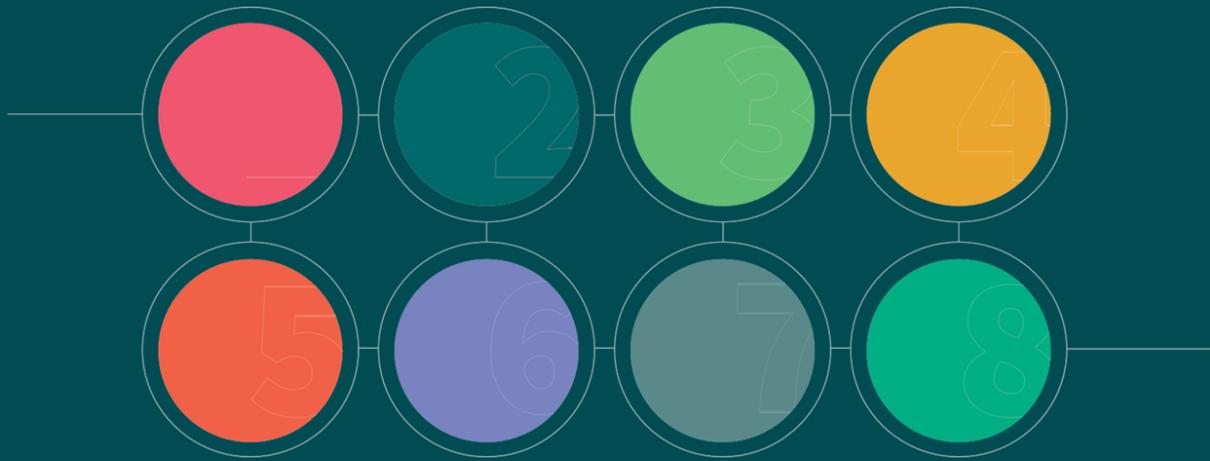


transforming your council



Finance and Property Services

Anti-Poverty Service Customer Engagement 2019/20

July 2019

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Anti-Poverty Service

The Anti-Poverty Service delivers a free, impartial and confidential service to help the most vulnerable households in West Lothian. The focus of the service is on alleviating poverty and promoting inclusion and equality. The work of the Anti-Poverty Service contributes to the Community Planning Partnership's priority "Minimising poverty, the cycle of deprivation and promoting equality'.

The service provides advice, assistance and advocacy to those who are vulnerable, disadvantaged and likely to be in poverty; namely, those who are:

- Without work or in low paid work.
- Are poor and/or fuel poor.
- Have money/debt issues.
- Have been affected by cancer or other long term conditions.
- Are over 60.

The Service is responsible for the administration of housing benefit, the council tax reduction scheme and the Scottish Welfare Fund. It provides a direct front line service to recipients of benefits, which includes processing claims, assessing benefits, processing discretionary housing payments as well as payment to claimants and landlords. The service is also responsible for the administration of the Blue Badge and National Entitlement Card scheme.

2 Service Standards

Service Standards set out what customers accessing the Anti-Poverty Service should expect in regards to:

- communication and timeliness;
- quality and accuracy of information;
- knowledge, professionalism and attitude of our employees;
- service delivery and overall quality.

The Anti-Poverty Service is committed to the highest standards of customer care. In support of this commitment we have developed the following service standards in consultation with our customers. These standards include targets which will be monitored on a regular basis and reviewed annually to ensure we continue to meet our customer needs.

