

Housing Benefits Service

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit- Policy Statement.

- Our main objective is to provide an effective, fast, accurate and secure Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit service that is customer focussed, modern and efficient.
- Benefit assessment and processing will be undertaken in accordance with the relevant legislation and with the Verification Framework and Security Against Fraud and Error (SAFE) to reduce the risk of fraud and error and to ensure that claimants receive the benefit to which they are entitled. Effective planning will be undertaken to deploy sufficient and appropriately skilled resources in order to deliver an efficient, effective and secure service and to minimise barriers to work.
- The service is committed to the Council's values and priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. It does this by putting the Community First and by Supporting The Vulnerable in our Community. The population of Barnet is very diverse. Every sector of each community – young, old and those with particular needs all have a right to lead full and independent lives and the Council will work to meet those needs. Barnet's Equalities Policy sets out the Council's vision and commitment to ensure equality of access and opportunities for everyone in Barnet.
- We will seek the views of the service stakeholders to ensure the service works to meet the needs of the community and we will work with staff, clients and others to improve the service.
- The service is designed to be accessible to everyone in the community and publicity will be provided to promote the benefit service and enable claimants to make successful claims.
- Benefit processing will be speedy and accurate with the objective of achieving the Local Public service Agreement targets as set out in the Performance Management Plan. We will also aim to achieve upper quartile scores in all relevant Best Value Performance Indicators to help Barnet's ambition to become an excellent council.
- We will measure our performance against our Local Public Sector Agreement and the relevant Audit Commission Best Value Performance Indicators. We will publicise both the expected standard of service delivery and how the service is performing against these targets so that claimants, benefit staff, councillors and other interested parties may access that information.
- We will have a high regard for good customer care taking account of the Corporate Customer Care Standards, the Corporate Care Standards and the Corporate Care Strategy.

- Where fraud is suspected we will refer cases to the Corporate Anti-Fraud Team who will investigate and (where appropriate) prosecute in accordance with Barnet's antifraud policy and prosecution policies.
- The service supports the whistle-blowing policy and makes all staff aware of it.
- Where in the course of our duties we become aware that a customer might qualify for a benefit that they do not appear to be receiving, we will encourage that person to make a claim.
- When requested we will provide customers an indication of the amount of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit they might receive if they found a job. This helps minimise the barriers to work.
- We will provide customers with advice on rent levels through pre-tenancy determinations, so they may seek their own private accommodation rather than ask the Council to assist them with temporary accommodation.
- We will use Discretionary Housing Payments in accordance with the Discretionary Housing Payments policy and we will work with the Council's Environmental Health service and Tenancy Relations Officer to help claimants live in decent housing.
- Where overpayments occur we will first consider whether or not the overpayment is recoverable and if it is we will have regard to our overpayments policy. If it is deemed recoverable we will take steps to recover the debt. We are aware that we are stewards of public funds and overpayments that are not recovered impact upon all the taxpayers of Barnet.