



Joint Public Issues Team  
Methodist Church House  
25 Marylebone Road  
London  
NW1 5JR  
enquirys@jointpublicissues.org.uk  
Methodist Church Helpdesk 0207486 5502

Dear All

The Welfare Reform Bill is currently reaching its final stages in Parliament and represents the most radical change in the welfare system since 1945. Some changes that form part of the overall policy are already happening. It is extremely important that Churches and those who wish to serve their communities understand the reach of the changes that are occurring.

Attached is a briefing on the changes to Housing Benefit. It is important to note that Housing Benefit is claimed by many people who have jobs, appear not to be in poverty and would not normally have financial problems. The income threshold for receiving Housing Benefit is highly variable, but those on incomes of £15,000 a year are more likely than not to be receiving the benefit. In Greater London over a quarter of households rely on the benefit and that rises to 40% in more deprived boroughs.

The initial phase started in April 2011 but the major change – capping housing benefit levels for those who are already claiming benefit – starts in January. Initially these changes will most affect areas with the highest rents such as London. While other cities will be affected we expect London to face large population movements in the coming year as a result of these changes.

Estimates of numbers affected vary widely, but at least 1million households or 2.5 million people will have their Housing benefit reduced. It is expected that this will leave a quarter of a million households facing temporary accommodation and/or homelessness.

We are also asking you and your contacts to consider signing a petition backed by a partner organisation Zacchaeus 2000. The petition asks Government to reconsider benefit caps within London as there is strong evidence that this policy will most heavily affect underprivileged children.

The petition is at <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/25438> and should be signed before 7<sup>th</sup> January 2012 to have an influence on the Parliamentary debate. The Churches are working with The Children's Society and others around the benefit caps more generally.

Yours Sincerely

Paul Morrison, Policy Adviser, Joint Public Issues Team. December 2011

PS. Should you have any comments on this briefing please contact the Joint Public Issues Team. Similarly should you wish to contact your local paper or campaign on this or related issues JPIT will provide assistance where we are able.