



## The Anglia Revenues Partnership

# Strategy for Take-up and Publicity Of Housing Benefit & Council Tax Benefit

**Benefits Service**  
**Author: Sharon Jones**

**1 December 2011**

Strategy for Take-up and Publicity  
Of  
Housing Benefit & Council Tax Benefit

DOCUMENT SPONSOR (Client Officers):            Forest Heath - Andrew Claydon  
   Breckland       - Rob Walker  
   East Cambs     - Linda Grinnell  
   St Edmundsbury – Liz Watts

DOCUMENT AUTHOR:                                   Sharon Jones  
   Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership

DATE : **1 December 2011**

DOCUMENT APPROVED AT:-

LAST REVISION DATE: 10<sup>th</sup> May 2010

NEXT REVISION DATE: June 2012

Strategy for Take-up and Publicity  
Of  
Housing Benefit & Council Tax Benefit

ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP

**PRIMARY LEGISLATION**

Social Security Administration Act 1992, Section 123(3)(a) and 123(4)(a) of the Social Security Contribution and Benefit Act 1992, The Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000, Human Rights Act 1998.

**SECONDARY LEGISLATION**

The Housing Benefit Regulations 2006, The Council Tax Benefit Regulations 2006, The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (Decisions and Appeals) Regulations 2001.

**INTRODUCTION**

Breckland Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council and Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council working as the Anglia Revenues Partnership, have a legal obligation to administer the benefit schemes on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. The Councils' are committed to improving the welfare and quality of life of the residents living within the Anglia Revenues Partnership area, publicise the schemes and to raise the profile of the services, and for financial reasons.

**STRATEGY STATEMENT**

Forest Heath District Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Breckland Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council working as the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership (ARP), under authority of Section 101(b) of The Local Government Act 1972, will deal with the promotion and take up of Housing Benefit and Council Tax in a professional manner that shows respects for customers, members of staff and anyone else involved in the process and will deal with encouraging benefits take-up as set out in this strategy.

This Strategy will be available to all internal and external stakeholders and will be on the Councils' websites [www.breckland.gov.uk](http://www.breckland.gov.uk), [www.forest-heath.gov.uk](http://www.forest-heath.gov.uk), [www.eastcamb.gov.uk](http://www.eastcamb.gov.uk) [www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk](http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk)

## **LEGAL OBLIGATION**

As a service provider, managing and administering the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit schemes, the Councils' working as the ARP have a legal obligation to implement policies to address poverty and promote social inclusion. This is highlighted in Section 123(3)(a) of the Social Security Contribution and Benefit Act 1992 which provides that every Local Authority awarding Housing Benefit: **"Shall take such steps as appear to them appropriate for the purpose of securing that persons who may be entitled to Housing Benefit from the authority become aware that they may be entitled to it"**

Requirements in respect of Council Tax Benefit are the same and can be found in Section 123(4)(a) of the same act.

### **To improve the welfare and quality of life of our residents**

Social Security Benefits, including Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit provide a safety net for those on low incomes. By encouraging take-up and ensuring that residents are claiming the benefits to which they are entitled, the Benefits Service can improve their financial position, improving their quality of life and reducing unnecessary stress and worry for vulnerable members of the community.

## **OBJECTIVE**

This strategy is provided to ensure that the Local Authorities through the ARP fulfil their statutory requirements. This strategy helps to ensure that the legislation is adhered to and that benefit take-up is promoted, in a fair and open manner.

## **EQUALITY**

ARP is committed to equality of opportunity and valuing diversity in both the provision of services and in its role as a major employer. We believe that everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect. We are committed to the elimination of unfair and unlawful discrimination in all our policies, procedures and practises. We are determined to ensure that no member of the public, employee or job applicant receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of their age, child care or other caring responsibilities, disability, gender, HIV status, language, marital status, race, religion, sexuality, membership or non-membership of a trade union, or by any requirement which cannot be shown to be justifiable.

## **DATA PROTECTION**

This is compatible with Data Protection requirements as the Strategy relates to the legal requirement to recover overpayments in accordance with the relevant legislation – as set out above.

## **CRIME AND DISORDER ACT**

This Strategy is compatible with Section 17 of the above act. All staff are aware of their responsibilities and duty under this, and are mindful of its relevance.

## **BEST PRACTICE**

This strategy reflects best practice in the procedure for dealing with the take-up and promotion of Housing and Council Tax Benefits..

The strategy should be flexible in its approach to recovery and promotion of benefits.

This strategy has regard for the rights of individuals and obligations of each of the Partnership Councils' under the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998.

