



Dover District Council and Thanet District Council

Joint Benefits Policy

March 2010

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Benefits Policy

What is this policy for?

Dover and Thanet District Council have adopted this joint policy because we are committed to providing a local and accessible Benefits service that ensures the needs of our communities are at the heart of the design and delivery of the service, now, and in the future.

This policy supports the East Kent Local Strategic Partnership strategy as both Authorities have the same five aims and are working towards having the same service delivery methods, which will concentrate our

‘...resources to best advance the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the people of East Kent.’

We will make sure:

- We always do our best to pay the **right** Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit first time, as **quickly** as possible
- Residents **maximise** their **income** by claiming all other benefits and services they are **entitled** to
- Residents know about other help that is available to them that could **improve** their **quality of life**
- We **listen** to the needs of our communities

Aim 1 The RIGHT Benefit

We will make sure:

- Our staff are trained to the highest standards and use their knowledge to always pay our customers the correct maximum Benefit allowed by law
- We encourage customers to claim backdated Benefit if they have a good reason for not claiming earlier
- We encourage customers to claim Discretionary Housing Payments to top-up their Benefit if it does not meet their full rent or Council Tax charge, as the law allows
- We encourage customers to tell us about changes in their circumstances that may affect the amount of Benefit we pay them, as soon as they know about the change, to maximise Benefit or minimise possible Benefit overpayments
- All Council Tax discounts and exemptions are applied

Aim 2 Pay Benefit QUICKLY

We will make sure:

- We constantly review our working methods and share best practice across the partnership
- We minimise barriers that lead to delays in claims being paid and changes in circumstances being actioned
- We work together to develop new initiatives that continue to provide value for money services which are delivered more efficiently and effectively
- We help our residents to claim in the way that best suits their needs

Aim 3 What our residents are ENTITLED to

We will make sure:

- We provide a robust and fair Benefits service with equal access for everyone
- We know who our communities are and encourage take-up of all types of benefit by the people who are entitled to them
- We work with our communities to understand how we can break down the barriers and stigma attached to claiming benefits

Aim 4 MAXIMISE INCOME and IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE

We will make sure:

- We tell our residents when they may be able to increase their disposable income and improve their quality of life by claiming other help (if they meet the conditions attached to claiming)

We will also make sure we work with other agencies and organisations that will:

- Advise on debt
- Help reduce poverty
- Advise on other events that may be affecting peoples lives

Aim 5 LISTEN

We will make sure:

- We listen to the needs of our communities by using effective consultation and feedback methods
- We listen to and work with our partner organisations for the benefit of our communities

How will we deliver the 'Benefits Policy'?

The 'Joint Strategy for delivering the Benefits Policy' details how we will meet the aims in this Policy. ***There will be a link to the 'Joint Strategy' if this policy is viewed online***