

■ Performance update

Our final performance figures for the year 2009/2010 are as given below. The format for these performance figures are judged on the combined performance of new claims and changes of circumstances.

Average time to process a new claim - 25 days
Average time to process a change in circumstance - 4 days

This gives a combined performance of 7 days.

To arrive at this end combined performance figure, the number of days to process a new claim and a change of circumstance are divided by the number of claims dealt with.

Benchmarked against other Surrey Local Authorities, we are one of the top performers.

■ Landlord Portal

We are thinking of introducing a landlord portal sometime in the near future. This would be a direct link between you and our back office via the internet. You would have your own personal log in and password to streamline communication and speed up processes.

This facility would include the ability to -

- View your payment schedules
- Change your bank account details
- Notify us of changes in circumstances that you became aware of
- You would even be able to upload your rent increase schedules

More information will be provided as the project progresses; in the meantime, if you would like to volunteer to test the new portal, please contact Karen Robinson, our Service Support & Development Officer, on 01737 276286 e mail Karen.robinson@reigate-banstead.gov.uk

■ Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit take-up

No doubt that one of the first things that you do when a tenant falls into arrears is to suggest they claim Housing Benefit to see if they are entitled.

We are trying to take a proactive approach and we are trying to find those people who qualify for help but to date have not claimed.

Would you be willing to display a small A4 poster in your offices or estate offices? It would be designed to explain the various ways in which someone can find out if they are likely to receive any help or not. We know from a recent survey of our customers that it is very frustrating for them to go through the process of completing the application form, submitting all the evidence, only to find that their income is too high (summary of results shown below). We would like to signpost people to our website where they can use our benefits calculator, or ask for a short form application where we can make an initial assessment as to whether it is likely they would qualify or not.

If you are able to put up a laminated poster (or more!) please contact Louise, details at the end of the newsletter and she will send you what you need.

■ Reporting Changes of Circumstances

Please remember to keep us informed if you are aware of change of circumstances with your tenants. If you think there has been a change in the household composition, the tenant may

have had a change of income or any circumstance that may affect the amount of Housing Benefit they are entitled to, please tell us.

You can notify us of any changes by e mail to: benefits.enquiries@reigate-banstead.gov.uk

Benefits Survey

We recently sent out a survey form to customer who have claimed Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit in the last 6 months. We did this to see how we are performing from a customer service point of view and also to establish how they felt about the process of claiming.

204 Surveys were sent out, 44 were returned, and this gave a 21.5% return. Therefore, the percentages shown are a small representation of our customers.

29.5% claimed through unemployment. The results for these were that the majority of claimants found out how to claim either by our website or visit to a Help Shop. The majority returned the form back in person. This meant that 61.5% of this group supplied all the information required with their claim. They still found the process either ok or confusing and also needed to question our decision, but when they did, were satisfied with our response. Overall, they were happy with the service that they received.

9.1% claimed due to a rent increase. The results for these were that they obtained the information on how to claim either from their Housing Association, our website or through a visit to the Help Shop. Most of the claimants returned their form directly to the Help Shop in person. This group of people found the process to be OK. No one found it confusing or easy, however, it was 50/50 between meeting or not meeting their expectations. However, they were very happy with our service.

34.1% claimed as they were unable to manage their financial affairs. The results for these showed that the majority of customers found the information on how to claim from a Help Shop Visit. Again, the majority handed their claim in person to a Help Shop. 86.7% of this group supplied all the information we needed to process their claim. Some people found it easy to claim, but the majority found the process ok and a small minority confusing. For 60% of this group, the outcome met with their expectations. For this group of customers, it showed that they were happy with our service.

4.5% claimed through sickness. They found out how to claim either by a visit to the Help Shop or a request for a home visit. Some posted the claim form back to us; some visited the Help Shop in person. This group of people were not confused by the process; they either found it easy or ok, and were totally happy with the service and it met their expectations.

Overall, of the people who returned the survey to us, 70.5% returned the application form to us in person to a Help Shop. 77% provided all the information with the claim, and the majority of people are satisfied with our service. The department that provides the best service from the customer's point of view is our Help Shops.

Fraud Awareness

Fraud against Reigate & Banstead Borough Council is taken very seriously. If you suspect that someone is committing fraud you can contact us anonymously on 01737 276 483 or email fraudstoppers@reigate-banstead.gov.uk Alternatively you can download a fraud referral from the internet by clicking here and sending it to Corporate Anti Fraud Team, Town Hall, Castlefield Road, Reigate, Surrey, RH2 0SH. If you would like fraud awareness training delivered to your teams, please contact Chrissie Harwood, Corporate Fraud Manager on 01737 276487 e mail Chrissie.Harwood@reigate-banstead.gov.uk

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 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.**

If I am not available and you would like a named contact here, please contact Simon Evans on 01737 276481.