

Benefits Service Customer Consultation 2009

In October and November 2009 the Benefits Service conducted a consultation exercise to better understand our Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) customer's needs and preferences.

1000 survey forms were sent to a selection of customers covering all age groups, post codes and social groups across North Ayrshire, and around 200 responses were received (20%).

Of the respondents, 36% were claiming Council Tax Benefit only, 25% were Private Tenants, 19% were Local Authority Tenants and 20% chose not to tell us this information.

The first part of the survey asked customers about the ways in which they access the Benefits Service, the ease of claiming and the quality of the information provided.

81% of people found the information provided by the Benefits Service to be easy to understand, with **19%** saying they didn't.

76% of people found claiming HB/CTB easy to some extent, with **12%** finding it hard (12% reported they found it neither easy nor hard)

During 2010 the Benefits Service will continue to develop our HB/CTB application form and review our standard documents to make sure they are as clear and easy to use as possible.

Also during 2010, the Service will introduce internet – based claiming in order to make the claim process widen the way in which people can claim. The survey revealed relatively modest interest from customers in internet claiming so far, but we regard it as an important option for the future of the Service.

The survey also asked Customers to comment on the level of satisfaction with seven key targets set by the Service. The results of this were –

- **96%** of people were satisfied with the target of 99% for the accuracy of assessments
- **86%** of people were satisfied with the target to reply to correspondence within 10 working days
- **86%** of people were satisfied with the target to speak to all personal callers to Cunninghame House within 15 minutes
- **85%** of people were satisfied with the target to recover 92.5% of overpaid Housing Benefit identified in the year within that year
- **83%** of people were satisfied with the target to process new claims and changes in circumstances within 14 days
- **74%** of people were satisfied with the target to answer 85% of telephone calls

- **73%** of people were satisfied with the Benefit Investigation Team's target to investigate 80% of the cases referred to them for fraud.

The lowest levels of satisfaction can be seen with regard to telephone answering and fraud investigation. In respect of these the following information is important –

- The Telephone Contact Centre has recently invested in a new call answering system and this should improve call handling times, and therefore increase the number of calls that can be answered. The system was introduced in November 2009, and initially there were disruptions to the service on account of the new system. We would like to thank our Customers for their patience during this time. However it is anticipated that a much improved service will be provided throughout 2010 and beyond.
- The Benefits Investigation Team will exceed their target to investigate 80% of the referrals they receive for fraud for 2009-10. It is not possible to investigate 100% of the referrals received, as sometimes the quality of the information received is insufficient for the benefits investigation team to investigate the matter further for example incorrect or incomplete details. Additionally the investigation team may receive some referrals where the alleged perpetrator is not in receipt of HB. However 100% of all referrals that meet the quality standards are investigated

North Ayrshire Council achieved the fourth highest number of sanctions in Scotland for fraud in the last year for which full figures are available (2007/2008). Sanctions are either cautions financial penalties or prosecutions, and the three Councils that achieved more sanctions have much larger numbers of benefit customers and investigators in their areas. When the number of sanctions per fraud investigator employed is calculated, North Ayrshire Council is Scotland's best performer

The Benefits Service would like to thank all the people that responded to our survey in 2009. The views expressed are very important to us, and they will be considered in our Service Delivery Plan and targets for the next year.

We are currently conducting a satisfaction survey and we would welcome feedback regarding our levels of service. The survey can be accessed on our website (www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk) and paper survey forms are available at our Customer counters at Cunninghame House. Survey forms may also be obtained by request on telephone number 01294 324634.

Details of our satisfaction survey will be posted on the website and displayed in our office in due course.