

YOUR SERVICE - OUR STANDARDS

Benefits Service

What you can expect from us



Your services - our standards

Gateshead Council's Benefits Service is committed to providing you with the best possible service. We help you with the assessment and payment of benefits including:

- Rent rebates for council tenants
- Rent allowances for housing associations and private tenants
- Council tax benefit
- Free school meals

We have set out in this leaflet the standards you can expect from us and how you can help us to meet these standards.

Contacting us

- If you visit us, we will aim to resolve your enquiry during the course of your visit.
- If you have an appointment to see us - we will aim to see you within ten minutes of your appointment time.
- If you telephone us, our interactive telephone system will respond to your call immediately. If you'd like to speak to an advisor, we will aim to answer calls on average within ten minutes.
- When we are dealing with you in person or on the phone we will always be polite, courteous and friendly.
- Your letters, faxes or emails will be answered within ten working days.
- We will try to arrange any home visits at a time that is convenient for you. Officers will contact you in advance and show identification on arrival.
- We will provide information in different formats on request.
- We will always investigate allegations of Benefit fraud.
All enquiries will be treated with strict confidentiality.



Our response to you

- We will aim to assess 90% of benefit claims within 14 days of receiving all information.
- We will send you a written decision about your claim for housing or council tax benefit within seven days of your claim being assessed.
- We will aim to assess any change in your circumstances in eight days or less.
- If you ask us to look again at your benefit decision we will contact you within 28 days with the outcome.
- We will aim to process any 'Fast-track' applications within three working days of receiving all of the information we need.
- We are committed to treating you with respect and understanding for your individual needs. We will ensure our services are equally accessible, appropriate and sensitive to all members of the community.

We would expect you to:

- treat our employees with the same degree of respect that they show to you.
- provide all of the proof we need with your claim.
- provide the information we ask you for, when we ask for it **(this will help us to speed up your claim).**
- tell us about any changes in your circumstances as soon as they happen.
- carefully read all of the information we send you and to contact us if there is anything you are not sure about.
- tell us about anyone that you believe is claiming benefit fraudulently **(this will be treated as strictly confidential).**

Improving our service

If you have any comments or suggestions about this leaflet or the service you have received, please let us know by contacting our Benefits Suggestion Service:
Phone: 0191 433 3627 (24 hrs)
Email: benefitsuggestions@gateshead.gov.uk
Online: www.gateshead.gov.uk (select the link for Benefits and Benefit suggestions)

Further information

Phone the Benefits Service on: 0191 433 4646
Email: benefitenquiries@gateshead.gov.uk
Website: www.gateshead.gov.uk





DIFFERENT FORMATS:

If you would like this information in Large Print, Braille, on Audio Tape/CD or in a different language, please contact us on: 0191 433 4724