

Housing Advice Service

# Newsletter

Summer 2010

Edition 4



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**Sedgemoor**  
IN SOMERSET

# Welcome to the Summer edition of the Housing Advice Newsletter

The past three months have been extremely busy for the Housing Advice Service. Again, record numbers have approached the service for advice and assistance. We were the only Local Authority to conduct a rough sleepers count in May 2010, which was overseen by an official from Communities and Local Government. The count provided us with some useful information and whilst we already have measures in place to help address rough sleeping, we will continue to work with partners to ensure that alternatives to rough sleeping are in place.

Sadly, we continue to see an increase in repossessions and have a co-ordinated approach across all 5 Districts to assist homeowners

remain in their homes where possible. The Somerset Mortgage Advice Line 0300 3430013 has recently been set up to give free, independent and confidential advice.

We have a busy few months ahead of us as we conduct a review of Homefinder Somerset. We will keep you posted with future review developments.

If you experience any housing difficulties, please contact our Housing Advice Service as soon as possible.

I hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter and wish you a wonderful Summer.



**Councillor Paul Herbert**  
Housing & Project Delivery

## The Housing Advice Team

Many people with housing problems are unsure of their rights and where they can go for help. The Housing Advice Service at Sedgemoor District Council provides advice and assistance on a wide range of housing related problems to include; renting privately, affordable home ownership, homelessness, illegal eviction, registering on Homefinder Somerset. All our advice is free and confidential.

Should you require any advice or assistance, please visit:

Bridgwater House, King Square,  
Bridgwater TA6 3AR

Open: Monday to Friday 8.45am to 5.00pm.



## New developments in the Sedgemoor area

Sovereign Housing Association will also be advertising its accommodation at the Stockmoor Development in the near future.

The last phase of development will be completed in approximately September/October 2010. The last phase consists of 35 properties.





# homefindersomerset.co.uk

Please do not forget to take full advantage of the computer suite we hold in the reception area at Bridgwater House for on line bidding. We have three computers available to use. We always have members of staff available to assist with the bidding process should you need assistance. Friends, relatives, carers or support workers are also welcome to accompany you to make a bid. Please do not forget to also use your local Library. Homefinder Somerset can be translated into most languages by clicking on the

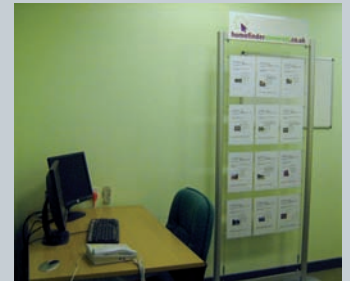
Google Translation box on the Homefinder Somerset home page.

## DO NOT WASTE YOUR BID

Please read each advert thoroughly including vital information on the marketing text. Please be aware that if you do not read the advert thoroughly and the property is not suitable for your needs, you will be skipped by the relevant Landlord.



If bidding online is not for you, please don't forget about the Property Hotline  
**0845 241 5948**  
On this line you can listen to details of available vacancies then use the telephone bidding line  
**0845 270 2524** to place your bids.



## Homefinder Somerset- Facts & Figures

Here are some useful statistics we have produced regarding the current housing register. We currently hold **4232** active applications for Sedgemoor District Council. Active applicants are:-



**199**  
**Gold**  
**Applicants**



**1940**  
**Silver**  
**Applicants**



**2093**  
**Bronze**  
**Applicants**

Number of lets allocated by band in the Sedgemoor area. In total 728 applicants have been housed in the Sedgemoor District by various partner Registered Social Landlords.

- 75 bronze applicants have been housed. 10%
- 400 silver applicants have been housed. 55%
- 255 Gold applicants have been housed. 35%

Your home, your choice....



***Our mission is to provide high quality homes and services for this generation and ready for the next***

Homes in Sedgemoor manages over 4,200 properties on behalf of Sedgemoor District Council, and works with Homefinder Somerset's Choice Based Lettings scheme to help find the perfect home.

