

London Borough of Barnet

Housing Department

Housing Benefit Service

Communication Strategy

Internal Communication Strategy

We will base our internal communication strategy on the Council's communication policy aiming for excellence in internal communications.

Briefings will be based upon the cascade system with each section knowing from whom the briefing is expected. Where there is a breakdown in the cascade chain through sickness or vacancy the Head of Benefits will designate a Principal Benefits Officer to brief the team. The briefing will be based upon the "First Hand" briefing, which is available to all staff and the First Team staff newsletter delivered with the pay slips. There will also be regular team meetings with Senior Benefits Officers. Staff are encouraged to bring ideas and concerns to these meetings as well as suggestions for improvement of the service.

Communication with Customers

Our aim will always be to make sure the customer understands their rights and responsibilities. They should also understand when we have made a decision why the decision was made. We also want to reduce the barriers to claiming.

All decision notices must comply with the relevant section of the regulations.

All letters should be in Plain Language and avoid jargon.

Letters should explain why decisions have been made and under what regulation. They should also set out the customer's rights and responsibilities.

Application forms should guide the customer through them logically and explain what information is required in support of the claim so that delays are reduced.

Where further information is required, the time limits for supplying the information must be clearly set out.

Other information provided by the division in the form of posters, leaflets and flyers should be unambiguous and comprehensible.

Advice and information given face to face or over the telephone should also be clear and jargon free. Officers must wear their name badges at the counter or give their name when answering the telephone.

- We will support the Landlords Forum and the Social Landlords Forum.
- We will support the Customer Services Forum.
- We will regularly inform members of significant changes to the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit scheme.
- We will publicize our targets and performance on the intranet and internet
- We will over time make all claim forms, booklets and leaflets available on the Internet in support of the government's e-government agenda.