## **APPLICATION OF THE STRATEGY**

By being more pro active in publicising the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit schemes and encouraging those entitled to claim will show the importance of the Benefits Service to each of the Council's strategies and priorities. The ARP is fully committed to service improvement and a key part of that improvement is to ensure the maximum take up of these benefits. The service has a full role to play in supporting social inclusion and achieving community cohesion.

There is a direct financial incentive through increased Council Tax collection and rent collection for landlords, and preventing homelessness by ensuring the public are receiving their entitlement to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit and other Social Security Benefits. A poor level of benefit take-up can affect the local economy, increase financial pressure on the Council and increase pressure on Public Services.

## **NATIONAL REQUIREMENT FOR TAKE-UP**

The Department for Work and Pension's Performance Standards for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit administration provides guidance and sets standards that each Local Authority must adhere to. We must provide equal access to the Benefit Service and ensure that we meet any specific needs of groups or individuals so that they are able to claim.

Accessibility is the key to encourage people to claim what they are entitled to and to ensure that claims are successful. This means removing barriers that often prevent individuals from claiming their entitlement. This strategy details and outlines what ARP Benefits Service will do to reach these standards.

## **WHO SHOULD WE BE TARGETING?**

National Estimates for the Take-up of Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit published in June 2009 estimated that in 2007 – 08:

- Up to half of all working households do not claim housing benefit worth an average of £37.60 a week
- An average of £13 a week in council tax benefit is not being claimed by up to three million households

There are many reasons why potential claimants who are entitled to benefits fail to claim, including:

- Lack of awareness of what they may be entitled to and whom they need to contact to seek advice/make a claim;
  - People wish to maintain their independence
  - Limited knowledge of the benefit system;
  - Previous bad experience of the benefit system as a whole
- an expectation of bureaucracy and difficulty;
- Negative expectation of the Local Authority/DWP;
  - Fear of losing existing benefits;
  - Complexity and length of claim forms and having to submit evidence to support a claim;
  - People do not believe they are entitled to it
  - They don't want handouts

In order to address the reasons for people not claiming and overcoming barriers there is a range of activities that the ARP will undertake on behalf of Breckland, East Cambridgeshire, Forest Heath District Councils and St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

We have looked at our processes and procedures to identify any barriers, obstacles and/or improvements that could encourage take up;

- Customer Services is a key area, which can encourage or discourage potential claimants. We need to ensure this “front door” to the service is optimally effective;
- We are continually considering other sources of help and advice available to enable people to access benefit and ensure it is of the appropriate quality and up to date;
- We recognise and endeavour to target information to particular groups through meetings and publicity events. This include people such as:
  - Elderly tenants
  - Disabled groups

- People who are new to the benefits system such as those who are about to become unemployed for the first time.
- Ethnic minority tenants/English as “second language”;
- People with debt management problems
- People with addiction problems
- Working families on low income;
- Lone parents;
- Vulnerable adults

### **ONGOING ACTIVITY**

We continue to provide, leaflets, posters etc., targeted events and publicity. We work with organisations such as Job Centre plus, Pensions Service, CAB, landlords and representatives of targeted groups to promote the take-up of benefits, and we provide training to organisations to help them keep their staff knowledgeable on the benefits scheme.

We work with stakeholders to share information, develop joint approaches and coordinate activities to improve take-up.

We will continue to encourage take-up and promotion at any event ARP officers attend.

We will promote other benefits and provide an officer to help with this for those recently bereaved.

Visiting officers are available to help people who cannot come into an office complete benefits application forms in their own home.

Revenues officers are trained to invite claims where it appears appropriate  
On line claims are encouraged for easy access

### **IMPLEMENTATION AND TRAINING**

This Strategy will be made available to all staff. This will be reinforced as part of the induction process, training programme and management supervision of all staff.

### **COMPLAINTS**

The respective Council’s individual ‘Compliments and Complaints Procedure’ (available on the each of the Councils’ websites) will be applied in the event of any complaint received about this strategy.

### **STRATEGY REVIEW**

This strategy will be managed and reviewed every year and, from time to time, updates and re-issues will be circulated. However, the strategy will be reviewed sooner if a weakness in the strategy is highlighted, in the case of new risks, and/or changes in legislation. Each section will be responsible for ensuring that this strategy is adhered to and effective.

<b>Authors</b>	Sharon Jones
<b>Review Date</b>	1 Dec 2011
<b>Next Review</b>	June 2012
<b>Document Version</b>	1.3
<b>Document Location</b>	G Drive Policy - policies 2011

## REVISION HISTORY

	<b>Description</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>
1.0	Original Strategy	Apr 2008	Steve Knights
1.1	Annual Review	Feb 2009	Steve Knights
1.2	Annual Review	May 2010	Sharon Jones
1.3	Annual Review	Dec 2011	Sharon Jones