

Vulnerable West Midlands residents could lose £65 a week in Housing Benefit



A proposed cap on Housing Benefit could see the West Midlands supported housing residents asked to make up a shortfall of more than an average Â£65 a week to pay rent. According to figures from the Starts at Home campaign, roughly 8,200 could be affected in the first year alone.

The Starts at Home campaign aims to highlight the importance of supported housing, a diverse sector made up of schemes that provide extra care and support ranging from women's refuges and specialist dementia accommodation to veterans' services. On 1 September, housing associations are taking part in 'Starts at Home Day' a day of campaigning to celebrate supported housing across England.

In the West Midlands, there are more 44,000 living in this type of housing, more than half of whom are older people. The estimated average of Â£65 a week shortfall in Housing Benefit would mean that vulnerable residents need to find an extra Â£3,400 a year to cover their rent.

The Federation has welcomed a Government review into how supported housing is funded, with an announcement expected soon. However, the continuing threat of the Local Housing Allowance cap continues to cause uncertainty over the future of this essential type of accommodation and support. Across the country, an estimated 156,000 homes or 41% of all supported housing would become unviable and be forced to close if the cap were implemented. Building work on 2,400 new specialist homes has already been cancelled as a result of the threat alone.

If current trends continue, a rapidly ageing population means that there will be 50,000 fewer supported housing homes than needed each year by 2025.

Gemma Duggan, External Affairs Manager for the West Midlands at the National Housing Federation, said: "Some of the most vulnerable people in the West Midlands are supported by housing associations and it cannot be right that they lose the on average £65 per week that helps keep a roof over their heads.

"The Government has already said that these tenants will continue to receive the support they need, but providers need to hear how it will do this. Any future funding model should provide peace of mind and security to those people who most sorely need it."

Case study " Anonymous, Birmingham, Fry Housing Trust

"I moved into supported housing with [Fry Housing Trust](#) after I was released from prison. I have been offending and in and out of custody for the past 14 years, with the longest period of being out lasting 13 months.

"With supported housing, I have managed to make changes to my life " improving my education at college, learning how to cook and to manage my debt & finances. I've also taken mindfulness and anger management courses.

"Without this support I would have ended up back on the wrong track, with nowhere to live and, without doubt, back in prison. Supported housing has given me a chance at a fresh start. A chance to get the right help. Somewhere to live that helps me to move on with my life in a good way."
