

Responses to 2 outstanding questions

Benefits support in CSC

This is a really complex issue and I wish that just putting an extra member of staff in the CSC was the solution. The reality is I don't have a spare member of staff – if I move a member of the back office staff downstairs, it will impact on processing of claims, which would generate more phone calls and visits. Additionally, there is no capacity in the CSC for us to have another desk – something which I have been discussing with Dani Negrello and Alan Gough and would need a remodelling of the whole area.

In relation to the average waiting time quoted of 40 minutes – this varies by the day and by the hour. There are times when we have no-one waiting at all but we have to manage the peaks and troughs. Originally we had 1 benefit officer on the counter but I increased that to two about a year ago. I also have another benefit officer located in the back office within the CSC to help out. Additionally some of the customers may have been seen by my team but then need to see housing.

The average wait time has been 27 minutes this week and last – which are traditionally busy after the Xmas break so I would expect that to reduce over the coming weeks. In addition, the waiting time includes people who choose to wait for their documents to be copied/scanned rather than having them posted back to them – i.e. they have been seen but are told that there will be a delay in photocopying if we are busy.

Whilst we are trying to proactively channel shift people from face to face for new claims we are encouraging them to come in so that we can check their claim and if right process it on the same day. Some customers are opting to wait to see what their entitlement is, thereby skewing the figures.

Whilst I fully appreciate the observations made by members of the committee, during my time here I have not had any formal complaints from customers visiting us – which was not previously the case. My experience as an ex-head of customer services is that benefit customers are prepared to wait if they know their query is dealt with. As a result, the time spent with customers has increased so that we can process changes with them there and then – i.e. a true one stop experience, as opposed to being a “message taking service”.

We have spent a lot of time before Xmas updating and simplifying benefit and assessment letters as they were complicated and difficult to understand. Many of our enquiries were because people didn't understand them. I am hoping that the work we have done on the letters may reduce the footfall

Head of Revenues and Benefits
15 January 2015

Housing staff in CSC

As per the WBC website (<http://www.watford.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/housing/>) the drop-in sessions for Housing advice are as follows:

“If you do want to come in, a housing advisor will be available Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday - 9am until 12.30pm, and Wednesdays - 1pm until 4.30pm.

If you come to the Town Hall when the advisor is not on duty, you will be offered the option of telephoning for advice at the following times: Monday, Tuesday and Thursday - 1pm until 4.30pm, and Friday - 1 pm until 4.15pm.”

Please note that for the drop-in sessions the duty Housing Advisors now sits in the CSC back office (along with the duty Environmental Health Officer, duty Planner and duty Benefits Officer) so is readily available for meetings with customers during these drop-in times.

Head of Community and Customer Services
19 January 2015