



# **Benefit Service Business Plan**

**2010 - 2011**



## 1. Introduction

The Council's Benefits Service administers Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Its principle aim is to provide a statutory service in relation to the assessment and award of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit under the Social Security Administration Act 1992.

2. The aim of the Benefits Service is to ensure that we pay the right benefit to the right person at the right time. This aim sets out how the Service plans to build upon the work of previous years. The Service is committed to meeting the changing needs and aspirations of local people.
3. The success of the service will reflect the key objectives of the Environment Culture and communities Service Plan also contributing to the Authority's medium term objectives, which are:

### **Corporate Medium Term Objective 7:**

Seek to ensure that every resident feels included and able to access the service they need.

7.6.3 Introduce benefits on line claims.

### **Corporate Medium Term Objective 13:**

To limit the impact of the recession;

Promote the take-up of benefits, allowances and concessions provided by the Council

13.2.1 Implement benefit Take up strategy.

In the addition, the Service supports medium term objective 9 to promote independence and choice for vulnerable adults and older people.

## 4. Benefits Service Objective Actions:

	<b>Action</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Lead officer</b>	<b>Resources</b>
<b>1.Extending the benefit service</b>	1a ,Continue take up campaign targeted at people living in social housing , low income families and older people with or without high care needs	March 2011	An increase in take up in each targeted group.	Service Development Officer	Within existing budget.

	<b>Action</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Lead officer</b>	<b>Resources</b>
	1b, Investigate potential for virtual benefit surgeries	September 2010	Business case for provision of virtual surgery at specific locations in the borough	Chief Officer: Housing	Within existing staffing resources.
	1c, Improve the reception service offered for benefit customers at Times square	July 2010	Improved customer satisfaction	Chief Officer: Housing	Capital budget.£81,000
	1d, Implement second phase of system implementation to offer on line applications	March 2011	New service access opportunities available	Benefit service manager	Within existing staffing resources.
	1e, Review verification and fast track service with RSL's operating in Bracknell Forest	March 2011	Improved customer satisfaction	Benefit Assessment Manager	Within existing staffing resources
	1f, Review Social Media .	March 2011	Benefits Service can use social media to promote council services	Service Development Officer	Corporate resources to pilot this work.
	1g Investigate use of text messaging	March 2011	Effective way of communication.	Benefits Service Manager	Within Capital budget.
	1h. By closer working with external organisations, including Age UK, CAB, Pension Service, JCP and Social Services Promote fast track, DHP.	September 2010	Achieve fast track targets and DHP spend.	Service Development Officer	Within existing staffing resources.
	1iMaximise take-up of Discretionary Housing Payments	April 2010	Award of DHPs maximised to utilise resources available. Prevention of homelessness	Service Development Officer	Within existing staffing resources.
	1J. 1h. Work with Job Centre Plus. Mobile outreach unit.		An increase in take up in each targeted group.	Service Development Officer	Within existing staffing resources
<b>2. Providing the right service</b>	2a, Consult stakeholders and benefit user group on service plan	May 2010	Service plan reflecting stakeholder and customer priorities	Service Development Officer	Within existing budget.

	<b>Action</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Lead officer</b>	<b>Resources</b>
.	2b. Improve Customer Services knowledge of awareness and service.	September 2010	Customer experience at Time Square reception.	Service Development Officer	Within existing staffing resources

<b>Improvement plan theme</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Lead officer</b>	<b>Resources</b>
	.2c, Conduct satisfaction customer surveys	June 2010	Customer Satisfaction performance ideas to improve service.	Service Development Officer	Within existing budget.
	2d. Test benefit website with customer focus group	July 2010	Improve access to service	Service Development Officer	Within existing staffing resources.
	2e, Test new correspondence provided on new system with benefit customer user group	July 2010	Improved customer satisfaction	Service Development Officer	Within existing budget.
	2f, Organise regular engagement with black and ethnic minority groups	June 2010	Increased engagement with hard to reach groups and identify barriers to service take up.	Chief Officer: Housing	Within existing budget.
	2g, Contribute a tailored benefit service offer as part of the landlord and letting agent accreditation scheme	March 2011	Improved satisfaction with benefit service from accredited landlords and letting agents	Service Development Officer	Within existing staffing resources From benefits and Environment Culture and communities.
	2h Implement new Northgate Version 6 benefit processing system	October 2010	Improved service offer and improved speed of service	Benefit Service manager	Within allocated project budgets.
	2i, Review business processes with revenue service to achieve efficiency	November 2010	Improved efficiency of benefit processing	Benefit Service manager	Within existing project budgets.
	2j, Roll out of home working to benefit assessment officers	December 2010	Improved productivity of processing	Benefit Service manager	Within Corporate IT budgets.
	2k, Develop a programme of mystery shopping with all	December 2010	Improved customer experience recommendations	Service Development	Within existing staffing resources Of neighbouring LA.

