

BENEFITS SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10

Throughout 2009/10, the recession continued to have a significant impact on the workload of the Benefits Team. During the year the team dealt with 34,680 work items (new claims and general post). This represented an increase in workload of 10% compared with 2008/09 and just over 26% when compared with 2007/08. The number of Benefit claims in payment on 31 March 2010, was 6,158, which is higher than at any time over the last 15 years.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE YEAR

- **Achieved our target for the average time to process New Claims and Changes of Circumstances**
- **Worked in partnership with the Pension Service to encourage Benefit take-up. We visited 100 residents in the area offering advice and helping them to make claims. Here are some of the good news stories:**

One couple received extra benefits amounting to £309.77 per week.

Another couple didn't think they would be eligible for Pension Credit because of their savings but we were able to disregard some and they were then entitled to £30.05 per week Pension Credit and a lump sum of £661.10 for a backdated claim.

We were able to refer another resident to the Royal British Legion for some financial assistance to help buy a new cooker as her cooker had been condemned as unsafe and had not been in use for a number of months.

- **Redesigned our Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit claim form**
The new form is clearer and easier to fill in. This has been recognised by the Plain English Campaign which has awarded it a Crystal Mark for its clarity.
- **Worked with Job Centre Plus, the Pension, Disability & Carers Service and HM Revenues & Customs to implement the Governments e-transfer project and the revised 'In/Out of Work' process.**

This is helping to speed up the re-assessment of benefits for customer's whose circumstances change through moving in and out of work

- **Sent information on how to apply for the Government's Warm Front Grant to 1775 households**
- **Increased the proportion of customers opting to have their Housing Benefit paid by BACS from 89% to 95%**

Payments by BACS are safer for our customers and more cost effective for the Council

- **Carried out benchmarking with the top 2 Hampshire Benefit Teams.**

This has helped us to identify a number of things that we can do in order to improve our service levels.

YOUR VIEWS - are important to us; if you have any comments, suggestions or new ideas to help us to improve our service please let us know.

We monitor our performance against our targets during the year. Here is a summary of how we did in 2009/10:

Assessing New Claims and Changes of Circumstances

- The average number of days taken to process new claims and change of circumstances was 12.9 days. Our target was 13 days
- 86% of all new claims were decided within 14 days of receipt of all the information required to process the claim. Our target was 90%.

Recovering Housing Benefit Overpayments

- In total, we recovered £418,084 of overpaid Housing Benefit. Our target was to recover £320,000.

Answering correspondence

- Our target was to respond to emails as soon as possible or to acknowledge them within 1 working day followed up by a full reply within 3 working days. We received 2126 e-mails in 2009/10 and met the target in 100% of these cases.
- Our target was to respond to general letters and faxes as soon as possible or to acknowledge within 3 working days followed up by a full response within 10 working days. We achieved this target in 90% of cases.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2010/11

- We expect our workload to remain very high because of the continuing impact of the recession. However, we are still aiming to improve the average processing time for new claims and changes of circumstances to 12 days and to assess 90% of all new claims within 14 days of receiving all the information we need.
- We will carry out a Benefits Service customer satisfaction survey. Using this customer feedback we will put together an improvement plan ready for implementation in 2011/12.
- We are planning to continue to review the way in which we deal with new claims and notifications of changes of circumstances. We hope to identify further changes to our processes which will lead to improvements in the service we provide.
- We will be improving the information about Discretionary Housing Payments available on our website and introducing an on-line application form.
- We hope to submit a successful application for the new Customer Service Excellence award.

CONTACT US

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Mon - Fri 9.00 am to 5.00 pm

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Any complaints received are always investigated thoroughly, and can help improve our systems and procedures.