

Landlord Update April 2009

As we go into a new financial year, the main priority for the Isle of Wight Council Benefit Service is to provide quick and effective help to those residents who are claiming benefits, often for the first time and to maintain and enhance the service we give to all our customers.

Details of the Benefits Service performance over the last year, are shown below. These show how the service is performing against our service targets and coping with the increase in claims received during the last year. I have also taken the opportunity to provide you with a quick review of Local Housing Allowance one year on and what happens now that the first anniversary date for some of these claims has been reached.

Performance

Our local target for 2008/09 was to process all new claims on average within 20 days and changes in circumstance within 11 days. Average processing times for the last four months are detailed below.

	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Final Year average
New Claims : end to end processing (days)	18.11	21.20	17.97	16.77	18.74
Changes in circumstances (days)	8.42	9.02	7.06	8.23	8.81
National Indicator 181 (Right Time)	12.03	13.47	10.90	10.89	12.14

The Benefits Service is also required to report back against National Indicator 181 (Right Time measure). The purpose of this indicator is to measure the time taken to process Housing and Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events together. The NI 181 figure is still to be confirmed by The Department of Works and Pensions. Our target for this indicator was 15 days during 2008/2009 and we achieved an average time of 12.14 days.

The Benefits service has seen a 27.1% increase in the number of new applications received during 2008/09. The service strived to meet this increase and maintain performance within the targets set to ensure that residents receive their Housing and Council Tax Benefit promptly. The targets for service delivery for 2009/2010 have been reviewed, taking into account the ongoing demands on the service, our target to process all New claims remains at 20 days, the Change in Circumstances target has been amended to 9.5 days, and our National Indicator 181 Target has been amended to 13.5 days.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

Local Housing Allowance was introduced on 7th April 2008 and therefore the first anniversary dates are beginning to be reached for some of these benefit claims. So what happens now? Any claim approaching the yearly anniversary without change will generate a new LHA award based on the current months LHA rates. This will automatically be recalculated and if there is any change, a revised award notice will be sent to the claimant. In the cases where the LHA is paid directly to a Landlord, the payment schedule will show the revised amount due. A recent change to legislation has restricted the maximum level of LHA payable to a five bedroom level, even if the number of bedrooms required by a claimant exceeds this level.

May LHA Rates

Category	Room Need	LHA Rate Weekly £	LHA Rate Monthly £
A	Shared room rate	70.00	303.33
B	1 Bedroom	103.85	450.02
C	2 Bedroom	129.62	561.69
D	3 Bedroom	155.77	675.00
E	4 Bedroom	196.15	849.98
F	5 Bedroom	275.77	1195.00

Please note the household of any claimant determines the size of accommodation required rather than the number of rooms in the property. Please contact the Benefit Section if you need advice on the appropriate size of accommodation.

The Council's Benefit Service continues to work very closely with Housing, Supporting People, and the Citizens Advice Bureau. As a Landlord you have an important role in assisting us to safeguard payments of benefits. If you are not receiving payments from your tenant and believe Housing Benefit may be in payment, it is important that you let us know as soon as possible. The information we can give a landlord may be limited but, if there are rent arrears and Housing Benefit is in payment we will investigate the matter, however, I must stress that the arrangement to make rental payments remains an agreement between landlord and tenant.

The Rent Service

From the 1.4.09 The Rent Service has transferred and is now incorporated in the Valuation Office Agency. Their web address is now: www.voa.gov.uk

'Credit Crunch' Impact

In the December update I explained that the Revenues and Benefits Service had been working very closely with other service areas and organisations, to look at ways of assisting families and individuals on the Island. Since then a booklet has been produced that provides advice and guidance to people to help them cope during the current recession. I have provided the Council's web site link for this booklet and other information available that may be of interest to you: http://www.iwight.com/living_here/news/2009/credit_crunch/default.asp

If anyone has any concerns about personal debt, independent and free advice is available from the Citizens Advice Bureau (01983 826160) and The Law Centre (01983 524715).

Forthcoming Events

Isle of Wight Landlords' Fair

20 May 2009 at 6pm

Ryde Castle Hotel, Esplanade, Ryde, Isle of Wight PO33 1JA

Agenda to include:

- Information and advice to landlords from a financial advisor (not confirmed).
- Information on Housing Services new Choice Based Lettings system and its benefit to private sector landlords.
- Information on the Anti Poverty Group.
- Details of repairs grants and HMO grants that are available for landlords.
- A presentation from Stonham Housing Association and how they work in partnership with landlords.

The content of the presentations may be subject to change.

For more information or to reserve a place please telephone (01983) 823040 or email us at housing@iow.gov.uk