

Frequently Asked Questions

Further to the recent Landlord bulletin you have received many of you may have queries regarding the new Housing and Council Tax Benefit software and how it will affect you and your tenants. It is hoped that the following questions and answers will resolve some of these queries.



Blackpool and Fylde Shared Revenues and Benefits Service



Frequently Asked Questions

General Information

1. How long will the system be down for?

Both Blackpool and Fylde systems are scheduled to be down for approximately 2-3 weeks.

2. When do we expect to lose the current system?

Blackpool live system will go down on Friday the 24th September 2010.

Fylde live system will go down on Wednesday the 6th October 2010.

3. When will the new system be in operation?

Blackpool's caseload is due to go live on Wednesday the 13th October 2010.

Fylde's caseload is due to go live on Monday the 25th October 2010.

Please note that these dates are approximated and will possibly be subject to change due to the conversion process.

4. What is the need for a new system?

Our current software provider Anite, was bought by another provider Northgate, in August 2008. Northgate then made the announcement that with effect from December 2010 they were no longer going to support our current system, Pericles.

5. Why has the Council chosen Academy?

A robust tender process that took place last year narrowed the choice down to three alternative systems. Choosing our new system involved looking at price, system functionality and ability for future developments.

6. Do any other Authorities use the same system?

This is an established system currently being used at over a hundred other Local Authorities. This has already provided us with the opportunity of visiting other nearby authorities in order to benefit from their experience and expertise. This has proved extremely valuable in preparing for the implementation of the new system.

7. Will I have a new Landlord reference?

Yes all landlords will be allocated with a new creditor reference. This will be shown as the reference number on any correspondence issued to you with regards to a payment or overpayment. Therefore if making an enquiry please quote your new creditor reference so we can retrieve your details as quickly as possible.

8. Will the tenant have a new reference number?

Yes tenants will be given a new Housing Benefit case reference when their details are transferred onto Academy. The new number will be shown as the reference number on all correspondence issued in respect of that tenant.

9. Will all staff know how to use the new system?

Yes. An extensive training package has been designed and delivered to all members of staff who will be using the new system.

10. Who can I contact to express any concerns about the new system?

You can write to the Academy Project Team, Benefits Service, Blackpool Council, Municipal Building, Blackpool, FY1 1NF. Alternatively you can email benefits@blackpool.gov.uk and mark it for the attention of the Academy Project Team.

Payments

11. Will there be a big delay in processing claims?

We will not be able to process any new claims for benefit or make any changes to existing claims whilst the live systems are unavailable. Due to this we do expect a backlog to accumulate. Much effort is being put into reducing the amount of outstanding work we have now in order to minimise the impact of the new system and reduce potential backlogs.

12. Will payments still be made whilst the system is down?

Yes – as long as the claim was already in payment prior to the systems being shut down. Payments are being produced in advance so that they can be released as and when expected whilst the system is down. Please be advised that as payments are being raised in advance there may be an increased risk of being overpaid should a change of circumstances occur.

13. Can I still make an enquiry about a payment?

Yes we will have a read only system to enable us to confirm whether or not a payment has been produced. We will also be able to stop payments that may have gone astray or are incorrect however we will be unable to return payments to the system immediately for re issue this may take some time whilst we wait for the new system to become available.

14. Can I still be paid by cheque or BAC's?

Yes the current payment methods will remain the same on the new system.

15. Will you still be recovering overpayments?

Yes, where recovery was in place prior to the close down of the Benefit system. No new recovery will be actioned whilst the system is down.

Reporting Changes

16. What if my tenant leaves the property whilst the system is down?

You can still notify us that your tenant has left so that we can make a record of it. We will be unable however to stop that person's claim but we may be able to withdraw a payment if required. If it is not possible to stop the payment, such as if a payment is for more than one claimant, then you may be overpaid.

17. What if I move or change the way I wish to be paid?

You can still notify us of the change, however we will be unable to actually amend your details until the new Academy system becomes available.

Local Housing Allowance

18. Will payments still be made to the tenant?

Yes. The new system will not affect the Local Housing Allowance scheme.

19. Will we still get payment schedules where Benefit is being paid to claimant?

Yes. Blackpool Council has specified that this functionality on the new system is extremely important to us.

20. What if my tenant falls into arrears?

You can still notify us of the problem and provide us with the necessary proof. Once we have been notified we can attempt to withdraw any payments due to be made to the tenant. We will be unable to re-issue the payment in your name, or record the tenant as being 'vulnerable' until the new Academy system is live.

What can Landlords do to help?

We would appreciate your patience and understanding at this time. The length of time it will take to do the conversion from Pericles to Academy is very much dependent on the software company. In the meantime we will endeavor to offer the best service we can under the circumstances.

Could you kindly avoid or limit the amount of calls you make to the benefit telephone line chasing outstanding work. During system down time our Benefit Assessors will be unable to give you any definite information regarding when a specific benefit claim is likely to be put into payment. Once the new system goes live our main focus will be processing outstanding work and getting payments issued as quickly as possible. Front line benefit staff that deal with all your telephone and counter enquiries, emails and messages on the landlord line are also responsible for processing the new claims and changes they take. Therefore the less calls and enquiries that are made chasing outstanding work the more time each assessor will be able to dedicate to actually paying the claims they still have outstanding.

Your co-operation regarding this matter will be much appreciated and help us focus our attention on reducing the backlog as quickly as possible.

• Have an enquiry regarding a Fylde Benefit case?

If your enquiry is in response to a letter you have received please ring the telephone number at the top of the letter, otherwise telephone 01253 658658 or email benefits@fylde.gov.uk

• Have an enquiry regarding a Blackpool Benefit case?

If your enquiry is in response to a letter you have received please ring the telephone number at the top of the letter, otherwise telephone 01253 478847 or email benefits@blackpool.gov.uk

IF YOU DID NOT RECEIVE THE LATEST LANDLORD BULLETIN IT CAN BE FOUND ON BLACKPOOL COUNCIL'S WEBSITE www.blackpool.gov.uk

GO TO Advice and Benefits/ Benefits/ Housing Benefit Landlord Information