
REPORT TO:	FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM:
DATE OF MEETING:	29 APRIL 2004	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	CHRIS SWAIN (595812)	DOC: s:\cent_serv\committee reports\finance and management\29 april 2004\ctaxbentakeup.doc
SUBJECT:	COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT TAKE-UP CAMPAIGN	REF: CJS/JHM
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report and endorse the planned action to promote the take up of Council Tax Benefit.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To inform Members about the take-up campaign for Council Tax Benefit and to outline the local action planned.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 On 15 December 2003, Housing Benefit Minister, Chris Pond, announced that the Department for Work and Pensions had launched a programme of work to support local authorities in encouraging take up of Council Tax Benefit.
- 3.2 A Best Practice Guide was issued in March 2004 which includes issues surrounding overcoming barriers to claiming, sharing of information, handling enquiries and managing an increase in new claims.
- 3.3 Whilst latest national figures show take up of Housing Benefit ranges between 87% and 94%, take up for Council Tax Benefit is lower at between 70% and 76%. Within this figure, take up is even lower amongst some groups. For pensioners, it is between 62% and 68%, for owner-occupiers (many of whom will also be pensioners) between 43% and 49%. This means that up to 1.4m pensioners may be missing out on help to which they are entitled. Whilst the promotional activity is aimed at raising awareness of Council Tax Benefit overall, its particular focus will be pensioners.

- 3.4 The Best Practice Guide also gives details of the new poster campaign which was supported by Ministerial interviews and specialist press articles. The promotional activity will direct potential applicants to their local authority. Packs have also been mailed to local outlets of Citizens Advice, Help the Aged and Age Concern as well as local branches of the National Pensioners' Convention.
- 3.5 The pack received by the Council contained A3 and A4 posters and an A5 flyer, together with the Council Tax Benefit leaflet GL17 "Help with your Council Tax".
- 3.6 The table below shows the number of new cases received each month. (Please note that claimants moving from one address to another and those transferring from JSA/IS to a standard claim are included in these figures)

Schedule of new Council Tax Benefit Claims

Number of New Cases	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004
April	249	173	237	173
May	227	263	140	160
June	204	173	122	173
July	192	155	129	124
August	143	138	131	154
September	182	154	151	180
October	191	139	129	157
November	178	165	165	134
December	124	93	100	132
January	224	156	135	150
February	175	117	112	133
March	213	208	217	164
Total for Year	2302	1934	1768	1834

- 3.7 The following action has already been taken:
- In partnership with five other councils in Derbyshire, a supply of bookmarks was circulated to all libraries in the county during February giving contact details for those who wish to claim Council Tax Benefit
 - Our leaflet that accompanied the council tax bills in March included a full column of information about claiming Council Tax Benefit
 - The Derbyshire County Council leaflet that accompanied the council tax bills included a help-line number for a free assessment of entitlement to Council Tax
 - The Department of Work and Pensions posters are displayed in the cash office area
 - The Department of Work and Pensions leaflets are available in the cash office area

- ❑ Routinely invite applications from those who qualify for Pension Credits but do not currently receive Council Tax Benefit

and this action is planned:

- ❑ Joint working arrangements with Derbyshire County Council Welfare Rights service, at both local and county level, to promote Council Tax Benefits
- ❑ Joint working with the local Pensions Service office to promote Council Tax Benefits
- ❑ Provide a supply of leaflets to Housing Services for inclusion with the documentation for new tenancies
- ❑ A series of sessions for pensioners to attend to receive advice from the agencies involved are being arranged. Probable venues are Swadlincote Town Hall, Melbourne Leisure Centre and Etwall Village Hall

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 None directly at this stage as the publicity and joint working arrangements can be funded from existing budgets.

5.0 Background Papers

Letter from the Department of Work and Pensions, Housing Support Division	19 Feb 2004
Council Tax Benefit Take-up Campaign literature	15 Mar 2004
Letter to Council Leaders	15 Mar 2004