	neighbouring Local authorities			Officer	
	2l. Establish regular liaison meetings and protocol with CAB	October 2010	Improved communications and complementary services	Benefit Service manager-	Within existing staffing resources.
<b>Improvement plan theme</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Lead officer</b>	<b>Resources</b>
	2m. Widely advertise to customers the need to promptly report change of circumstances and providing easy means to do so.	Deceased 2010	Decrease overpayments	Benefit Assessment Manager	Within existing staffing resources and allocated budgets
	2n. Review possibility of joint landlord forum with neighbouring authorities.	December 2010	Improved satisfaction with benefit service from accredited landlords and letting agents	Service Development Officer	Within existing staffing resources.
	2o. Use data to assist in targeting resources effectively to identify fraud in the system, including Annual Fraud campaigners	December 2010	Reduce Fraud and error	Senior Investigation Officer	Within existing staffing resources.
	2p. Review "Fraud awareness" training plan.	June 2010	Reduce Fraud and error	Senior Investigation Officer	Within existing staffing resources.
	2q. Where we identify claims that may qualify under the backdating rules we will encourage the claimant to make their case under the "good cause" rules so their entitlement may be backdated	May 2010	Maximised HB & CTB	Benefit Assessment Manager	Within existing staffing resources
	2s. Where claimants are disabled, vulnerable or sight impaired we will make arrangements to visit them in their homes to offer help with	May 2010	Improve access to service	Benefit Assessment Manager	Within existing staffing resources

	making their claims;				
	2t. We will work with partners to explain Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit to raise awareness of the benefits. We will also target their client groups such as the vulnerable, disabled or those whose first language is not English to ensure that they have access to our services;	May 2010	Improve access to service	Benefit Assessment Manager	Within existing staffing resources
	2u. We will provide, as required, translation services for claimants who do not have English as their first language. We will also use necessary sign language for the hearing impaired and loop system when required, and large type or Braille for the visually impaired (Provide Training to landlord forums if requested)	May 2010	Improve access to service	Benefit Assessment Manager	Within existing staffing resources
<b>3. Providing the best service</b>	3a, To process new housing benefit & Council Tax Benefit claims and change events in an average of 11 days in 2010/2011	March 2011	Middle quartile processing performance. Taking into account Pericles replacement October 2010.	Benefit Assessment Manager	Within existing staffing resources. Within existing budget.
	3b, To have processed 960 benefit claims under the fast track scheme	March 2011	Improved processing times	Senior Assessment Officers	Within existing staffing resources.
	3c, To ensure claims worked on are correct, and will be checked to achieve quality of	March 2011	To ensure high levels of quality in the processing of all new claims and change events	Senior Assessment Officers	Within existing staffing resources.

	99% accuracy Financial Procedural 97%				
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<b>Improvement plan theme</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Lead officer</b>	<b>Resources</b>
	3d. Compare the Benefits Service with other local authorities in order to identify improvements and good practices & liaison with neighbouring authorities	March 2011	Cost effective Service and improved service, Improve Resilience of service.	Benefit Service Manager	Within existing budget.
	3e Identify service efficiency savings,	November 2010 2011	Cost efficient service	Benefit Service Manager	Within existing budget.
	3f, To achieve a 75% in overpayment recovery	March 2011		Overpayment officer	Within existing budgets
	3g., To achieve a 5% increase in customer satisfaction	June 2010	Improved customer satisfaction	Service Development Officer	Within existing budget.
<b>Improvement plan theme</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Lead officer</b>	<b>Resources</b>
	Monitor Local Authority Error	March 2011	No loss of income to Local Authority	System Control Officer	Within existing staffing resources
	Arrange corporate Customer Service Refresher training	March 2011	Improved Customer Satisfaction	Service development officer	Within existing budget.
	Develop a customer care development plan	December 2010	Improved Customer Satisfaction	Service development officer	Within existing budget.

## 5. Benefits Service National and Local Performance Indicators

		<b>Target 2010/2011</b>
<b>NI 181</b>	Time taken to process Housing and Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events	11 days
<b>Local Indicators:</b>		
<b>BS1</b>	Successful Compliance Visits	550
<b>BS2</b>	Number of prosecutions and sanctions	50
<b>BS3</b>	Number of fraud investigators/1000 caseload - (BVPI 76b)	0.31.
<b>BS4</b>	Number of fraud investigations/1000 caseload where work is carried out to gather evidence on a claimant, landlord or associated party who is suspected of HB/CTB fraud.- (BVPI 76c)	32
<b>BS5</b>	Number of prosecutions and sanctions/1000 caseload – (BVPI 76d)	10
<b>BS6</b>	The average processing time taken for all new Housing and Council Tax Benefit	22 days
<b>BS7</b>	The average processing time taken for all notified change events that require a new decision by the authority	7 days
<b>BS8</b>	Processing Fast Tract claims	2 working days
<b>BS9</b>	Claims outstanding over 50 days	1%
<b>BS10</b>	Speed of processing: Percentage of new claims processed within 14 days of receipt of the full information necessary to process the claim	80%
<b>BS11 (a-d)</b>	<b>Accuracy of Processing:</b>	
	a) Benefits – correct amount of Benefit	99%
	b) Benefits – non financial error	99%
	c) Benefits – non procedural error	97%
	d) Benefits – processing units	10%
<b>BS12</b>	Average time taken to process applications for reconsideration and Appeals	4 weeks
<b>BS13</b>	decision on DHP	2 weeks
<b>BS14</b>	Scanning and indexing post	Within 1 working day
<b>BS15 (a-c)</b>	The annual amount of Housing Benefit Overpayments (HB) recovered:	
	a) The amount of Housing Benefit overpayments (HB) recovered during the period being reported on as a percentage of HB deemed recoverable overpayments as a % of the amount raised .	75%
	b) HB overpayments recovered during the period as a percentage of the total amount of HB overpayment debt outstanding at the start of the period plus amount of the HB overpayments identified during the period as a % .	15%



	c)	Housing Benefit (HB) overpayments written off during the period as a percentage of the total amount of HB overpayment debt outstanding at the start of the period, plus amount of HB overpayments identified during the period.	3%
<b>BS16</b>		Take up of Benefits	5% increase n households £50,000
<b>BS17</b>		Customer Satisfaction	82%