



# Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit Office Charter

## Housing Benefits Office Charter

**The Housing Benefits Office has a duty to administer Housing and Council Tax Benefit in accordance with legislation.**

**We are constantly striving to improve our service to our customers and have developed a set of standards that we aim to achieve.**

1. We are here to help and will be polite open and honest although we will not tolerate aggression violence or bad language, but we will treat customers fairly and objectively, paying particular attention to those customers with special needs.
2. We ensure that all staff is continually developed to retain high calibre staff and recognise staff achievement through the reward and recognition scheme.
3. We ensure that all staff are monitored for quality and quantity to ensure we meet our targets and maintain a high quality service to the public.
4. We are constantly striving to improve our service to our customers and have developed a set of standards that we aim to achieve.
5. We maintain good channels of communication within the team through team meetings, appraisals, staff focus groups and one 2 one's.
6. We work closely with the Revenues Office for the good of the claimant and have joint team meetings twice a year to discuss cross team issues.
7. We follow the principles of the Verification Framework and Security against Fraud and Error (SAFE) to reduce the risk of fraud and error to ensure claimants receive the benefits they are entitled to.
8. We narrate every telephone call and counter enquiry where relevant to ensure a full history of a customers account is available.
9. We regularly review claims to ensure accuracy.
10. Overpayments will be determined effectively incorporating any underlying entitlement. Overpayments will be recovered but incorporating customer care and we will explain our policies and send leaflets in plain English.
11. We review all our leaflets, publications and charters on a two yearly basis and review our standards regularly through surveys, customer and staff suggestions and will publish our performance annually.
12. We work with Age Concern, CAB and other outside agencies to ensure a better understanding of our policies and to improve customer care for the public and benefit take-up.
13. We support the Councils 'Dress down Days' for local charities. /continued.....

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## Telephone Calls

1. We try to answer 95% of telephone calls within five rings using the Councils Corporate greeting.
2. We provide a telephone service from 8am to 6pm Monday to Thursday and 5pm on Friday.
3. Answer phone facilities are available when the office is closed or the team are receiving training. Voicemail messages are dealt with within one working day.
4. We telephone claimants where appropriate to help in speeding up the process of their claim.
5. We ask assistance from Senior Officers to ensure sound advice is being given and offer to ring back if the enquiry becomes too complicated or the customer requests it.
6. We will not terminate a call unless the customer is continually abusive and we have requested they stop or given them the opportunity to speak to a senior officer.

In extreme circumstances, where a customer has been abusive, we will refer them to Customer Services who hold an incident register.

## Correspondence

1. We deal with appeals as a priority.
2. We reply to general Correspondence including letters and e-mails within 10 working days. Where this cannot be achieved, we will send an acknowledgement letter explaining when they can expect a reply.
3. All original documents are returned on the next working day.
4. We ensure all letters are written in plain English and that all points are covered.

## Personal callers

1. We follow the Counter Charter.
2. We wear a name badge so customers know who they are dealing with.
3. We try to deal with the enquiry as quickly and politely as possible, but if the enquiry becomes too complicated we can offer a private interview appointment at a mutually convenient time.

## Home visits

1. We can provide a home visiting service to customers if they are unable to come into the Council Offices
2. This service is limited and will be based on individual needs.
3. Appointments are offered within 5 working days.