



News in Brief

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Spring Statement

Chancellor Rishi Sunak delivered the Spring Statement on 23 March, promising support to help vulnerable families with the cost of living crisis.

The measures announced are as follows:

- an extra £500 million funding for the Household Support Fund, to be administered by local authorities;
- changes to the National Insurance thresholds for both employees and self-employed workers (for full details see our upcoming Benefits Bulletin);
- a planned tax cut in 2024.

The measures fell short of what many organisations had called for, making no change to the planned percentage increase to April's benefit uprating, and no change to the introduction of the health and social care levy.

For more information, see [Chancellor announces tax cuts to support families with cost of living - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Terminal illness rule change

New regulations, in force from 4 April 2022, amend the terminal illness rules for Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance. To fall under the special rules, death must be reasonably expected within twelve months, rather than the previous six months. Equivalent rules for Personal Independence Payment, Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance will be brought in as soon as possible (they require more complex changes to legislation).

Further details can be found here: [The Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance \(Terminal Illness\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

Benefit access for Ukrainians

Emergency amendments have been made to the habitual residence test and past presence test rules to allow Ukrainians fleeing the conflict in Ukraine to access benefits immediately.

The press release states: 'The Department for Work and Pensions is laying emergency regulations today (Monday 21 March 2022) so those arriving in the UK from Ukraine as a result of the Russian invasion can access Universal Credit and jobs support immediately. Ukrainians will also be eligible for Housing Benefit, Pension Credit, Personal Independence Payment, child Disability Living Allowance and Carer's Allowance, and Attendance Allowance. Contributions-based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) are also available for those Ukrainians who meet the criteria.'

The emergency provisions only apply to Ukrainians who:

- are entering the UK through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme or the Ukraine Family Scheme;
- are fleeing as a result of the invasion;
- resided in Ukraine prior to 1 Jan 2022.

For more information, visit [Immediate benefit support for those fleeing the invasion in Ukraine - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Housing Benefit underpayments

You may remember that the DWP have been undertaking a trawl to identify claimants who were incorrectly transferred from Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance. The issue in these cases was that income-related ESA was not considered, with some claimants transferred onto contributory ESA only. 118,000 claims were identified in the trawl, with nearly £600 million paid out in arrears. This 'reassessment journey' was completed in July 2021, but a further complication has now come to light. Receipt of income-related ESA passports a claimant to maximum Housing Benefit, but Housing Benefit arrears were not considered at either the initial IB to ESA transfer, or when the ESA arrears were awarded. The DWP have identified 22,500 cases where they believe there may be a Housing Benefit underpayment and Local Authorities have been asked to investigate.

For more information: [LA Welfare Direct 3/2022 \(revised\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Video Hearings Service

HMCTS have announced that Social Security and Child Support Tribunals will begin to use the Video Hearing Service, provisionally from 28 March. The VHS is HMCTS'

bespoke platform (similar to Zoom or Skype) for carrying out remote hearings. After being used in limited areas, it is now being rolled out in all jurisdictions.

If your role includes helping clients attend appeals, it is very important that you prepare for this change, including making sure that the firewall settings on your network don't block your access.

Further details and more information on how to join can be found here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/video-hearings-service-join-from-a-corporate-network

www.gov.uk/guidance/hmcts-video-hearings-service-guidance-for-joining-a-hearing



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