



Help With Rent Team

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Background

Since December 2011 the Help With Rent team, formerly known as the Local Housing Allowance Transition Team (LHATT), have been helping customers who have experienced a reduction in their Housing Benefit due to the government's Welfare Reform programme.

The team have been funded by:

- The Department for Works & Pensions 'Local Housing Allowance Transition Fund'
- A grant from money given to prevent homelessness in Greater Manchester by the Department for Communities and Local Government
- Contributions from each Local Authority across Greater Manchester, including Manchester City Council

The team works across the 10 Greater Manchester Local Authority areas plus Warrington Council.

The Team

The team's service comprises the following:

- A telephone advice line – 0845 120 2093
- A website – www.helpwithrent.org.uk
- A mobile advice centre which visits various locations across the region offering both appointments and a drop in advice service
- A team of 10 advisors who offer in depth advice on the effects of Welfare Reform and actions that customers can take



The Team's Successes So Far

From December 2011 to date the team has:

- Prevented an estimated **320** people from presenting as homeless by working to make their accommodation affordable
- Reduced their customer's rent shortfalls by an estimated **£910,000** per year. This has been achieved by helping people claim extra benefit or negotiating a reduced rent with their landlord
- Had 23,000 visitors to its website www.helpwithrent.org.uk
- Had 6,600 visitors to its Mobile Advice Centre
- Taken 4,000 calls at its customer service centre (0845 120 2093)
- Received 2,900 referrals to its team of advisors
- Helped 175 people move house, either into cheaper accommodation or with friends and family
- Helped 50 people take in lodgers or enter house-share agreements
- Assisted 65 people in finding work or increasing their hours at work



In October 2012 they were presented with the Gold Award for Excellence in Social Inclusion from the Institute of Revenues, Ratings & Valuation in recognition of their work helping these tenants. In March 2013 they were shortlisted for the LGC Award for Frontline Team of the Year.

Work in Manchester

310 (11%) of the team's referrals have been from customers in the Manchester City Council area. Of these customers the majority were tenants in privately rented accommodation affected by the changes to Local Housing Allowance for under 35 year olds – the team worked with the Housing Benefits department to pro-actively contact those customers who would be worst affected by the changes.

At the time of writing the team is contacting all private tenants in Manchester who will be affected by the Benefits Cap in August/September.

The final two pages of this report contain a number of case studies of customers who we have worked with.

Further information

To refer a customer to the team you can telephone our customer service number on **0845 120 2093** or complete the online referral form available at www.helpwithrent.org.uk

For the latest news on the team please have a look at our Twitter feed (www.twitter.com/helpwithrent), our Facebook page

(www.facebook.com/helpwithrentmanchester) or our team's monthly newsletters which are available on our website at:
www.helpwithrent.org.uk/aboutus/newsletters

Case Studies

(Carol Barlow has given us consent to use her story in publicity for the team)

Case Study – Carol Barlow

Carol originally contacted the Help With Rent team because she had a shortfall in her rent of £30 per week. As a pensioner she was concerned that she wasn't receiving all the help she was entitled to.

Carol stated: "I had always worked before but I had some serious health problems a few years ago. I was struggling to pay all my expenses, including the rent, and thought that I should be getting more help but I just didn't know where to start. I didn't know which way I was turning and I'd got in a right state – I needed someone to put me on the right road."

When the team met with Carol they discussed her circumstances in detail. She informed them that her cousin frequently had to stay overnight to look after her because of her illnesses. The team immediately considered that she might qualify for extra Housing Benefit.

Kelly, the team's advisor who helped Carol, commented: "A lot of customers do not know about some of the aspects of claiming benefit and worry that if they ask for extra help there may be implications in the future. Once I had spoken to Carol I knew that she needed the overnight carer and that her Housing Benefit should reflect this."

Once the necessary forms and documents were submitted to the local Housing Benefit office Carol was awarded the extra the 2 bedroom rate of Local Housing Allowance. This increased her benefit by over £22 per week, making her rent much more affordable. She even received an underpayment of over £400.

Carol says: "Kelly helped me sort this out so quickly. She kept me informed every step of the way which stopped me from panicking. I feel in control of my money now and can stand on my own two feet. I can't believe the relief now you have taken this off my mind!"

(Please note that in the following case studies the customer's names have been changed to protect their identity)

Case Study – Mary

Mary contacted the team as her Housing Benefit was due to reduce to the shared rate of £55. Mary is in receipt of Income Support so could not afford the shortfall given her full rent is £103 per week. Mary had various disabilities and is also registered blind so is very keen to stay in her current property.

When the team looked at Mary's claim they noticed that despite her disabilities she was not claiming Disability Living Allowance. They helped her obtain the initial application pack and arranged an appointment for Mary with the local Citizen's Advice Bureau to complete the form. Several weeks later Mary was awarded Disability Living Allowance for care at the middle rate.

Once this was added to her Housing Benefit claim by Manchester City Council Mary was exempt from the shared rate as she qualified for the Severe Disability Premium. This increased her Housing Benefit to £97 per week. This reduced Mary's shortfall to only £6 per week, which she could pay using some of her extra income.

Case Study – Peter

Peter telephoned the Help With Rent advice line because he was concerned that his Local Housing Allowance was due to drop to a shared rate (£55 per week) as he is single and under 35.

Peter was already receiving the maximum benefit he was entitled to and was trying to find a job with no success. The advisor therefore looked at ways he could utilise the spare second bedroom in his apartment; either by taking in a non-dependant, a lodger or even setting up a joint tenancy. The advisor spoke at length about the costs and benefits of each option, referring Peter to information on the internet including on the www.helpwithrent.org.uk site.

A few weeks later Peter decided that he would open his spare room up. At the same time his brother lost his previous home and so needed a place to stay. Peter's brother therefore moved into the property with him as a non-dependant. Peter's Housing Benefit claim was reassessed by the Council at a 2 bedroom LHA rate (£98.08) with a minimum non dependant deduction for his unemployed brother (£9.40). Hence his new award is £88.68 per week. With the additional Housing Benefit and a weekly contribution from his brother Peter can now afford the rent for his property and his brother has a place to stay.

Case Study – Tracey

Tracey has 2 young children and as such receives Income Support. She was receiving Housing Benefit for her property of £550 per month – which exactly covered her rent charge. After the end of her transitional protection she would only be receiving £495, and was concerned she would not be able to pay the shortfall.

When the team spoke to her Tracey made it clear that she wanted to stay in her property as it was convenient for the schools her children were due to attend. She had lived there for several years and was settled in the area.

The team telephoned Tracey's landlord on her behalf and explained the situation to him. They stated that she was keen to stay in the property and did not want to get into rent arrears. Because Tracey had previously been a good tenant the landlord agreed to reduce the rent to £495, on the condition that Housing Benefit was paid to himself directly. The team liaised with the council to make sure this happened and Tracey's tenancy was secured.