

Housing Benefit Service

Working with Landlords Policy

Barnet Council's overriding intention is "Putting the Community First". The aim of the Housing Benefit Service is set out in the Housing Benefit Policy Statement. The Housing Benefit Service helps the Council achieve one of its five priorities, which is supporting the vulnerable in our community. The Housing Benefit Service's role is to pay Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit to those in the community who have a low income and need help in paying their Council Tax and rent.

We need an active private rented sector where people on low incomes and receiving Housing Benefit can live in decent accommodation and rent their homes from both registered social landlords and private companies and individuals. We also need to protect public funds from incorrect claims and people who commit fraud.

To achieve this aim we will

- Work with landlords to help their tenants claim.
- Help landlords know the maximum Housing benefit the tenant can get before they agree a tenancy. We will do this by displaying the Local Housing Allowance rates on our website and in our contact centres.
- Give landlords as much information as we can under the law.
- We will allow tenants to ask for payments to be made direct to their landlords in special circumstances in line with our Safeguard Policy.
- Give landlords information on their rights and duties if they choose to accept Housing Benefit payments direct.
- Where tenants are more than eight weeks in arrears and the tenant does not dispute this, we will pay the Housing Benefit direct to the landlord in accordance with the regulations. If there is a dispute we will ask for satisfactory proof of the arrears.
- Where a payment covers more than one claimant, we will send a schedule explaining how much is for each claimant and the period the payment covers.
- We will use electronic and secure methods of sending schedules to landlords.
- For registered social landlords only, we will provide a file so that they may post payments electronically into individual accounts. This is only possible where the landlords have compatible software.
- Overpayments will be recovered in line with the overpayments policy.
- We expect that landlords will help us keep overpayments to a minimum. They must report anything of which they may become aware that might affect the claimant's entitlement to Housing Benefit, especially the tenant leaving the property or if the landlord suspects fraud.
- If an overpayment is fraudulent we will not seek to recover overpayments from the landlord unless the landlord was involved.
- We will seek suggestions and improvements to the service from landlords and involve them in changes to this policy.