Customer Enquiry Standards

We will:

- Give customers equal access to our services, through appropriate multiple contact and information methods including face to face, telephone, email, online, paper based and texting.
 - Deal with all enquiries in a polite, sensitive and efficient manner.
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Advice Shop Standards

- See customers face to face within 60 minutes at our drop in sessions.
- Return telephone calls and texts within one working day.
- Respond to emails and letters within three working days.
- See customers face to face on time at our appointment based sessions.
- Work with customers to provide good, impartial advice to support and resolve their concerns.
- Measure and monitor our appeals performance against other appeal services.
- Monitor and review our performance against our standards and publish the outcome.
- Treat personal information in a confidential manner and only share information in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Benefit and Discretionary Housing Payment Standards

- calculate new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction within fifteen days of receipt of a valid application form;
- calculate reported change events for existing Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction awards within seven days;
- accurately calculate new claims and change events;
- look at our decisions again within one calendar month if you have told us you think that we have got our decision wrong;
- advise you of your right of appeal if you do not agree with our assessment;
- ensure that overpaid Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction is calculated correctly and provide a written statement detailing the full overpaid amount you need to pay back;
- calculate new claims for Discretionary Housing Payments for those experiencing hardship on receipt of an application;

- ensure that the impact of the bedroom tax is mitigated in full through the award of a Discretionary Housing Payment to those affected.

Scottish Welfare Fund Standards

- calculate Crisis Grants within 48 hours following receipt of all necessary information to assess the claim;
- calculate Community Care Grants within fifteen working days following receipt of all necessary information to assess the claim;
- look again at your award if you have asked us to review our original decision. We will review Crisis Grants with 48 hours and Community Care Grants within 15 working days

Non-Residential Social Care Financial Assessment Standards

- carry out a financial assessment on receipt of notification that you are receiving a non-residential social care package and after all relevant information is gathered;
- advise you of your right of review if you do not agree with our assessment;
- look again at our decision within one month if you think we have used the wrong information;
- Signpost you to the Advice Shop for a full Personal Income Check

Blue Badge Administration Standards

- Make a decision on your entitlement to a Blue Badge within 5 working days if you are in receipt of the relevant qualifying income;
- Refer you to Occupational Health if you require an Independent Medical Assessment;
- Look again at our decision if you think we have used the wrong information

How we make sure our standards are met:

We make sure our standards are met by:

- Routinely surveying customers in a structured and segmented manner. We analyse the results of those surveys and take action to address any issues raised by our customers.
- The results are recorded in our Performance Indicator system and published on our intranet page.
- All comments from customer surveys are recorded in our comments, complaints and compliments log. These are reviewed quarterly to identify improvements.
- Use reporting tools to monitor our service standards and identify areas of improvement such as customer waiting times.
- Comments from the customer surveys are recorded in our 'You said, we did' document which is published on our intranet page.
- Logging all complaints and compliments and reviewing these in order to identify lessons learned.

3 Performance against Service Standards

We measure and report our performance against our service standards on a regular basis throughout the year. Further details on performance are provided on the Anti-Poverty Service intranet site. Please click [here](#) to access.

Public Performance Reporting

Live performance results against key performance indicators are available on the Council's Public Performance Reporting website. A link is provided below:

- www.westlothian.gov.uk/article/6283/Service-and-Public-Performance-Reporting
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Customer Consultation

The Anti-Poverty Service works with its customers, partners, stakeholders and other services of the council to deliver its services in the best way possible. As an integral part of this process we regularly consult with our customers to ensure that we meet their expectations and needs on all aspects of the services provided. Customer feedback is welcomed and we review our services as a result of the comments received.

You Said We Did

The Anti-Poverty Service always seeks to ensure that services meet our customers' needs. In order to show how customers' views make a difference we undertake a "You Said: We Did" exercise after each consultation. Click [here](#) to view the results of our most recent 'You Said: We Did' exercise.

Further information on performance indicators and customer consultations can be provided on request.

4 Contact Us

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Comments and Compliments

As well as obtaining feedback through regular customer surveys, we are happy to receive compliments and comments on how we can improve our service at any time. We will keep customers informed of changes we make as a result of their comments.

To provide feedback, comments or for more information please e-mail:

- advice.shop@westlothian.gov.uk
- benefits@westlothian.gov.uk

Complaints

We are committed to providing high-quality customer services. We fully consider all complaints and use the information to help us improve our services. If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, please tell us. We will keep customers informed of changes we make as a result of a complaint.

All complaints are dealt with in line with the West Lothian Council Complaints Procedure. Full details are provided in the link below:

- www.westlothian.gov.uk/complaints