**2010 Tenants' Conference** • Saturday 4 September • East Bridgwater School

To learn more about our services and lettings process why not visit us at: [www.homesinsedgemoor.org](http://www.homesinsedgemoor.org)



**General enquiries**

0800 585 360  
or  
01278 552400

## Sedgemoor Advice Centres



### Burnham-on-Sea surgery at Princess Hall



We have seen a steady increase in applicants visiting the Princess Hall surgery.

As from 17th March 2010, the Housing Advice Team, Housing Benefits, Homes in Sedgemoor, Novas Scarman and the Shaw Trust are available to answer your queries on a Wednesday.

The Housing Advice Team will be available to assist you in the bidding process should you need assistance. We will also have information on the weekly adverts readily available for you to look at.

Surgery takes place between 9:30am and 4:30pm.  
Princess Hall, Princess Street, Burnham-on-Sea



### Wedmore Advice Centre



We are on hand to help with queries on a range of services provided by Sedgemoor District Council, including Housing and Council Tax Benefit, and to help you with the Homefinder Somerset bidding process.

We also have information on the weekly adverts readily available for you to look at, together with a variety of information leaflets.

We are open on a drop-in basis every Thursday from 10:30 am to 12:30pm.

The Parish Rooms, Grants Lane, Wedmore

## Nightstop Scheme

### Can you offer a young person a home for a few nights?

We aim to establish a Nightstop scheme in Sedgemoor whereby a young person who becomes homeless in an emergency can access accommodation in a family home as opposed to bed and breakfast accommodation which is expensive and often inappropriate. Nightstop UK is a national organisation helping to provide young people aged 16 – 25 with free, safe, emergency accommodation in the homes of approved and trained volunteers.

The young person will be provided with a room of their own, meals, opportunities to bathe and wash clothes. The preventative nature of the Nightstop service means young people avoid rough sleeping and are in safe accommodation in their own community.

Support and mediation will be linked to this service to enable the young person to return home where appropriate as well as support and links to training schemes. In Sedgemoor, the YMCA will be extending their provision to operate the scheme with the support of Nightstop UK.



If you are interested in helping young people at risk of homelessness please contact Sedgemoor District Council's Housing Advice Team on 0845 408 2540

## New Deal for Disabled People - Shaw Trust

### **New Deal for Disabled People - A project that aims to help people who currently claim incapacity, sickness or any health related benefit.**

Shaw Trust is a registered charity that has been operating for over 25 years. Shaw Trust started in the village of Shaw in Wiltshire. It was set up originally by five local people to help a small group of individuals achieve their employment aims. All were disabled, but each one had valuable skills and abilities.

By focusing on what they could do, rather than what they could not do, real jobs were found with employers.

Last year Shaw Trust helped over 60,000 individuals back into employment. All projects managed by Shaw Trust aim to help disadvantaged and disabled people back into work. Most projects are government funded so we have strong links with Department of Work and Pensions and Job Centre Plus.

#### **Service**

Each client has their own personal development advisor. Initially we meet with them for a 1 hour appointment. During this time we discuss their suitability for the project, what we can do to help them and then set an action plan for the client to follow over the next 4/5 weeks. We aim to meet with our clients on a monthly basis to assess their progress although more frequent appointments can be made if needed.

We offer 'better off in work calculations' this service allows our clients to speak with an experienced advisor who can advise how financially they can be better off through entering employment.

We offer help to identify and access suitable childcare facilities in the area

Run a STEPS training course. This course is a one day course that covers: Interview techniques, how to write a CV, Letter writing and confidence building.

We also run weekly work wise sessions which allows our clients 1 hours free internet access with a personal advisor on hand to help with job searching, completing application forms and any other assistance they need.

We sign post our clients to suitable training providers and are able on occasions to fund training courses that may lead to employment. In recent weeks we have supported people financially to attend Health and Hygiene Courses, IT and CLAIT courses, CSCS construction courses.

