

■ Performance update

Our performance for the first quarter of 2009:

Time to process a new claim (including waiting for all information)	18.94 days (31.06 days Q1)
Claims processes within 14 days of receiving all the information	98.36% (89.44% Q1)
Time to process a change in circumstance	6.61 (8.067 days Q1)
*Combined processing time for new claims and changes	10.83 (16.6 days Q1)

You can see from the figures that our performance has improved considerably during this second quarter. There was a reduction in the volume of new claims received in the second quarter but the volumes are still greater than the same quarter 2008.

■ Questionnaire

Within our last newsletter, we enclosed a short questionnaire. The results of this are enclosed. We will address each of the comments made.

■ Appeals

We have a leaflet that explains the Appeals process in full; it explained what to do if you do not agree with a decision we have made, or how to appeal against a decision. It also tells you what to do if you just want some more information about a decision we have made. As a landlord, you would only be able to ask us to look a decision that directly affects you; for example the recovery of an overpayment.

■ How to complain

Any complaint received is treated as an opportunity to make improvements to our service. The Council treats as a complaint any expression of dissatisfaction about the Council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service provided. A complaint can be written or verbal. We have a complaints leaflet that explains the complaints process in full.

■ Which aspects of our Service could we improve? - In response

Nearly every landlord would like us to paying in advance and also to the landlord in the first instance. When the legislation was changed to paying in arrears, this helped with reducing overpayments when customers move from their properties. If a claim is made under the Local Housing Allowance rules, we have to pay the tenant in the first instance unless they are unlikely to pay their rent, vulnerable or 8 weeks in arrears or more. We have to adhere to the benefit legislation; I would suggest that you speak to your local Member of Parliament about this aspect if you would like to

take it further. Having said that, provided that we work together closely where you are aware that your tenant is in receipt of Housing Benefit; if you have concerns that your tenant may not pay their rent, please speak to us. It is in everyone's interest to make sure that rent is paid on time and that people's homes are secure.

When we calculate benefit entitlement, if the payments or part payments are sent directly to the landlord, you should receive a notification letter about this with the weekly amount. This will remain the same unless there is a change of circumstances that affects the weekly amount of benefit, at that time, you would be notified again. Likewise with the tenant, they would receive a separate notification, including information on how we worked out their benefit.

Housing benefit schedules can be sent by e mail. Please e mail - Karen.robinson@reigate-banstead.gov.uk, who will be happy to arrange this for you.

If in my absence you would like to contact one team member, please contact Simon Evans. Simon is an experienced benefit assessor and can be contacted on direct dial 01737 276481.

■ **News from our Private Sector Housing Services Team**

Did you know that if your tenants are in receipt of eligible benefits* or aged over 70, your property could be eligible for the following measures free of charge?

- Loft insulation
- Cavity wall insulation
- Replacement central heating boiler or complete system
- Further energy efficiency measures

The Council is promoting a Government grant funded scheme to provide the above measures. The scheme is being managed by the Greater London Energy Efficiency Network (GLEEN). If eligible, the tenant will need to make the application to GLEEN (rather than the landlord).

*(*for example, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, disability living allowance - this list is not exhaustive)*

For further information or to arrange for a surveyor to visit your property, please contact GLEEN on 0800 652 3163.

■ **Contacting us by e-mail**

If you would like to contact us by e-mail with a query about a benefit claim, you can e-mail benefits.enquiries@reigate-banstead.gov.uk. Your e-mail will be forwarded to the relevant officer to reply to you.

If you would like to receive a copy of our complaints procedure or our Appeals Leaflet, both are available from our website, www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk alternatively, please contact me and I will put a copy in the post to you.

If you have any queries or concerns regarding our service, or would like to set up regular liaison, please contact Louise Stone - telephone 01737 276491, e-mail louise.stone@reigate-banstead.gov.uk or alternatively, you can write to us at the Town Hall, Castlefield Road, Reigate, Surrey, RH2 0SH.

Results of Landlord Questionnaire : July 2009
(268 sent to Private Landlords & 38 sent to Housing Associations)

	Private Landlords	Housing Associations
<i>How good do you think the service is?</i>		
Very good	10	2
Good	5	0
Not good	0	0
<i>What is the most important to you?</i> <i>(1) as most important and (2) as next important</i>		
1. Payment by due date	10(1) 3(3)	1(1)
2. Easy telephone access	7(2) 3(3)	1(1)
3. Changes (e.g. rent increases) processed quickly	4(3) 3(2) 2(1) 1(4)	1(4)
4. Something else (please tell us)	2(4)	1(2)
	Ability to discuss reasons for claim suspension, etc. Getting paid by tenants	Good email query service
<i>Are you able to contact us easily, do we offer an accessible service?</i>		
Do our opening times suit you?	15 Yes	2 Yes
Are our offices accessible to you?	13 Yes 1 No 1 not visited	2 Yes
<i>If you have a query with us, do we respond effectively?</i>		
By phone	15 Yes	2 Yes
By email	14 Yes*	2 Yes
By letter	15 Yes	2 Yes
	* 1 not tried to use email to contact us	
<i>Are you aware of our Appeals Service?</i>		
	6 Yes 8 No 1 probably	2 Yes
<i>Would you know how to complain?</i>		
	7 Yes 7 No 1 probably	2 Yes

Private Landlords	Housing Associations
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What do you think is the best aspect of our Service?

Private landlords
 The professionalism of the staff
 The fact that the rent is paid directly to us and not to the tenant (must be pre LHA claims)
 Payment direct to the landlord on allocated date (again must be pre LHA claims)
 That we keep the landlord informed of any changes
 Communications
 Prompt payment (2 landlords said this)
 Very prompt at answering calls and very professional and polite
 Updates with newsletter and our service seems to be very efficient

Housing Associations
 Friendly approachable staff quick to respond to queries
 Good working relationship

What aspect of our Service do you think we could most improve?

Private landlords
 If rent could be paid in advance to the landlord as opposed to the new system
 It seems to be adequate at present
 Tackling the Fraudsters (the rest of this comment has been given to our fraud team)
 Initial payment could be before 6 weeks
 As a landlord, I find the tenants do not seem to know what you pay for them, is this so?
 Length of time it takes to process claims
 Return to paying landlords directly
 Email HB payment schedule rather than post
 Stop paying rents directly to tenants

Housing Associations
 You are by far my best local authority (I cover 6 in total!)

<i>Do you like to receive the landlord newsletters?</i>	14 Yes 1 No	2 Yes
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Please let us know what you would like included in future landlord newsletters.

Your newsletters are fine (you are also my only local authority to produce a regular newsletter!)
 Legislation update.
 Promote the Next Step scheme. This is a wonderful service and more landlords should be encouraged to participate as the support is superb.
 How do you set limits as to whether to pursue a fraudster or not.

Please could you let us know if there is any aspect of our Service that you would like us to provide or improve upon that is not covered or asked for above.

Definitely agree to receive the newsletters via email (2 comments)
 Tackling the Fraudsters
 If possible to allocate one team member to deal with any enquiries so as to build a more personal relationship