

Coronavirus Financial Guidance

27th March 2020

We know that these are increasingly worrying and stressful times for tenants and families and we are continuing to monitor the situation and identify relevant advice and support to share with tenants.

If you would like any further information regarding the undernoted or support to apply for the welfare benefits then please contact our Welfare Rights Team on 0141 550 5600 or welfarerights@westscot.co.uk.

Paying your Rent

You should continue to pay your rent as normal and you can do this in a number of ways:

- Direct Debit
- By using your swipe card at any Post Office.
- At any shop or garage which has a Pay Point terminal.
- By telephone on 0141 550 5600. Card payments only.
- Online at www.allpayments.net/Allpayments/Signin.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fallpayments%2f.

We understand that the coming weeks may have an impact on the income of some of our tenants and customers. **If you feel you will have difficulties paying your rent then please contact us so we can assist you.** We have our own Welfare Rights Team that may be able to help you apply for any benefits you might now be entitled to.

Statutory Sick Pay

Those who follow advice to stay at home and who cannot work as a result will be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP), even if they are not themselves sick.

Anyone not eligible to receive sick pay, including those earning less than an average of £118 per week, some of those working in the gig economy, or self-employed people, is able to claim [Universal Credit](#) and or contributory Employment and Support Allowance.

The DWP has also confirmed arrangements to support people who are either infected by the virus or have been advised to self-isolate including the following:

- Statutory sick pay will be paid from day one, rather than the fourth day of illness (to be put in force from 13th March 2020)
- If employees need to provide evidence to their employer that they need to stay at home due to the coronavirus, they will be able to get it from NHS 111 Online instead of having to get a fit note from their GP. This could also take the form of an isolation note.
- All assessments for sickness or disability benefits are being suspended from 17th March 2020 for three months. Existing claimants will continue to receive payment until their assessments is rearranged
- People who need to claim ESA or UC because of coronavirus will not be required to produce a fit note
- When claimants inform the DWP that they are self isolating or have been diagnosed with coronavirus, they will not be sanctioned and will have their claimant commitment reviewed and revised to remove mandatory work requirements for the period of sickness
- Those affected by coronavirus will be able to apply for UC and can receive up to a month's benefit advance without having to physically attend a Jobcentre
- The seven waiting days for ESA for new claimants will not apply for those affected by coronavirus, so will be payable from day one
- Any claims made for ESA or UC by people infected by coronavirus or by those required to self-isolate will be treated as having Limited Capability for Work without the requirement for medical evidence or undergoing a Work Capability Assessment.

Being Laid Off/Working Hours Been Cut

You may be entitled to guaranteed pay if your employer has asked you to stay at home or take unpaid leave if there's not enough work for you. A lay-off is if you're off work for at least 1 working day. You're entitled to guaranteed pay during lay off or short-time working. The maximum you can get is £29 a day for 5 days in any 3-month period - so a maximum of £145. If you usually earn less than £29 a day you'll get your normal daily rate. If you work part-time, your entitlement is worked out proportionally.

To find out more and to apply please visit www.gov.uk/lay-offs-short-time-working/guarantee-pay or contact our Welfare Rights Team on 0141 550 5600 or welfarerights@westscot.co.uk.

I'm an employee and I've been sent home

Some employers have told workers that they will pay them as usual, at least for the next few weeks. If you are in that position and you do not usually receive any benefits, then you will not need to make a claim.

Other employers are not in a position to meet the costs themselves. It is their workers who will be covered by the government's pledge to cover 80% of wages.

This will be claimed by the employers and distributed to staff, so you will not need to do anything yourself. It will be up to employers to decide whether to make up the difference.

Job Retention Scheme for 'furloughed' workers

The Government has set up a fund, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, for employers to pay employees 80% of their salary (up to a maximum of £2,500 a month). You are classed as a 'furloughed' worker, if you are unable to do any work but you are kept on your employer's payroll, rather than being laid off.