We also have a discretionary fund available this can be used for a variety of reasons including; transport cost to training or interviews, purchasing suitable interview or work wear or money for childcare whilst attending an interview. The use of the discretionary fund is looked at on a case by case basis.

Once a client starts paid employment the support does not stop. We provide in work support for 6 months. This can be something as simple as a phone call so that our clients know that they have someone to talk to if they are having any problems or issues during their return to work.

#### **Project Delivery**

We deliver the NDDP contract across Somerset. Shaw Trust directly delivers the contract in West Somerset, Sedgemoor and Mendip and our subcontractor Maximus Employment and Training deliver in South Somerset and Taunton Deane. We aim to be as accessible as possible in all areas and have a number of outreach venues that we utilise on a weekly basis.

Shaw Trust - Bridgwater  
40 Eastover  
Bridgwater  
TA6 5AR



## **Sedgemoor's Rough Sleepers Steering Group count to identify Street Homeless**

Sedgemoor District Council's Housing Advice Team organised an early morning count of rough sleepers in the district in May 2010 as part of an initiative to combat street homelessness. The count is a key project of the newly established 'Rough Sleepers Steering Group' which was formed at the start of the year to address local issues of rough sleeping.

The count involved an enthusiastic group of 19 volunteers from a range of local services including Sedgemoor District Council, Citizens Advice Bureau, Novas Scarman, Turning Point, Red Cross and the Police, and was overseen by an official from Local Government.

The volunteers were split into groups and covered areas within the District where recent intelligence on rough sleepers had been gathered from a range of sources. Four rough sleepers were identified on the count and although the figures are relatively small compared to larger towns and cities within the South West, work will continue to end street homelessness.

The Rough Sleepers Steering Group will use the information from the count to continue to identify the future needs and issues of rough sleepers within the District.



# SAVE YOUR HOME

If you are experiencing housing difficulties, whether you are renting privately, an owner occupier, or renting through a Housing Association, you should seek help at an early stage. Sedgemoor District Council's Housing Advice service is there to try to prevent you from losing your home. Even if you have been served with a possession order, it may not be too late.

We would give the following messages to anyone in this situation:

- Turn up for court
- Seek help now
- You are not alone
- Court desks can give you free representation
- 84% of those clients that receive representation get to stay in their homes
- Repossession is not inevitable
- There are often choices – let's explore your choices!

## Useful telephone numbers

Sedgemoor District Council Housing Advice Team.....	0845 408 2540
Sedgemoor Citizens Advice Bureau.....	01278 455236
Homeowner Helpline:.....	0300 3300 515
(8am to 8pm Mon to Fri and 8am to 5pm at weekends)	
National Debt Line:.....	0808 808 4000
Pay Plan:.....	0800 917 7823

### Are you at risk of losing your home? Do you have rent or mortgage arrears? Are you under threat of eviction? Do you have problems coping with bills?

Novas Scarman can help with anything relating to housing issues such as:

- Support and assistance to prevent you losing your home
- Help with claiming benefits or problems paying bills
- How to get in touch with other agencies in your area for help

**How do you get help?** Give Novas Scarman a ring on 01458 259248/252341 and talk things through with some one who will listen and respond.

**Working?** No Problem. The service is available until 8pm Monday - Friday. You can book an appointment to suit you.

**Contact a member of staff on one of the numbers above for more information.**



## Sedgemoor's Repossession Prevention Loan Scheme

Sedgemoor District Council has today launched a unique partnership with Sedgemoor Citizens Advice Bureau, Sedgemoor Credit Union and Wessex Home Improvement Trust to help households who, through no fault of their own are at risk of losing their home.

A Government grant of £38,000 will be used to help keep households in their own homes by providing them with a small, interest free loan. As part of the scheme, householders will be required to register with the Credit Union, agree to save an agreed amount each month and to make affordable repayments against the loan after a full financial assessment by the Citizens Advice Bureau.

