits that you might qualify for:

- **The Winter Fuel Payment** if you are over state pension age.
- **The Cold Weather Payment** if you are on certain means-tested benefits and the temperature goes below freezing for 7 consecutive days.
- **The Child Winter Heating Assistance** if you have a child or young person who gets a qualifying disability benefit like the highest rate of the care component of DLA (Disability Living Allowance) or the Scottish Child Disability Payment.

✓ The Warm Home Discount

This is a one-off yearly payment of £140 that is paid automatically to people on pension credit (guaranteed element) but some fuel suppliers also make this available to other people on benefits if they meet certain criteria. Check your supplier's eligibility criteria for more details.

www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme/energy-suppliers

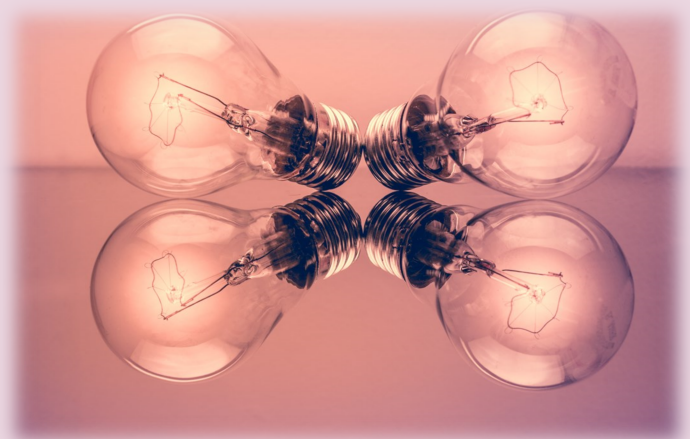
✓ Extra help from your supplier

- Ask your supplier if you are on the lowest tariff
- Give accurate meter readings
- Switch to online billing and direct debit if you can, to save money on bills.

✓ Grants to pay off your fuel arrears

If you're in debt to your energy supplier, you can apply for a grant from a charitable trust to help pay it off. The British Gas Energy Trust offer grants and schemes that are open to anyone, you don't have to be a customer.

There are also companies who offer grants specifically for their customers, such as Scottish Power Hardship Fund, Ovo



Energy Fund, E.ON Energy Fund/Next Energy Fund, the EDF Energy Customer Support Fund, and Bulb Energy Fund.

You may also be eligible for a grant from the **Home Heating Support Fund** if you are in fuel debt or self-rationing. <https://homeheatingadvice.scot/>

✓ Contact Home Energy Scotland (HES)

HES can be reached on 0800 512 012 or online www.homeenergyscotland.org & can help you with energy efficiency advice (e.g. how to use storage heaters properly). See their 'quick wins': <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/hub/quick-tips-to-save-energy/> HES can also help you identify any grants you might be eligible for to **insulate your property** if you are a private tenant or a homeowner (e.g. for a new boiler, heating systems, loft insulation etc.).

✓ Try switching to a cheaper supplier

Shop around for best deals and switch suppliers using price comparison websites if you can. See <https://energycompare.citizensadvice.org.uk/> We realise this might be difficult at the moment.

✓ Help with bills and budgeting

A money adviser can help you with budgeting or arrange an affordable repayment plan to pay your fuel arrears or any other debts.

✓ Get a benefit check

Contact us for a benefit check to make sure you're getting all the right benefits.

What's New with.... Post Office Accounts?



The DWP's approach

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has started sending letters to customers who are receiving benefits or pensions payments via their Post Office card account (POca).

People are being asked for their bank account details so their benefits and pensions can be paid into this alternative account.

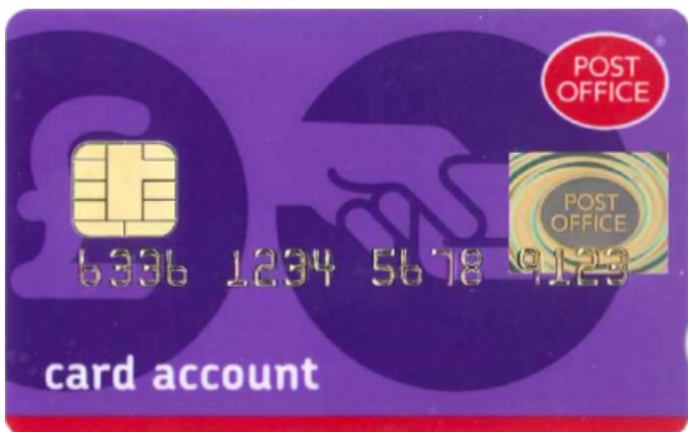
For those who don't have a bank account, they will automatically be moved over to a new system called the new Payment Exception Service (PES). This will deliver benefits using a digital voucher. People can choose whether they receive the voucher via a text message, an email or a re-useable plastic card.

The Department will look to move everyone off the Post Office card account **by Summer 2022**.

HMRC's approach

Despite their previous insistence that payments of Tax Credits, Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance would stop being made into Post Office card accounts from 30 November 2021, HMRC made a last-minute extension to the deadline.

