

Housing Plus

Benefit Advice

What we did

We awarded a three year contract to the Kent Benefit Partnership to provide Benefit Advice at both the Ashford Gateway and the Tenterden Gateway.

The aim was to offer advice on all welfare benefits, assist with preparing letters for appeals and assisting with backdating claims.

How we did it

We met with the Kent Benefit Partnership Manager and scoped out our needs in terms of the proposed services we wished to offer, and discussed the project outputs we were looking to achieve.

A service level agreement was drafted and agreed.

Who was involved?

The Housing Plus Project Manager, Senior Housing Options Officer, Ashford Gateway Manager and the Kent Benefit Partnership.

www.kentbenefits.org

Resources

We allocated 50% of the annual cost of the contract from the Housing Plus (Trailblazer) funding. This was then matched by funding from within the housing department.



Time taken

Following an initial meeting with the Kent Benefit Partnership and finalising of the service level agreement, the service was launched within six weeks.

Lessons learned

Staff briefings were held for the Housing Options officers and wider Gateway partners to help embed the new service. This helped raise awareness of the new service and to encourage staff to make referrals.

The uptake of the service was high from the initial launch and we found it necessary to review how the service was delivered, as initially all customers were offered an appointment.

On receipt of a referral, the Kent Benefit Partnership now telephones the customer and undertakes a short telephone diagnostic assessment. An appointment at the Gateway or a home visit is only where needed.

Cost

An annual cost of £3,000, which includes Kent Benefit Partnership attending our monthly housing clinics for residents.

Additional Information

We produced a specific leaflet to promote the Benefit Advice Service and used our tenant's magazine, resident's magazine and a media releases to advertise the service.

Kent Benefit Partnership also attends our monthly tenant meetings offering benefit advice as part of the service level agreement.

Staff providing benefit advice have undertaken a Gateway induction, so they are briefed on the full range of services offered within the Gateway and can refer customers internally where necessary. They will eventually go on to use our Whole Needs Assessment tool.

For more information email: Housingplus@ashford.gov.uk