

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICER: DENISE PARK**

DATE: 13th APRIL 2012

WELFARE REFORM ACT

The Welfare Reform Act has now received Royal Assent. The changes outlined in the bill affect many national benefit awards administered by the DWP, including the Social Fund, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

HOUSING BENEFIT

From April 2013 all working age claimants of Housing Benefit who reside in Housing Association accommodation will have their payments reduced if they occupy a property that is too large for them. Whilst it is too early to know how many households will be affected by this change, our Benefits Service will be working closely with all Housing Associations throughout 2013 to highlight the households affected and will make efforts to minimise the impact.

WELFARE CAP

The Council has been informed by the DWP that all households that may be affected by the cap on welfare payments will be contacted by letter during April 2012. Whilst the change does not come into effect until April 2013 the DWP wishes to interview all those affected prior to its introduction.

The cap will introduce a maximum welfare payment of £500 for couples per week and lone parents, and £350 for single people. The cap will be administered by Councils from April 2013 by reducing Housing Benefit awards.

At present the information is quite vague, however, indicative figures illustrate that up to 100 households in Blackburn could be affected.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT

A further major change for Benefit claimants will be the introduction of Universal Credit, a single benefit which will replace income based Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support, Income based Employment Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. This new benefit will commence from October 2013 for new claimants and then current recipients of the old benefits will be migrated to universal credit over a number of years.

2013 will also see the replacement of Disability Living Allowance with Personal Independence Payments. Further details are expected on this over the next few months.

NEW SERVICE LAUNCHED – REGISTERING DEATHS AT THE ROYAL BLACKBURN HOSPITAL

A new service has been launched by Blackburn with Darwen Council Registration Services working in close partnership with colleagues in the East Lancashire Hospital Trust.

From 6th March 2012 experienced Registrars from the Council's Registration Services have been based at the Royal Blackburn Hospital site on Tuesdays and Wednesdays for registering deaths that have occurred in the Borough.

Members of the public who have lost a family member or close friend in the Blackburn with Darwen Council now can have the option of registering the death at the service on the Royal Blackburn Hospital site.

The service is by appointment, by contacting the Blackburn Registrar's office on 01254 58 86 60 or by e-mail registrars@blackburn.gov.uk

Around 70% of all deaths in the Borough occur in hospital so this new service will greatly improve access to death registration services for people in the Borough, providing an additional option to the main office in the King Georges Hall complex in Blackburn Town centre or outreach session at Darwen Town Hall.

Already, there have been many compliments and positive comments from users of the service.

2011/12 IT UPDATE

As part of our cost saving measures, a replacement printing system has been installed in a number of offices which will offer greater flexibility and security while delivering significant savings.

The project to replace and improve the Council's entire web infrastructure was initiated in October 2011. The project is being delivered in two major phases: Phase one will see the replacement of the current web site, a review and revision of content and the provision of improved search capabilities. It will go live later this spring. Phase two will:

- Improve support for the public using handheld devices including mobile phones, smart phones and tablets;
- Introduce interactive maps;
- Increase the number and type of transactions which can be completed for on-line;
- Increase interaction to improve public consultation;
- Provide the capability for citizens to login in securely and view their own account information, transaction histories, etc.;
- Replace the Council's intranet site to improve services for elected members and staff; and
- Look at improved collaborative working with external partners.