Customers now have until **5 April 2022** to provide HMRC with alternative bank details.



Useful Numbers

- There is a dedicated **DWP customer service centre helpline** (0800 085 7133) to report your new bank details or ask for guidance.
- You can phone **HMRC** on 0345 300 3900 for tax credits or 0300 200 3100 for child benefit.

An Update on Scottish Benefits

The Scottish Child Payment

The Scottish Child Payment will double to £20 per week for children under 6 from April 2022. It will also be increased to £25 per week by the end of 2022. The benefit is currently for children under 6 if parents claim a means-tested benefit (like Universal Credit, Tax Credits, Income Support, Pension Credit, JSA or ESA). However, it will be rolled out to all children under 16 by the end of 2022. To apply, phone 0800 182 2222 or claim online at www.mygov.scot/scottish-child-payment/how-to-apply



the same as those for PIP Personal Independence Payment. When your case is transferred from PIP to ADP, you will also keep the exact same award without the need for a reassessment.

The ADP will however be different from PIP in some respects:

- New claims for ADP can be made online, by post, phone or face-to-face.
- For the claim assessment, only one piece of supporting information from a professional will be required, such as a social care assessment, medical report or prescription list.
- The onus will be on Social Security Scotland to gather information on people's behalf.
- Equal consideration will be given to all sources of information available, including that given by family, friends and unpaid carers.
- A team of in-house health and social care professionals will ask the right questions to save clients and staff time when making a decision.
- Reviews will be light-touch and will take place less frequently than in the Department for Work and Pensions system.
- Indefinite awards will also be possible for disabled people on the highest components of the new benefit whose needs are highly unlikely to change will be eligible for an "indefinite award".

The Scottish Child Disability Payment

The transfer of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to the Scottish Child Disability Payment is still ongoing. Parents will receive a letter to notify them of the transfer and will continue to receive DLA right until their benefit has been transferred to Social Security Scotland. There will be no re-assessment and you will continue to get the same amount of benefit as you did under DLA.

If your child doesn't already claim DLA, you can now **make a new claim** for the Scottish Child Disability Payment from Social Security Scotland. See www.mygov.scot/child-disability-payment/how-to-apply or call 0800 182 2222.

The Adult Disability Payment (ADP)

Social Security Scotland's next benefit, Adult Disability Payment (which will replace DLA and PIP for adults of working age), opened for new applications in pilot areas on 21 March 2022. **Edinburgh is NOT in any of the pilots** and will therefore be rolled out **from August 2022**.

Under the Adult Disability Payment (ADP), the eligibility conditions and assessment descriptors will be initially be



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Other News in Brief

Two new JobCentres

A new Jobcentre opened at Northbridge in the former Argos store opposite The Scotsman Hotel. It will service **Universal Credit** customers from the following postcode areas: EH7 5, EH8 7, EH17 7, and EH16 5. Meanwhile, another Jobcentre opened on Waverly Bridge, at the Waverley Market Mall (former New Look store on the ground floor) for UC claimants in several postcodes across the city.

Widening your Job Search

Universal credit claimants are now required to widen their job search outside of their preferred sector after just four weeks of job-seeking. Previously, jobseekers were able to restrict their job

search to specific types of jobs for up to 3 months.

This is part of the Government's new 'Way to Work' campaign aims to get half a million people 'off universal credit and into work' by the end of June 2022. Get in touch if you need help to challenge a sanction or assistance with employability.

Audio-Recording at PIP Assessments

The DWP's assessment providers like Capita and ATOS now have the facility to audio record both telephone and face to face PIP (Personal Independence Payment) consultations. Updated DWP guidance advises that any requests for recording must be made in advance.



Covid News

End of Provisions for SSP and ESA

Covid provisions for statutory sick pay (SSP) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) ceased on 24 March 2022. If you are ill with Covid, you now need to wait 3 days before SSP can be paid. The 7-day waiting period for ESA has also resumed. People who isolate or shield themselves to prevent infection or contamination with coronavirus, will no longer be entitled to SSP (unless they are ill).

The Tenant Grant Fund

A reminder that the Tenant Grant Fund is open for enquiries from tenants who are at risk of being evicted due to rent arrears that have accumulated during the pandemic. For more details, see the City of Edinburgh's website tinyurl.com/tenantfund or email Edinburgh_TGF@edinburgh.gov.uk

Evictions

Some emergency measures are shortly coming to an end. From 30th March 2022, tenancy notice periods will revert to their pre-pandemic lengths (notice periods had been extended to 6 months for most tenants with some exceptions). Meanwhile, it is expected that grounds (reasons) for eviction will remain discretionary until 30th September. This means that all cases would go to Tribunal for a Judge to decide if it is reasonable to evict the tenant.

Maximise!

Income - Wellbeing - Attainment - Potential

Maximise! is **now city-wide** in all schools, with a focus on families who are Care Experienced. For more info or to make a referral, email maximise@children1st.org.uk. Alternatively, call us on **0131 442 2100** or request an appointment through your child's school or early learning centre.



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