

**For: Executive Board on 8th July 2002**

**QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

**1. Housing Benefit**

**Councillor Fooks to Portfolio Holder, Local Services (Councillor Tarver)**

Question asked at the Executive Board meeting on 27th May.

**Question:** Are there still delays in the award of housing benefit?

**Answer:**

Dear Councillor Fooks,

Portfolio Holder Question - Executive Board - 27th May 2002

I refer to your question regarding delayed payments from Housing Benefits in respect of refugees.

It is not possible for me to respond specifically to this question as it is not feasible to identify which applicants for benefits are refugees. Additionally, sometimes delays in payment are caused by the fact that claimants have not provided all the information necessary to process their claim.

Where full information has not been received, the claimant is asked to provide the further information needed to assess their entitlement. Ideally, this should be done as soon as their application is received. There have been delays in doing this and also in assessing claims where the full information has been received.

However, an action plan is being produced to target the work and ensure that delays are minimised. For information I have listed the current workload position in respect of new claims below.

There are currently 972 applications for benefit awaiting assessment. This the equivalent of 1.5 weeks work (i.e. on average 600 claims are received each week). 49% of the claims waiting to be processed were received after 1st May.

Staff resources have previously been focused on dealing with urgent claims that need cancelling. Staff will now be concentrating on clearing the oldest cases first, although there will still be a need for urgent cases and cancellations to be addressed.

If you need to find out additional information about the situation may I suggest you contact those dealing with these claims, such as our own Housing Department or Social Services.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Richard Tarver