

Outreach work in Housing and Council Tax Benefit

RECOMMENDATION

1. To note the report

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 In October 2003 a new post of Ethnic Community Liaison Officer was created in the Revenues and Benefits Division. The purpose of the post was to promote access to the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit schemes by members of the minority ethnic groups in the City through contacts with individuals and community organisations, and to ensure that publicity about benefits is widely available within ethnic minority groups.
- 2.2 This report looks at the work done by the post holder, and the progress we have made in promoting Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit amongst ethnic groups.
- 2.3 The post holder is currently on maternity leave and the surgeries at the Peartree Home Improvement Centre are being covered by other staff.

Advice surgeries and other contacts made within the community

- 2.4 A number of sites have been used for face to face enquiries on a 'drop in' basis. We have direct access to all our Benefits and Council Tax computer systems at advice sessions held at Housing Area Offices, or the Peartree Home Improvement Centre. This enables the Ethnic Community Liaison Officer to give up to date information about claims made, and deal with enquiries with the full range of information available to her.

The Pear Tree Home Improvement Centre

- 2.5 The Pear Tree Home Improvement Centre has proved to be the most popular of these. This is because :
 - the Pear Tree Home Improvement Centre is in the heart of the Asian community

- it is an established office
- customers already visit this office to make payments for Council Tax, and rent and to use Derby Home Finder
- they don't have to wait for an interpreter to be made available

Three drop in sessions a week have been taking place at The Pear Tree Home Improvement Centre. The service has been used by private tenants, council tenants, landlords and people just wanting general advice.

Disability Direct

- 2.6 Advice sessions were introduced at Disability Direct, but were poorly attended and only a few people from ethnic minority groups were seen. We will review this when the Ethnic Community Liaison Officer returns from maternity leave.

Harhari Nari Women's Group

- 2.7 We had one advice surgery which was advertised in the Hadhari Nari newsletter, and have set up links for them to refer any cases to us at any time where they think it is appropriate. We will review this when The Ethnic Community Liaison Officer returns from maternity leave.

Sinfin Neighbourhood link services

- 2.8 Drop in sessions have taken place at the Sinfin Link office. The link office and the two Sinfin Housing offices advertise this service. We also attended and had a stall at the Council Information open day at Sinfin on 3 July 2004.

The Derby Somali Group.

- 2.9 We have made contact with the Derby Somali Group based on Normanton Road. The office is too small to hold a drop in service and any clients are forwarded to the Pear Tree office.

Asian Advisory Group

- 2.10 This is based on Normanton Road and offers advice to people about issues like welfare benefits and immigration. They have been provided with information regarding our Housing and Council Tax Benefit advice sessions and are forwarding customers to our surgeries at the Pear Tree office.

Normanton and Pear Tree Landlords' Association

- 2.11 We have sent representatives to a number of the meetings of the Normanton and Pear Tree Landlords' Association. At these meetings, we have answered questions from the landlords about Housing and Council Tax Benefit, and explained the role of the Ethnic Community Liaison Officer. We have had particularly good feedback from our involvement with the Normanton and Peartree Landlords' Association. They appreciate our

involvement with their group, and the fact that we keep them informed of any changes in Housing Benefit that effect landlords. We also had a stall at an open day for landlords organised by The Normanton and Peartree Landlords Association on 22 June 2004.

The Madeley Centre

- 2.12 We started to have advice surgeries at the Madeley Centre in July 2004. These were announced in the mosque and leaflets were given out at the centre.

Karma Nirvana women's group

- 2.13 We have set up links with the Karma Nirvana Women's group. We were invited to hold a drop in session but we were unable to attend because it clashed with another session. However, we have set up arrangements for them to refer customers to us where appropriate. We have also introduced a reciprocal arrangement where we will refer customers to them where we feel it appropriate.

Livelihood

- 2.14 This centre opened up in Normanton in December 2003 to give people career guidance and training and as part of Connexions. The Ethnic Community Liaison Officer visited the centre and explained her role. The project manager of the centre said that they had staff available who could give general advice, so would not consider holding a surgery at their office. However, posters and leaflets were left, and they said they would guide customers to the surgeries at the Pear Tree office.

Housing Area Offices

- 2.15 The Ethnic Community Liaison Officer made contact with the managers of all the Derby Homes' Housing Area Offices to explain her role and to encourage their staff to refer customers to her surgeries. We also introduced surgeries to the Austin Area Office in January 2004, but the response was poor, so the surgeries were withdrawn, and customers referred to the Pear Tree Improvement Centre where appropriate. Regular advice surgeries were set up at Stockbrook Area Office. The take up here was slow, and will be reviewed when the Ethnic Community Liaison Officer returns from maternity leave

Meeting with Iraqi Kurd community

- 2.16 We attended a meeting with the Iraqi Kurd community on 5 October 2004 to give guidance on Housing and Council Tax Benefit issues, and answer questions arising. The meeting was also attended by representatives from the Housing Options Centre and Derby Advice.

Publicity

- 2.17 We have produced posters and leaflets advertising our service so far, in the three main ethnic languages of Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi. Adverts publicising the role of the Ethnic Community Liaison Officer, and the times and days of the drop in surgeries have been placed in the following publications.
- Derby Pakistani Youth Association Newsletter
 - Derby Pointer Panel
 - Derby Home finder
 - Derby Homes Newsletter
 - The Council's Council Tax leaflet
 - Disability Direct newsletter.
- 2.18 A letter was issued to the local councillors covering Abbey, Arboretum and Normanton wards. These are the areas where the greater number of the minority groups in the city live. The letter asked the councillors to help in promoting the service among their constituents.
- 2.19 Announcements have also been made at religious gatherings, mosques and temples, advertising the service.
- 2.20 Posters have been displayed at various centres (Indian and the Pakistani Community Centre, Asian over 60's etc) publicising the times of the surgeries.
- 2.21 We have made contact with the Registered Social Landlords who operate in the City and asked for them to publicise the service to their customers

For more information contact:	Officer Maurice Curtin 5133 maurice.curtin@derby.gov.uk
Background papers:	Appendix 1 – Implications
List of appendices:	

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

1. We get subsidy from government on most of the Housing and Council Tax Benefit expenditure we make. By maximising entitlement to Housing and Council Tax Benefit additional income is coming into the City, leading to enhanced prosperity for all members of the community.

Legal

2. None

Personnel

3. None

Equalities

4. Residents from Ethnic minority backgrounds sometimes face barriers to claiming Housing and Council Tax Benefit. This can be because of language difficulties, or because of a lack of understanding. The work of the Ethnic Community Liaison Officer is helping to remove these barriers.

Corporate Objectives and Priorities for Change

5. None