North and North East Lincolnshire

Local Taxation & Benefits Shared Service

**Newsletter**

June 2016

**Changes to Customer Services and the Local Taxation and Benefits Service**

From 1 July 2016 there will be changes to the way Local Taxation and Benefits services are delivered by North Lincolnshire Council’s Local Link offices and North East Lincolnshire Council’s Customer Access Points.

Both councils are taking a new approach to how customers access the Local Taxation and Benefits service. This will affect how all council tax, housing benefit and business rates enquiries are handled.

Customer service staff will no longer be able to access your account or claim details. If you are looking to report a change of circumstances or make a new claim the staff will help you to use our online forms or, recommend you to contact the relevant service by email or telephone.

Why are we making this change?

We live in a digital age and more of our customers want the ease and flexibility to access information and request services via the internet at a time to suit them. Our aim is to provide a modern, value for money service where most of our customers can do things for themselves. This means the council can focus its resources to support the more vulnerable members of our community who need our help.

The improved availability of online forms for housing benefit, council tax and business rate enquiries has proved a great success and take up of self-service has been unprecedented with minimal traditional interviews required. The current ‘face to face’ customer service has a number of issues that we aim to improve:

* It is expensive to run and the amount of contact made is disproportionately high in relation to the number of cases we actually handle
* has previously been managed as a drop-in service with very few pre-arranged appointments, leading to unmanaged flows of customers
* customer waiting times are often unacceptably long
* enquiries are double-handled firstly by Customer Service staff who receive information and secondly as they pass it to Officers who the input and process the changes in circumstances or new claims

Our new model will reduce waiting times, cut out double handling and ultimately provide a better service to customers.

The change enables substantial savings which both North and North East Lincolnshire Councils need to make. By improving how quickly we process your claims and changes, repeat contacts will be reduced and free up our resources to help our more vulnerable customers.

What will the new service be like?

**Digital access will be the main method of customer contact**

Our web pages, online forms and emailing services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and are compatible with all devices including tablets and phones, so customers can use them at their convenience with no need to come in to a council office, unless they need direct help with them. Also an electronic form is not delayed or lost and is passed direct to our systems where Officers can process your change or claim.

Local Links and Access Points will have computers available for self-service use and Customer Service staff will offer digital assistance to support those who need it. If we think a customer is vulnerable we will help them firstly to complete online forms or, where appropriate by making an appointment with specialist staff from Local Taxation and Benefits. In this way we can focus our resources on our most vulnerable customers and enable those that are able, to do more for themselves.

**A specialist telephone service will be the secondary method of contact**

A dedicated telephone service manned by staff specialising and working in Local Taxation and Benefits will also be available for customers who do not have or are unable to access our digital services. Using specialist staff trained in Benefits, Council Tax and Business Rates we will be able to resolve more customer enquiries at the first point of contact, meaning reduced waiting times and less repeat contacts.

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