I'm on a zero-hours contract and have been sent home

The pledge to meet 80% of wages applies to everyone who is on PAYE – that is, taxed before they are paid. It is not clear what figure the 80% will be based on. The chancellor, Rishi Sunak, has said that it will probably involve some kind of smoothing of earnings – that is to say it could be based on an average of recent weeks' pay so you are not out of pocket if your last week's wages were much lower than the previous week's.

I've been made redundant

The pay pledge is designed to stop people losing their jobs. By covering their pay, the government hopes that firms will keep positions open so that eventually as many people as possible can return to work.

If your employer has chosen to make you redundant despite this, there are rules that they need to meet – they cannot ignore your usual rights.

The company may have its own policy which is more generous than the statutory minimum. If it does not have its own policy and you have worked for your current employer for at least two years you should be entitled to:

- Half a week's pay for each full year you were under 22.
- One week's pay for each full year you were 22 or older, but under 41.
- One and half week's pay for each full year you were 41 or older.

You can calculate how much you are entitled to here www.gov.uk/calculate-your-redundancy-pay

Universal Credit

Tenants affected by the Coronavirus who are worried about paying their rent can claim Universal Credit from the Department of Work and Pensions which includes support for housing costs, if eligible. The UK Government has introduced some changes to make this easier. If eligible, you can apply for Statutory Sick Pay and Universal Credit and you should do this as soon as possible. For support and further information please contact our Welfare Rights Team.

Claiming universal credit

If you do not have enough to live on, you may be advised to claim universal credit (UC), which can include help with your rent as well as amounts for adults and children in the household. Claiming UC means that your tax credits are automatically terminated and you will not be able to get them back.

Get advice about whether you should claim UC to make sure claiming will not make you worse off.

You can claim for Universal Credit online at www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit

You can also call the Universal Credit Helpline on 0800 328 5644.

Claimants are experiencing long waiting times to get through but please persevere.

Tax Credits

If you are currently getting tax credits, your entitlement may be affected by the coronavirus outbreak.

Child tax credit (CTC) provides support for children, and working tax credit (WTC) provides support for people working at least a certain number of hours, employed or self-employed, on a low income.

The government has announced that the basic element of WTC will increase by £1,045 on top of the planned rise from 6 April 2020. The basic element will be £3,040 for 2020/21 (a daily rate of £8.33).

Off work due to infection or self-isolation, or caring for a child who is infected or in isolation

You can continue to be entitled to WTC if you are absent for work and you are:

- getting statutory sick pay (SSP) as an employee, or
- are self-employed and would otherwise have qualified for SSP, or
- are getting employment and support allowance (ESA), or
- are getting credits on your national insurance record for limited capability for work.

These periods must start immediately after working and can continue for a maximum of 28 weeks.

Off work or reduced hours due to downturn in employment or self-employment

If you stop work or your normal weekly working hours are reduced to below the number required in your circumstances (16, 24 or 30), then you may be entitled to a four week run-on of WTC.

However, there is HMRC guidance for people who have been laid off or put on short-time working, which effectively means the four week run-on only starts after an initial period of up to four weeks, or after you have been notified that you will not be able to

return to work, or work of sufficient hours. If you are classed as a 'furloughed' worker, the government has said that you will remain employed. Entitlement to WTC only ends if you have 'ceased work' so it is expected that you will be able to remain entitled to WTC if you are a 'furloughed' worker.

Self-employed

If you are self-employed, you remain entitled to WTC as long as you continue to meet the definition of self-employed as 'organised and regular, on a commercial basis, with a view to making a profit' and you continue to put in sufficient hours. HMRC guidance is clear that activities that count for self-employed hours include activities necessary for the business such as planning, promotion and maintenance of equipment. Updated guidance is expected on how self-employed people will be treated during the current situation. There is no requirement to actually be making a profit, and there is no assumed income or 'minimum income floor'.

Childcare costs

If you are still paying your registered childcare provider but childcare is no longer being provided due to the necessity to stay at home, (ie, you are paying a retainer so as not to lose the place) HMRC has said that these costs will continue to be covered, but updated guidance is expected.