In return, an agreement will be made with the lender to clear some of the outstanding debt to enable the householder to remain in the home.

Home owners will be referred to Wessex Home Improvement Trust and the Credit Union will administer funds for those in rented accommodation.

Jerry Milton, Housing Advice Manager for Sedgemoor District Council said 'Although loans are relatively small, the Repossession Prevention Loan Scheme is part of a range of measures designed to assist those at risk of homelessness. Last year the Council was able to prevent over 300 households from becoming homeless and we hope to continue this good work'.

Anyone who is concerned about their housing situation or for more information on this scheme should contact the Council's Housing Advice Team on 0845 408 2547.

*Jerry Milton, Housing Advice Manager with members of the Sedgemoor Credit Union, Citizens Advice Bureau and Wessex Home Improvement Trust.*



**Benefits Service**

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**Sedgemoor**  
IN SOMERSET

# Landlords - are your tenants not paying? Are the arrears building up?

## Don't wait 8 weeks, contact us today

The benefit section at Sedgemoor is committed to offering landlords a high quality customer service when dealing with Housing Benefit claims from their tenants. Wherever possible the section will work with landlords to identify and resolve problems experienced by themselves or their tenants during the claim process. The aim is to facilitate continuous improvement in service delivery and accountability.

The benefit section will endeavour to work with all landlords to prevent rent arrears and homelessness. Although the current Local Housing Allowance legislation dictates that Housing Benefit should be paid to the tenant there are circumstances where direct payment can be made to the landlord (tenant has health, literacy issues). The government is looking again at this area but whilst we await any changes to the legislation we will help you where we are able.

There remains in place authority for payments to be made directly to the landlord where the tenant is 8 weeks in arrears however we would not expect you to wait this long before contacting us. As soon as you have arrears accruing in respect of a tenant please contact us and we will work with you to prevent the problem growing.



### Landlords and their tenants can access the benefit service in a number of different ways:



#### By telephone

General enquiries: 0845 48 2542  
Monday to Friday 8:00am - 6:00pm  
Alison Holman, Senior Benefit Officer: 01278 435295  
Shaun Warren, Senior Assessor: 01278 435447  
Chris Peppin, Senior Assessor: 01278 436455



**By e-mail** - [benefits@sedgemoor.gov.uk](mailto:benefits@sedgemoor.gov.uk)



#### In person

Sedgemoor District Council's main reception  
in Bridgwater House  
Monday to Friday (except bank holidays)  
8:45am - 5:00pm  
Burnham-on-Sea outreach surgery  
Every Wednesday 9:30am - 12:30pm  
Wedmore outreach surgery  
Every Thursday 10:30am - 12:30pm



#### By letter

The Benefits Service  
Sedgemoor District Council  
Bridgwater House  
King Square  
Bridgwater  
Somerset  
TA6 3AR

In order to improve service delivery we are always looking at ways we can do things better or provide improved information to landlords. We are currently looking at developing a landlord protocol setting out clearly service standards and what information will be provided to landlords and would be grateful for any input from you.

We would welcome feedback from all landlords on the service currently provided. Please let us know your thoughts on what we do well, what we do badly or any other issues you think we need to address.

Please make your views known to us using our contact details, right.

# Useful reference information

## Local Housing Allowance rates - July 2010

BRMA	Weston-s-Mare	Taunton & West Somerset	Mendip
Shared room	£69.04	£67.58	£61.50
1 bedroom	£103.56	£103.56	£97.81
2 bedrooms	£126.58	£126.58	£126.58
3 bedrooms	£151.89	£149.59	£155.34
4 bedrooms	195.62	£195.62	£205.97
5 bedrooms	£218.63	£281.92	£247.40

