



Haringey Council

Agenda item:

[No.]

Overview and Scrutiny Report

On 16th March 2009

Report Title: Benefits Take Up / Maximising income	
Report of Chief Financial Officer	
Signed <i>G. Ollerton</i>	Dated 6 March 2009
Contact Officer : Ian Biggadike Acting Head of Benefits and Local Taxation 020 8489 3854	
Wards(s) affected: All	Report for: Noting
<p>1. Purpose of the Report</p> <p>1.1 To inform Members of income maximisation and take-up activity undertaken in 2008/2009 in order that Members can contribute to future income maximisation strategies.</p>	
<p>2. Introduction by Cabinet Member</p> <p>I am very pleased that the BLT team, working with relevant business units and partners were able to co-ordinate and organise the Claim-It campaign – especially at this time. I commend the officers and partners for this work and ask Members to note the progress made in this regard.</p>	
<p>3 Introduction</p> <p>3.1 This report aims to update Members on progress following the ‘scrutiny review of Benefit Take-up undertaken’ in July 2005. It also aims to provide information regarding all of the income maximisation events that have taken place over the last year, including the “Claim It” strategy. The report gives feedback on the campaign at Wood Green Library and other events, in order that Members and Officers can be advised of the success of the events and be better informed regarding the planning of future events.</p>	
<p>4 Overview & Scrutiny Recommendations</p> <p>4.1 In July 2005, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee produced a report entitled “Report of the Scrutiny Review of Benefit Take-Up”. Listed below are Haringey strategies where recommendations from the report have been included and addressed.</p>	

4.2 Tackling Poverty

- Tackling Poverty is a key theme within the Haringey Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-2016.
- A Child Poverty Strategy has been developed with income maximisation as a key theme and led by Children and Young People Services. The Council has approved a further £100k in 2009/2010 to support this strategy.
- The Experience Counts Strategy for Older People has maximising income as a key theme

4.3 Take up campaigns / Publicity

- Throughout 2008-09 publicity campaigns have been undertaken to encourage benefit take-up, including Haringey People, on JC Decaux advertising boards and street furniture. The campaigns have been targeted at encouraging people to attend events or make contact with the Council to seek advice on any welfare benefits to which they may be entitled.

4.4 Strategy & Organisation

- In 2008-09, Haringey's approach to take-up and income maximisation is focussed and co-ordinated following the implementation of a Child Poverty Strategy. Directed by Children and Young People Services, a Member group and an Officer group (including external partners) are now in place, where issues relating to take-up are discussed and actions agreed. Targets are set for activities undertaken within the Child Poverty Strategy, and the Experience Counts strategy.

4.5 Using NRF Funding

- The Urban Environment Economic Regeneration Team has been running the "Reaping the Benefits" campaign in three of the boroughs key deprivation wards using advice services from Haringey Citizens Advice Bureau, and working with partners to encourage take-up of work for jobless residents.

4.6 Links with Partner Organisations

- The Child Poverty Strategy has created a working group of staff who each have responsibilities to reduce child poverty. Included in this is take-up activity. The group of staff includes external organisations such as Haringey Citizens Advice Bureau as well as staff with links to external organisations such as the Primary Care Trust and HAVCO.

4.7 Older Persons

- Various services have contributed to the Council's Experience Counts Strategy (for older people), with focus on benefits take-up. The Adults, Culture and Community Service (ACCS) also participates in the Child Poverty Strategy Group and associated activities.

4.8 Joint Working

4.9 BLT has forged close links with the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Pension Service. The service has worked particularly closely with the Pension Service by providing lists of potential claims for Pension Credit. These customers have been targeted with mailed information and invitations to be visited by a Pension Service Officer.

4.10 As of September 2008, 336 referrals had been made to the Pension Service. Of

receive it, 28 people were advised to claim Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit of which 82% went on to receive it. 90 people were advised to claim other benefits of which 43% had other benefits awarded. The Pension Service have estimated that almost £580,000 over a year in additional benefits have been identified and claimed through this partnership.

4.11 BLT has also worked with a company called Work Directions to find work for long-term unemployed people. The service has sent mailshots to lone parents on Income Support explaining the Work Directions facility. Whilst the number of successful conversions into work has been fairly small, Work Directions have been very positive about the partnership and wish to continue to work with Haringey in this area.

5 Wood Green 'Claim It' Event

5.1.1 Council Directorates have joined together to contribute to a number of activities within the Child Poverty Action strategy and have incorporated income maximisation activities into service business plans and taken steps to address take-up following a push from Members to tackle poverty and increase awareness of unclaimed benefits in the borough.

5.1.2 It is thought that all benefits are under claimed: Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Pension Credit, Disability Living Allowance, JobSeekers Allowance, Carers Allowance, Child Benefit, Attendance Allowance, Bereavement Allowance, Incapacity Benefit (Employment & Support Allowance), Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

5.1.3 A specific way in which contributions have been made to combat poverty was to arrange a major take-up and awareness event. The event was intended to raise awareness of all under-claimed benefits, provide basic benefits advice to customers, and to help individuals understand and claim the benefits that they are rightly entitled to.

