

# HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

## your right, not charity

- Are you struggling to pay your Council Tax or rent?
- Are you on a state pension with less than £16,000 in savings?

Housing and Council Tax benefit can help you to keep a roof over your head - they are payments to which you are entitled. They are NOT charity.

Latest figures reveal that up to 40% of pensioners are not claiming the Council Tax Benefit to which they are entitled. Many are paying more Council Tax than they need to simply because they do not find out if they can claim benefit. The Council has a local rule not to take into account War Widows and War Disablement pensions. And some incomes - such as Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance - are also ignored when calculating benefit entitlement.

Some payments can be back dated to cover the last 12 months too!

- Mr & Mrs R of Northallerton got in touch and now receive £20 per month off their Council Tax bill!
- Mrs D of Northallerton receives £58 discount off her Council Tax bill.

There is also help available for people under the age of 60 who are employed - either full time or part time - but on a low wage. And if you are required to pay for child care some of these costs can be deducted from your income.

### SOME SAVINGS

#### Single parent with 2 children:

Weekly income of £261.35  
Receives £46.92 discount on her Council Tax bill plus £54 per week towards the rent

#### Single parent with 1 child:

Weekly income of £263.82  
Receives £24 per week towards the rent

#### Couple under the age of 60:

Weekly income of £210.11  
Receive £3 per week towards the rent.

#### If you think you qualify for benefit take action now by:

- Calling the council's benefit section on 0845 1211 555
- Completing the coupon below

I would like to claim Council Tax Benefit

NAME: ..... DATE: .....

ADDRESS: .....

..... POSTCODE: .....

SIGNED: .....

Please return this form to: **PO Box 121, Civic Centre, Stone Cross, Northallerton, North Yorkshire. DL6 2YP.**

We will then let you know what information we need to process your claim for Council Tax Benefit.



Welfare Officer, Lisa Fry and Councillor Blades call in at the flu jab clinic.

## JABBING HOME MESSAGE

Hambleton joined forces with health chiefs to jab home a cash saving message! The District Council's welfare officer gave out benefit advice to patients attending special 'flu-jab' clinics in Northallerton last autumn.

The authority teamed up with the Mowbray House Surgery through its partnership work with the Hambleton and Richmondshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) at four of the clinics.

Nationally only about 60% of eligible people take up council tax benefit - a figure the Department of Work and Pensions is keen to see rise. Since March 2004 it has risen by 7.5% in Hambleton - another 250 claims have been processed.

"Historically the take-up of this benefit has been lower than any other," said Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor David Blades.

"There is a great lack of knowledge and a perception

that this is charity. Most of the people who do not claim are elderly and they do not want handouts. But this is available to them and it is only right that they claim it.

"By working with the Primary Care Trust we hope to get to some more of this traditionally hard to reach sector."

And Maddy Ruff, Director of Primary Care at the PCT added: "We are delighted at this collaboration between one of the GP practices in our area and the District Council.

"It is a really good example of the way different parts of the public sector can help each other for the benefit of the local community, and could well reach people who otherwise would not be aware that they are entitled to claim benefits."

Further visits may be made to clinics this year.

## NATIONAL CAMPAIGN BACKED BY COUNCIL

A national campaign to encourage more take up of Council Tax benefits is being backed by the District Council.

Over the next few months a series of adverts to encourage pensioners to apply will be launched - in the local and national press. Leaflets will be issued to doctors surgeries and voluntary organisations.

Coupons were included in the winter fuel payments received by many pensioners during November and December last year.

And information will be included with all Council Tax bills being issued next month.

## TOUGH GOALS SET

Hambleton's benefits team has set itself a tough goal - to become one of the country's leading providers by the end of 2007.

It wants to improve benefit take up - and the time it takes to process them; recover more overpayments by uncovering fraudulent claims; and increase the accessibility of the service.

And one of the ways it wants to do that is by setting up customer forums - with both claimants and landlords.

"We want to deliver a service that is customer focused but is effective and secure ensuring that our taxpayers get excellent value for money," said Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor David Blades.

"Over the past few years there have been significant changes to housing and council tax benefits - there is no

longer an annual review of a claim although most people do receive an update visit or letter every two years.

"But in the light of these changes - and others expected from the Department for Work and Pensions - we want to further modernise and improve the service."

He said that changes are already reaping rewards - new claims processing has halved from 70 days to only 36 and claim determination within 14 days has doubled from 47% to 84%.

And the take up of council tax benefit has increased by 7.5% following promotional work.

To get involved in the customer forums write to the Benefits Manager, Hambleton District Council, Civic Centre, Stone Cross, Northallerton DL6 2UU.

## NEW RATE RELIEF RULES

### A new system of rate relief for small businesses is launched this spring.

Under new government legislation a business ratepayer whose property has a rateable value of less than £5,000 will get a 50% discount - as long as it is their only premises. Businesses with properties with rateable values between £5,000 and £10,000 will get relief on a sliding scale.

The cost of the relief will be borne by non-qualifying businesses by payment of a supplement on their rates bill - but businesses whose property has a rateable value between £10,000 and £14,999 will not pay the supplement if they are only occupying one property.

And businesses with more than one property may still be entitled to the relief or exemption from the supplement on their main property if their other property has a rateable value under £2,200 - and the total rateable value of their properties is under £15,000.

Where a business is receiving other types of relief - 'Charity Relief' or 'Rural Rate Relief' - they will continue to receive that relief.

The proposed rate in the pound for 2005/2006 is 41.5p for small businesses and 42.2p for all other businesses. In simple terms that means a small business with a rateable value of £4,000 - and not affected by any other relief or premiums - will have a bill of £830.00.

All qualifying businesses will need to apply for this relief - including those with rateable values between £10,000 and £14,999. Application forms have been sent out to all businesses by the Council.

**For more information call the council's finance section on 01609 767062.**