Monthly equivalents	Weston-s-Mare	Taunton & West Somerset	Mendip
Shared room	£299.17	£292.85	£266.50
1 bedroom	£448.76	£448.76	£423.84
2 bedrooms	£548.51	£548.51	£548.51
3 bedrooms	£658.51	£648.22	£673.14
4 bedrooms	£847.69	£847.69	£892.54
5 bedrooms	£947.40	£1221.65	£1072.07

## Rent allowance payments 2010/11 - 4 weekly in arrears (4A)

Cheque date/BACs release date	BACs clearing date	Benefit paid to date from to	
02/04/10	06/04/10	08/03/10	04/04/10
30/04/10	04/05/10	05/04/10	02/05/10
28/05/10	01/06/10	03/05/10	30/05/10
25/06/10	29/06/10	31/05/10	27/06/10
23/07/10	27/07/10	28/06/10	25/07/10
20/08/10	24/08/10	26/07/10	22/08/10
17/09/10	21/09/10	23/08/10	19/09/10
15/10/10	19/10/10	20/09/10	17/10/10
12/11/10	16/11/10	18/10/10	14/11/10
10/12/10	14/12/10	15/11/10	12/12/10
07/01/11	11/01/11	13/12/10	09/01/11
04/02/11	08/02/11	10/01/11	06/02/11
04/03/11	08/03/11	07/02/11	06/03/11
01/04/11	05/04/11	07/03/11	03/04/11

## Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit entitlement guide 2010-2011

All you need is your weekly income and the amount of your annual Council Tax charge and weekly rent charge. Compare your household against the closest value for your Council Tax and rent charge and see if your income falls below the weekly income threshold.

Column 1: Households - examples of different household types.

Column 2: Provides the weekly level of income up to which you may expect to receive 100% help with Council Tax. (If your income falls below this level you may also be entitled to other help from the Department for Work and Pensions such as Income Support, Employment Support Allowance, Pension Credit or Jobseekers Allowance.)

Column 3: Council Tax Benefit: Provides the income level up to which you can still expect to receive some help towards your Council Tax. Please remember there are exceptions. Some income is disregarded and higher allowances/income levels may apply to households in receipt of disability benefits.

Column 4: Housing Benefit: As above but for your rent payments.

**If your income is less than the weekly income threshold you may be able to get help with your payments. This is only a guide, please contact the Benefits Service for more information.**

Household	Max help £ per week	Council Tax charge						Weekly rental charge						
		£700 £ per week	£900 £ per week	£1100 £ per week	£1300 £ per week	£1900 £ per week	£2500 £ per week	£70 £ per week	£80 £ per week	£90 £ per week	£100 £ per week	£120 £ per week	£150 £ per week	£200 £ per week
Single														
Aged under 25	51.85	120	139	158	178	235	293	160	175	191	206	237	283	360
Aged 25-59	65.45	133	153	172	191	249	307	174	189	204	220	251	297	374
Aged 60-64	132.60	200	220	240	260	317	373	241	256	272	287	318	364	441
Aged 65+	153.15	221	240	260	279	335	395	261	277	292	307	338	384	461
Couple														
Aged 18-59	102.75	-	190	209	229	286	345	211	226	242	257	288	334	411
Aged 60-64	202.40	-	290	310	329	386	444	311	326	341	357	388	434	511
Family														
Couple under 60 with 1 dependant child	177.72	-	265	284	304	361	419	286	301	317	332	363	409	486
Lone parent under 60 with 1 dependant child	140.42	209	228	247	266	324	382	249	264	279	295	326	372	449

# Going back to work doesn't mean giving up your benefits

Housing Benefit can help pay all or part of your rent and Council Tax Benefit can help towards your Council Tax bills. These are both income related benefits, and you could qualify if you're working or not.

Almost everyone can be better off in work. Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Working Tax Credit provide extra support to help you while you work. It's not just about the financial benefits there are heaps of other benefits to working such as improved self confidence, being a good example to your children, meeting new people and finding new friends.