5.1.4 The campaign was coordinated jointly by Adults Culture & Community Services and Benefits & Local Taxation, with assistance from the Press & Publicity Team. It ran from Monday September 22nd - Friday September 26th 2008 between 10am – 4pm each day.

5.1.5 Benefits advisors participating in the campaign were provided by staff from inside and outside the Council. Each day BLT provided 2 advisors and 2 advisors were provided by the Financial Assessment Team in ACCS

5.1.6 Haringey Citizens Advice Bureau provided 2 advisors each day and Haringey Age Concern provided 2 advisors each day. The Pension Service provided an advisor for 4 days and the Haringey Carers Service provided one officer for four half days.

5.1.7 A large trailer was hired and placed outside the Wood Green library containing banners, posters and leaflets promoting the "Claim It" theme.

5.1.8 BLT, ACCS and CYPS staff acted as Public Relations officers (PRs) outside the library each day, wearing high visibility orange "Claim It" vests encouraging people to come in and speak to the advisors. The PR staff handed out 'million pound note' leaflet flyers, which promoted the message that millions of pounds of benefit remain unclaimed each year. The leaflet also contained contact details for advice, should the customer not wish to see an advisor at that point in time. There were also "Claim It" pens given away.

5.1.9 Once a person expressed a wish to see an advisor, the PR escorted the person to the filter desk in the library for direction to the most appropriate advisor.

5.1.10 A full page advert for the event was placed in Septembers Haringey People, building on the awareness-raising advert in August's edition. There were also lamp post banners placed along Wood Green High Road and posters in many Council Buildings. There were also flyers on display in various venues in the preceding week. Bookmarks promoting the 'Claim it' theme are still available in the library, advertising welfare benefits help lines.

5.2 Results

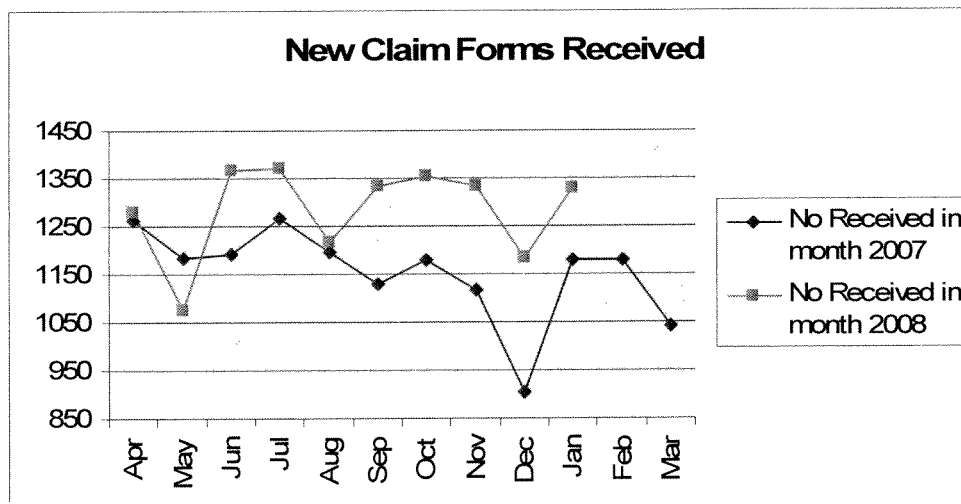
5.2.1 Detailed records of all customers seen were kept.

5.2.2 Altogether advice was provided to at least 500 customers. Of these, it is believed that 40% (200 customers) were advised that they were entitled to claim extra benefits.

5.2.3 It is not possible to provide specific figures as to exactly how much additional income this event generated for our customers as it cannot be guaranteed that every customer advised actually went on to claim the benefits that they were told that they were entitled to.

5.2.4 However, for illustrative purposes only, if each customer went on to receive just £5 in additional benefit per week, this would equate to £52,000 of additional benefits identified, however many customers were advised of potential benefits far in excess of this illustration.

5.2.5 An analysis of incoming benefit claims shows a marked increase in claims received in 2008/2009, when compared to 2007/2008. This could be attributed to the economic climate in general, but the 'Claim it' campaigns will have also contributed to this.



5.2.6 Our customers were recorded as being from the following areas:

31% No postcode recorded / address not given
24% N22
11% N8
10% N17
7% N15
5% N4

- 3% N11
- 1% N10
- 1% N6
- 6% Other including Out of Borough

5.2.7 Of the customers advised that they could claim extra money 22% are recorded as having children

5.3 Feedback

5.3.1 148 customers completed feedback cards. The results were extremely positive. Of the customers completing cards:

- ◆ 55% were encouraged in from the PR's outside the library, with a further 16% seeing the advert in Haringey People.
- ◆ 98% of respondents found the event very helpful or quite helpful.
- ◆ 98% expressed satisfaction with the advisor they saw
- ◆ 68% say they will claim extra benefit as a result of the advice they were given

6 Other Activity Undertaken

6.1 The Council have organised other events at which residents have been able to seek advice. These include Neighbourhood Forums, Access to Service Days and Area Assembly Meetings. Access to Service Days are targeted at particular communities in Haringey, and are aimed at raising awareness of local services and strengthening links between the local community and service providers.

