

# Equalities Monitoring – Services

## Appendix B – Benefits Service

**Annual Report - 2010-11**



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# 1. Introduction

The Benefit Service administers Housing and Council Tax Benefit on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. They are both means tested benefits so we have to collect information about people's financial and family circumstances. The Service undertakes benefit assessment, collection of overpayments and fraud investigation.

The purpose of equalities monitoring is to ensure the Council is providing a fair and equitable service to all residents.

To ensure the service is fair and equitable, monitoring has been undertaken in terms of:

- Access to the service
- Satisfaction with the service (2011-2012 data)
- Performance

It has been analysed by the following equality groups:

- Race
- Sexual orientation
- Age

Sex has not been analysed as this is just the sex of the person completing the application form rather than the household receiving the benefit. Women tend to fill in the application more often than men.

The remaining protected groups will be considered for future reports when data is available.

The data below has been taken from:

- 2010-2011 equal opportunities section of Housing and Council Tax benefit application form
- 2011 Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Benefits caseload data recorded from Northgate Benefit System

## 2. Access to the service

Customers access the service by various means. This could be in person themselves; via sign posting from other organisations and internal and external /stakeholders; take up campaigns; outreach surgeries; claims made via Department for Works and Pensions i.e. Jobcentre Plus and Pension Service.

Equality data is recorded from Bracknell Forest Council Benefit application forms received where we include an Equal Opportunities section at the end of the form. However not all customers complete this section. We are also unable to collate data from applications received via the Department for Work and Pensions as they do not record this information.

Our caseload as at 10/10/11 totalled 7460 households receiving housing and/or council tax benefit. A **breakdown of our caseload by age** is as follows:

**Table 1: Housing Benefit claims by age (2010/11)**

* Age group	No. of claims	% of claims
16-24	518	6.9%
25-40	1904	25.5%
41-59	1996	26.8%
60-79	1958	26.3%
80+	1084	14.5%

\*Where there is a joint claim the age is taken from the primary claimant

The table shows that we have a higher proportion of working age customers – this would be expected due to the economic climate over the last couple of years as more young people and families are entitled to benefit. Although the numbers within the age 16-24 are small, this group are more likely to be living in households as family members rather than claiming themselves.

**Table 2: Housing Benefit claims by Race (2010/11)**

Information received from benefit application forms during 2010-2011				
Ethnicity	No. of forms completed	%	Bracknell Forest population Mid-2009 estimates in 1000's	BF pop. %
White	653	93.3%	103.1	89.6%
Mixed	14	2.0%	2.1	1.8%
Asian	9	1.3%	5.0	4.3%
Black	18	2.6%	2.7	2.4%
Chinese	0	0.0%	1.4	1.2%
Other	6	0.9%	0.8	0.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>700</b>	100.0%	<b>116538</b>	100.0%

2826 application forms were received during 2010-2011 however only 700 customers completed the section on the forms and so this only represents 24.7% of the total number of customers making a claim for benefit during the financial year. This table does show we have a higher percentage of benefit customers from a white background compared to Bracknell Forest population, and indicates that those from minority groups particularly from an Asian background may have problems accessing our service. However, we need to bear in mind the small numbers which can lead to large swings in percentages; seven people changes the percentage by 1%. Access continues to be monitored closely and, if further data suggests there is a problem, actions to increase awareness will be taken. During 2010/11 proactive outreach work took place with faith groups and local BME groups in Bracknell Forest to explain the benefit service and promote take-up.

**Table 3: Housing Benefit claims by Sexual Orientation**

<b>Information received from benefit application forms during 2010-2011</b>			
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<b>No. of forms completed</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Bracknell Forest estimated population %</b>
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual	25	10.04%	1.5%*
Heterosexual	224	90%	98.50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

*\* based on Office for National Statistics "Measuring Sexual Identify: An Evaluation Report", September 2010*

Out of the 700 customers who completed the equal opportunities section of the application form, only 249 customers recorded their sexual orientation, therefore this only represents 8.8% of customers who returned their forms. Due to this, and the small numbers involved, no firm conclusions can be drawn from the data.

### **3. Satisfaction**

A customer satisfaction survey was carried out in May 2011 by post through QA Research. This was sent to 900 of our benefit customers made up of 450 working age customers and 450 pension age customers. Below is a table of the demographic profile of respondents:

	Count	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
Under 18	1	0%
18-34	43	10%
35-49	58	14%
50-64	88	21%
65-79	147	34%
80+	92	21%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	155	36%
Female	271	64%
<b>Economic activity</b>		
Working age	141	33%
60+	290	67%
<b>Q7c. Do you have any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity?</b>		
Yes	260	61%
No	165	39%
<b>Q7d. Does this illness or disability limit your activities in any way?</b>		
Yes	225	87%
No	34	13%

	Count	Percentage
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
British	395	93%
Irish	8	2%
Any other White background	6	1%
Nepali	3	1%
African	3	1%
Gypsy/Irish Traveller	1	0%
Indian	1	0%
Pakistani	1	0%
Any other Asian background	1	0%
Caribbean	1	0%
Any other Black background	2	0%
Any other Mixed background	1	0%
Chinese	1	0%
Filipino	1	0%
Other ethnic group	1	0%
<b>Sexual orientation</b>		
Heterosexual/ straight	360	91%
Gay man	2	1%
Lesbian/ gay woman	1	0%
Bisexual	1	0%
Prefer not to say	31	8%
<b>Religion/belief</b>		
Christian (all Christian denominations)	318	76%
None	81	19%
Other	8	2%
Buddhist	6	1%
Jewish	3	1%
Hindu	2	0%
Muslim	2	0%

As analysed by QA Research the 60+ age group is more heavily represented than those of working age and as a consequence the proportion of respondents with a long standing illness or limiting disability is high and so should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

Although we are able to record a breakdown of the demographic profile of respondents, the research did not provide comparisons to all equality strands with their satisfaction with the service but due to the small numbers this may be due to there being no statistical significant differences. However there were differences

between age groups from respondents who found it 'easy' to get in touch with the service. 84% of 35-49 year olds found it easy compared to 63% of 18-34 year olds.

In addition to this when asked for customer's satisfaction with benefit application forms and leaflets, it was respondents of working age (66%) who described the forms/leaflets as good compared to 55% of those aged 60+. The overall satisfaction levels with the forms/leaflets have improved since our previous satisfaction survey in 2009 (58% v 44%). Due to a customer focus group that we formed we do consult with them on the design of our forms.

## 4. Performance

<b>Ind Ref</b>	<b>Short Description</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2010/11</b>
NI181	Time taken to process Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events (Quarterly)	15.6 days	14.7 days	13.1 days