## Help you can get in work

You may be able to get an Extended Payment of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. This payment provides help for up to four weeks when you start a new job and begin earning a wage. You may also be able to continue to get Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit after this time, depending on your circumstances. Into work claims are prioritised and are resolved on average within 14 days so you will not have a long period waiting for a decision on your claim.

## Working parents

Parents may get extra help with childcare costs, and single parents may get In Work Credit. Any child maintenance and Child Benefit that you get won't affect your Housing and Council Tax Benefit. An adviser at Jobcentre Plus will be able to explain these benefits to you when you find work.

## Are you entitled?

If you have access to the internet you can find out by using the online Benefits Adviser at [www.direct.gov.uk/benefitsadviser](http://www.direct.gov.uk/benefitsadviser)

The online Benefits Adviser will provide benefit advice, an estimate of the amount you may get and information about how changes of circumstances will affect your benefits. Alternatively you can contact the Benefits Team at Sedgemoor District Council by calling **0845 408 2542**.

To find out more about getting back to work you can visit the Jobcentre Plus website [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

There is a lot of useful information about the support you may be entitled to receive, as well as listings of local job opportunities. Alternatively you can call the Bridgwater Jobcentre Plus 01278 435100 to make an appointment to speak with an advisor about getting back to work.

For a list of organisations to help you back into work, please see right.

### Suzie aged 23 - single parent with two children

Suzie was unemployed and receiving Income Support, but recently decided that she wanted to go back to work.

Suzie contacted her local Jobcentre Plus and found out that getting a job could really boost her income. Jobcentre Plus could also handle the changes to her benefits.

Suzie now works 37 hours a week as a receptionist, with a weekly salary of £214.60. She receives £27.20 in Housing Benefit, £51.10 in Working Tax Credit plus £129.40 of Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit. Suzie is now £94 better off each week, compared to when she was unemployed, and is enjoying the many benefits of getting back to work such as improved self-confidence.

# Organisations to help you back to work

## Jobcentre+

Find out about vacancies, help & advice when applying for jobs, benefits and help when going back to work  
[www.direct.gov](http://www.direct.gov)  
Telephone 0845 604 3719 Textphone 01202 276015  
E-mail: [contact-us@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:contact-us@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk)

## Sedgemoor District Council

Helping you with Council Tax & Rent payments while you are working  
[www.sedgemoor.gov.uk](http://www.sedgemoor.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 0845 408 2542  
E-mail: [benefits@sedgemoor.gov.uk](mailto:benefits@sedgemoor.gov.uk)

## Family Information Service

The Somerset Families Information Service (SFIS), formerly the Children's Information Service, is a free, impartial service giving detailed information and advice on childcare as well as general information on a wide range of services for children and young people aged 0-20 years and their families.  
[www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk) (search 'family information service')  
Telephone: 0845 345 9122  
E-mail: [childrens@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:childrens@somerset.gov.uk)

## Next Steps

Do you need help to decide your next step in learning, skills and work? The right advice is so important. Nextstep is a free careers advice service for adults  
E-mail: [nextstepenquiries@careerssw.org](mailto:nextstepenquiries@careerssw.org)  
Local Offices:

Bridgwater. Recreation Centre, Rhode Lane, Hamp, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 3EW  
Burnham-on-Sea. The Bay Centre, Cassis Close, Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset TA8 1NN

## Shaw Trust

A national charity, which supports disabled and disadvantaged people to prepare for work, find jobs and live more independently.  
[www.shaw-trust.org.uk](http://www.shaw-trust.org.uk)  
Telephone: 01278 437190

## HM Revenue & Customs

Helping you with tax credits  
[www.direct.gov.uk/taxcredits](http://www.direct.gov.uk/taxcredits)  
Tax Credit Helpline: 0845 300 3900 Textphone: 0845 300 3909

## Housing Benefit is an 'in work' benefit as well

Our objective is to help people back into work and provide support to keep them there. During April the Sedgemoor District Council Benefits team joined up with Jobcentre+, Family Information Service and Next Steps to deliver advice and assistance to Homes in Sedgemoor tenants about getting back into work.