6.2 Such events have been smaller than the main Claim-It event and have consequently seen less people. Take-up is not the sole focus of such events but they do provide a platform for people to seek advice, take leaflets and present an opportunity to raise awareness of state benefits.

6.3 Including the Wood Green event, advice has been provided to over 650 people, of which approximately 250 have been advised that they may be entitled to other benefits.

6.4 In a direct focus on Child Poverty, a pilot take up advice surgery was publicised and held in a school in Broadwater Farm, Tottenham, although this was poorly attended, so we will be rethinking the strategy for targeting schools in 2009/2010

6.5 In April 2008, targets were set for increasing take-up of Housing & Council Tax Benefit. The current projection is that by the end of the year, our caseloads will have increased as follows:

	2008-09 Target	Expected Year end Outcome	Target for Next Year
Council Tax Benefit for Pensioners	3%	1.6%	2%
Housing Benefit for Working Age claimants	5%	17.5%	20%
Council Tax Benefit for Working Age claimants	10%	11.6%	15%

7 Future Strategy

7.1 The Council will continue to pursue income maximisation and take-up activities as

a long-term strategy.

- 7.2 The Corporate Policy & Strategy Manager is coordinating project manager for the Child Poverty Strategy and spends on the allocated budget are authorised by the Children and Young People Service.
- 7.3 There was a child-poverty budget from which much take-up activity this year has been funded. The Council has once again committed to fund £100k for take up activities in 2009/2010.
- 7.4 The child-poverty budget has also funded an officer at Haringey Citizens Advice Bureaux to Project Manage take-up activity.
- 7.5 The Council will continue to run events under the 'Claim It' banner but the methodology for the campaigns will be slightly different this year. We will take advantage of intelligence available to us in order to target our campaigns to communities where benefits are under claimed and areas of the borough where benefits are under claimed.
- 7.6 Whilst it is recognised that general 'walk in' surgeries can be very successful, it has been agreed that activities undertaken in 2009/2010 will be more intelligence-led and focussed to those in greatest need, by using the information available to us from the Haringey Borough Profile, GIS data and Equalities data recorded on the BLT software application.

8 Recommendations

- 8.1 That members note the approach taken and can contribute to future income maximisation strategies for 2009/2010.

9 Reason for Recommendations

- 9.1 To ensure that Members are well informed of the activities undertaken in 2008/2009, be assured of the Council's continued commitment to income maximisation for all Haringey residents and contribute to future income maximisation strategies in the borough.

10 Summary

- 10.1 This briefing report updates Members on progress following the scrutiny review of Benefit Take-Up undertaken in 2005.
- 10.2 The report explains how we have addressed the points raised in that report
- 10.3 The report details how the main event (the Wood Green "Claim It" event) was organised and evaluated
- 10.4 The report lists other activity undertaken by Benefits & Local Taxation in partnership with other services and outside bodies.
- 10.5 The report considers options for our future strategy, including intelligence based activity, utilising information available from the Borough Profile, GIS and other

systems.

11 Chief Financial Officer Comments

11.1 The Chief Financial Officer can confirm that the Council meeting on 9 February 2009 agreed a further £100k in 2009/10 to support the income maximisation activities within the Child Poverty Strategy. There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

12 Head of Legal Services Comments

12.1 The use of resources for the purposes described in the report can be authorised under the Council's "well being" powers and the relevant link to the Sustainable Community Strategy is explained in paragraph 4.2 above

13 Equalities & Community Cohesion Comments

It is generally acknowledged that those receiving state benefits experience greater deprivation and disadvantage, and people from minority ethnic groups, women, lone parents and disabled people are disproportionately reliant on state benefits. Encouraging take-up and understanding of these benefits, increases the wealth and well being of these groups of people, and can also provide a stepping stone into work.

The Council are working with the other services to provide benefits advice to residents and to encourage take-up of all under claimed benefits.

We aim, through consultation and use of Geographical Information to target specific areas of the borough where under claiming of Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit is evident. We will focus on these areas to promote Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and other Welfare Benefits.

Customer consultation and feedback will continue and records will be kept of any impact of such consultation on particular areas of the community. Should the need arise our policies or practices will change as a result of the findings of this consultation.

14 Service Financial Comments

14.1 The Council is committed to continue the good work undertaken and has funded a further £100k for income maximisation activities in 2009/2010

15 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- Haringey Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-2016.
- Child Poverty Strategy
- The Experience Counts Strategy for Older People

All strategies are available to view on the Haringey Website