Income

If your income in 2019/20 has reduced (compared to what you expected, or compared to your 2018/19 income), you may have been underpaid tax credits for the current tax year. As the tax year is coming to an end on 5 April, any underpayment should be paid to you when your entitlement is finalised during the annual review, by 31 July 2020.

If your income in 2020/21 is likely to be reduced (compared to your 2019/20 income), your payments in the new tax year, starting on 6 April, may be increased, based on an estimate of your 2020/21 income.

For these reasons, you should provide an estimate of your actual income in 2019/20 and your expected income in 2020/21 as soon as you can. If things change, it is vital to keep your current year estimate up to date.

Contact the Tax Credits Helpline on 0345 300 3900 or online at <https://www.gov.uk/manage-your-tax-credits>

Other financial help

As well as continuing to get housing benefit and tax credits or claiming UC, a drop in income might mean you now qualify for help with your council tax. Check your local authority's website for what is available and how to apply.

If you are currently in receipt of Housing Benefit, please advise your Local Authority of any reduction in your income.

Self-Employed and Small Businesses

The Scottish Government has announced a rescue package for businesses with cash being made available to support business through the Covid-19 pandemic.

It will include rates relief, grants for small businesses and a £50m Hardship Fund for the self employed or people who lose their jobs as a result of measures taken to limit the spread of the virus. You should contact your local authority for more details and to apply.

A dedicated helpline has been set up to help businesses and self-employed individuals in financial distress and with outstanding tax liabilities receive support with their tax affairs. Through this, businesses may be able to agree a bespoke Time to Pay arrangement. If you are concerned about being able to pay your tax due to COVID-19, call HMRC's dedicated helpline on 0800 0159 559.

Self Employment Income Support Scheme

The Chancellor has announced details of the above scheme. The Scheme is for those who are self-employed or a member of a partnership and has lost income due to coronavirus and will allow you to claim a taxable grant worth 80% of your trading profits up to a maximum of £2,500 per month for the next 3 months. This may be extended if needed.

Who can apply:

You can apply if you're a self-employed individual or a member of a partnership and you:

- have submitted your Income Tax Self Assessment tax return for the tax year 2018-19
- traded in the tax year 2019-20
- are trading when you apply, or would be except for COVID-19
- intend to continue to trade in the tax year 2020-21
- have lost trading/partnership trading profits due to COVID-19

Your self-employed trading profits must also be less than £50,000 and more than half of your income must come from self-employment.

If you have not submitted your Income Tax Self-Assessment tax return for the tax year 2018-19, you must do this by 23 April 2020.

How much you'll get:

You'll get a taxable grant which will be 80% of the average profits from the tax years (where applicable):

- 2016 to 2017
- 2017 to 2018
- 2018 to 2019

The grant will be up to a maximum of £2,500 per month for 3 months and will be paid directly into your bank account, in one instalment.

How to apply:

You cannot apply for this scheme yet.

HMRC will contact you if you are eligible for the scheme and invite you to apply online.

You will access this scheme only through GOV.UK. If someone texts, calls or emails claiming to be from HMRC, saying that you can claim financial help or are owed a tax refund, and asks you to click on a link or to give information such as your name, credit card or bank details, it is a scam.

After you've applied

Once HMRC has received your claim and you are eligible for the grant, you will be contacted to tell you how much you will get and the payment details.

If you claim tax credits you'll need to include the grant in your claim as income.

TV licence fee changes

Free licence fees for up to 3.7 million pensioners had been due to be scrapped on 1st June of this year. In light of the coronavirus situation, this has been delayed until August 2020. Last year, it was announced that only low income households where one person receives pension credit will still be eligible for a free TV Licence.

The Welfare Rights Team has been maximising Pension Credit awards through benefit reassessments for our pensioner customers. If you have not already had an assessment and would like one carried out, please contact our Team on 0141 550 5600.

Please note the above is subject to change and we will continually review this information to provide regular updates to tenants. You can keep up to date via our website <https://westscot.co.uk/tenants/coronavirus/>