## You said .... we acted

### 'Benefit payments following a Bank Holiday are always late'

Payment runs now amended for Bank Holidays so payment received as normal on the Tuesday of the following week

### 'I want a private interview, not in front of the other people waiting'

Private interview rooms are available if required

### 'Letters are not clear with regard to non-dependants in the household'

Calculation statements amended to show clearly the number of non dependants considered in the benefit calculation

### 'My tenant has difficulty dealing with their affairs yet you still write to them'

Use of Welfare Indicators on Benefit system to identify vulnerable customers and use appropriate method of contact

### 'I find it difficult to get into Bridgwater to see someone about my claim'

Weekly benefit outreach surgeries in Burnham on Sea on a Wednesday and in Wedmore on a Thursday

### 'I want someone who can answer my questions when I contact the council'

Experienced benefit officers offer front line service both directly at the customer reception and on the telephone

# Reporting changes of circumstances

## Why You Must Tell Us About Changes

You will continue to receive help until there is a change to your circumstances. This could be something that affects you, your partner or anyone else who lives with you. **If something changes we have to amend your benefit.**

You have a legal responsibility to tell the Benefit Service as soon as something changes. A change could mean that your benefit goes up or down. If you delay in telling us you may be missing out on extra help or receiving too much. If you have received too much money you may be asked to pay it back.

## Examples of Changes That You Need to Tell Us About

You must tell us about changes in:

- Wages
- Tax Credits
- Benefits i.e. Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Benefit, Incapacity Benefit, Employment and Support Allowance etc
- When a child leaves school
- Savings i.e. bank accounts, stocks and shares etc
- Any other income
- When someone moves in or out of your home
- Changes to non-dependant's income

- Your rent if you do not live in a property managed by the Council
- If you change address
- If anyone is away from the home other than holidays

If you are receiving Pension Credit you do not need to tell us about changes to your income.

We still need to know if your capital goes above £16,000.

If there are any changes to your income or capital you need to tell the Pension, Carers and Disability Service.

**If you need to report a change, or if you are not sure if you need to tell us about a change, please contact the Benefit Service for advice on: 0845 408 2542**

**Failure to report changes may result in action from the benefit Section Investigation team who WILL take action in cases of proven fraud. This may result in you being taken to court and you may be prosecuted.**

## Benefit Fraud costs YOU money!

If you have information regarding anyone you believe is involved in a fraudulent claim, please call the Benefit Fraud Hotline.

Please note that you do not need to give your name or details. Outside of these hours you may leave information or a contact number on our answering service. Please try and provide detailed information as the better the quality of the information provided the more likely we will be able to investigate.

Officers from the Council's Benefit Enquiry Unit investigate a number of cases regarding suspected benefit fraud ranging from undeclared earnings, hidden capital and living together to non-residence, false documents and cheque fraud. Many of these cases occur as a result of a customer knowingly failing to declare a change in circumstances.

We have been successful in catching benefit thieves and administering over 100 sanctions in the last two years. Our officers work closely with other agencies such as the Dept for Work & Pensions and HMRC in order to maximise resources and minimise costs to the Council.

In cases of proven fraud, we are able to take action in the form of three different 'sanctions'. Should the fraud be low value in terms of overpayment and a first time offence, we can

consider issuing a simple caution or administrative penalty, the latter of which requires the offender to repay an additional 30% on top of any overpayment.

The most serious cases, however, are referred for prosecution through our own Legal Department and our most recent case in July 2010 resulted in a prison sentence being passed. Offenders must also pay back the overpayment of benefit regardless of which sanction is imposed.

Whilst the vast majority of customers claim benefits honestly and properly, the minority that intend to use the system to criminally steal tax payer's money must realise that, when they are caught, they may well be facing a Court appearance and a possible prison sentence.



**BENEFIT FRAUD HOTLINE: 0845 408 2540**