

Benefits Service Customer Charter

Who we are and what we do

The Benefits Service, part of Financial Services, operates from Cunninghame House, Irvine. Our main role is to provide every Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit claimant in North Ayrshire with an efficient and effective service. We aim to process new claims and changes of circumstances quickly. We shall also award the right amount of benefit and prevent fraud and error from entering the Benefits System.

The Benefits Service has around 19,200 benefit claimants. Housing Benefit, Local Housing Allowance or Council Tax Benefit is awarded to help claimants meet the cost of their rent charges or council tax.

We provide advice, information and assistance to claimants in the following main areas:

- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit
- Local Housing Allowance
- Other welfare benefits
- Working age claimants
- Pensioner claimants
- How to claim
- Supporting evidence to provide
- Reporting change of circumstance
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Housing Benefit overpayments
- Appealing against a decision
- Benefit fraud

The level of service you can expect when dealing with North Ayrshire Council's Benefits Service is: -

Customer Care

We will:

- Be friendly, welcoming, polite, courteous, respectful and helpful;
- Wear name badges where appropriate so you can recognise us;
- Carry and show identity cards when we visit people at home or visit business premises.
- Provide an efficient and effective service from the first point of contact through to conclusion
- Observe your privacy and confidentiality where appropriate
- Respond to your needs in order to access our services
- Monitor, evaluate and publish our performance
- Ask for your views on our service

Telephone Calls

We will:

- Answer 85% of calls
- Always give our name when we answer your call
- Try and resolve your query while you are on the phone & close 80% of calls at the first point of contact
- Call you back if the query is more complicated. We will provide you with a timescale for a call back and we will ensure that we meet that timescale.
- Call you back within 24 hours if you leave a message
- Only transfer calls if it is necessary
- Transfer calls quickly and correctly. We will tell you who you are being transferred to and tell the person taking the call who you are and why you are calling.

Written Correspondence, Fax and Email

We will:

- Provide a response within 10 working days. In cases where there is going to be a delay, we will provide an interim reply explaining the position and when you can expect a full response.
- Send you an application form you have asked for within three working days

Personal Callers

We will:

- Speak to you within 15 minutes of arriving
- Where possible try to arrange the most suitable date and time for a personal appointment that is convenient for you
- Provide, if required, private facilities for your appointment and ensure that our accommodation is accessible, clean and safe
- Leave a calling card when we visit you at home and you are not in.

Confidentiality

We will:

- Provide private interview facilities for use on request
- Keep your personal information secure and comply with the Data Protection Act 1998

Complaints

If you are not satisfied with our service the quickest way to have the matter dealt with is to discuss it with the member of staff you are dealing with or submit a written complaint to the Chief Financial Officer or complete a Listening & Learning form. These are available at all Council buildings including libraries. The form can also be completed on-line by visiting the Contact Us section of the Council's web site at www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk

We will:

- Let you know we have received your complaint either by making personal contact, telephoning or writing to you within three working days
- Reply to your complaint in writing within 20 working days
- Apologise to you, if appropriate, and take action to solve the problem. We will also consider your complaint when we review our service

Performance Standards

The Benefits Service aim to provide the following standards of performance:

We will:

- Set targets each year to reduce the average number of days to process new claims and changes of circumstances and publish our "right time indicator" performance on the Council's web site and at our enquiry counter.

Housing Benefit overpayments

We will:

- Advise you of the best method of payment including standing order, telephone payment, Internet payment, by cheque or by cash at a Council office
- If you are having problems paying your housing benefit overpayment then we will provide guidance and advise you, as best we can.. We can also arrange for you to see a debt advisor who specialises in debt management and welfare rights
- Make reasonable payment arrangements to help you pay your debt

Listen and Communicate

In order to do this, we will:

- Listen and learn from any comments or suggestions made
- Publish information on our web site
- Ask you to help us by using our reference number in all correspondence
- Offer to provide Council information in different languages, larger print, Braille or audio.

What we expect from you

We expect that you will

- Treat our staff with respect
- To pay your Housing Benefit overpayment invoice by the due date
- Provide us with information that we request and within the time we specify
- Contact us as soon as possible if you are having difficulty paying your Housing Benefit Overpayment Invoice
- Tell us as soon as possible about any change in your circumstances
- Keep appointments or let us know in good time if you will be unable to attend

How to Contact Us

Opening hours are:

Monday and Tuesday	9.00am to 4.45pm
Wednesday	10.15am to 4.45pm
Thursday	9.00am to 4.45pm
Friday	9.00am to 4.30pm
(Except for public holidays)	

Help us by using our benefit claim number in all correspondence

Please note we are closed every Wednesday until 10.15am for staff training. This training is essential in continuing to provide a quality service to all our customers.

The Benefits Service is located on the second floor (East) of Cunninghame House where there is a public counter to help customers with any enquiry relating to the local housing allowance or any other benefit enquiry for a private or Housing Association tenant.

A public enquiry service is also provided on the ground floor (East) of Cunninghame House for all council tenants and owner-occupiers with a benefit enquiry.

Tel number: 0845 603 0595

Fax number: 01294 324044

www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk