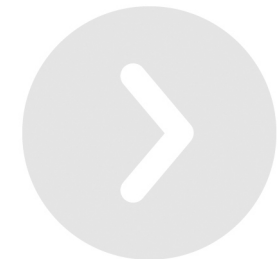
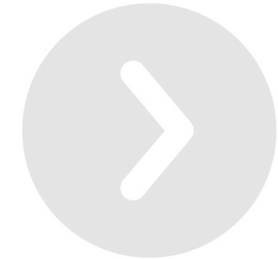


Benefits Online

“Making the benefit application process into a truly transactional and interactive experience between citizens and government”

Lynne Harvie
City of Edinburgh Council



Agenda

- Welcome and introduction
- What is Benefits Online?
- Aims and objectives
- What can Benefits Online do?
- Benefits to Customers
- Benefits to the Council



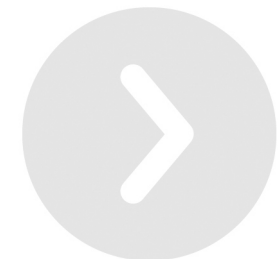
Introduction to Benefits Online

- Challenges faced with paper-based application:
 - citizens tend to find the 28 page paper application form daunting and difficult to understand, even when its “Crystal Marked”
 - Revenues & Benefits receive a large number of incomplete claim forms each year
 - 3rd party advisors state that 90% of claimants seek assistance with the application form
- Reasons for development
 - the benefits that can be achieved by both citizens and the Council from taking a lengthy paper application to making it available on the Internet
 - innovative use of ICT to empower citizens



What is Benefits Online?

- Benefits Online was a DWP funded project to develop an online application for Housing Benefit /Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB)
- The new system integrates with the Council's Electronic Data Management (EDM) system
- It is available for citizens on the internet
 - directly from home
 - through a third party such as a Registered Social Landlord, Citizen's Advice Bureau or Local Authority Officer
- A mixed Council team comprising eGovernment and Revenues & Benefits worked with BT and the chosen supplier, EzGov, to develop the final product
- EzGov has extensive experience in delivering e-government solutions worldwide

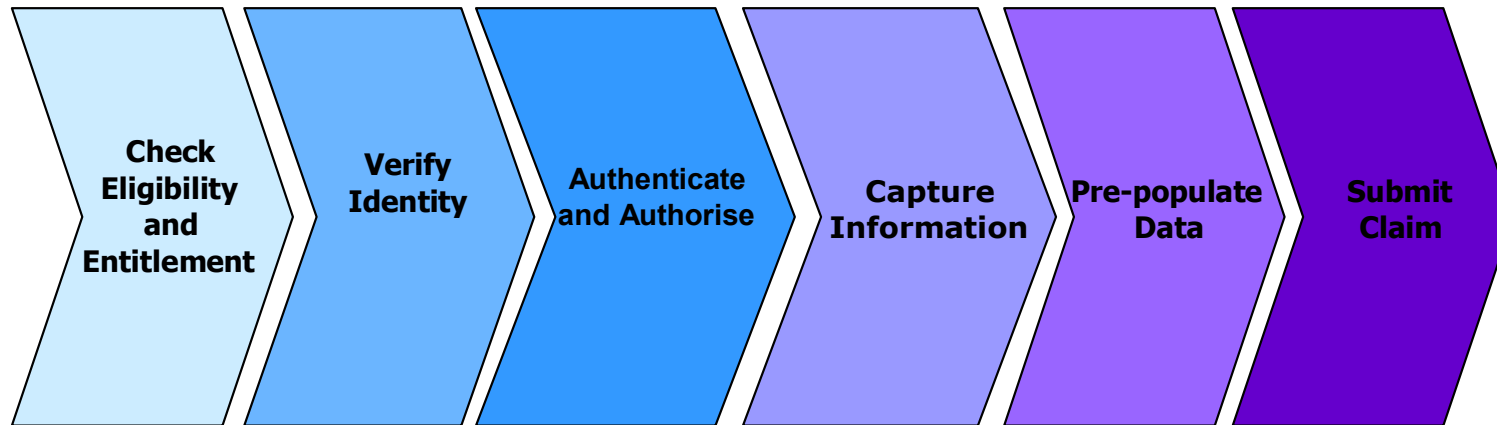


Aims and Objectives

- to produce and implement a national product for online Housing and Council Tax benefit applications that integrates with Civica's EDM system and presents data which is compatible with Northgate's Housing and Council Tax benefit system
- to facilitate increased uptake of benefits
- to achieve automation in certain parts of the new claims process
- Innovation and modernisation in administration of benefits
- Transferability and sustainability
- Delivering strategy – ICT and customer services
- Ensuring productivity



How does Benefits Online work?

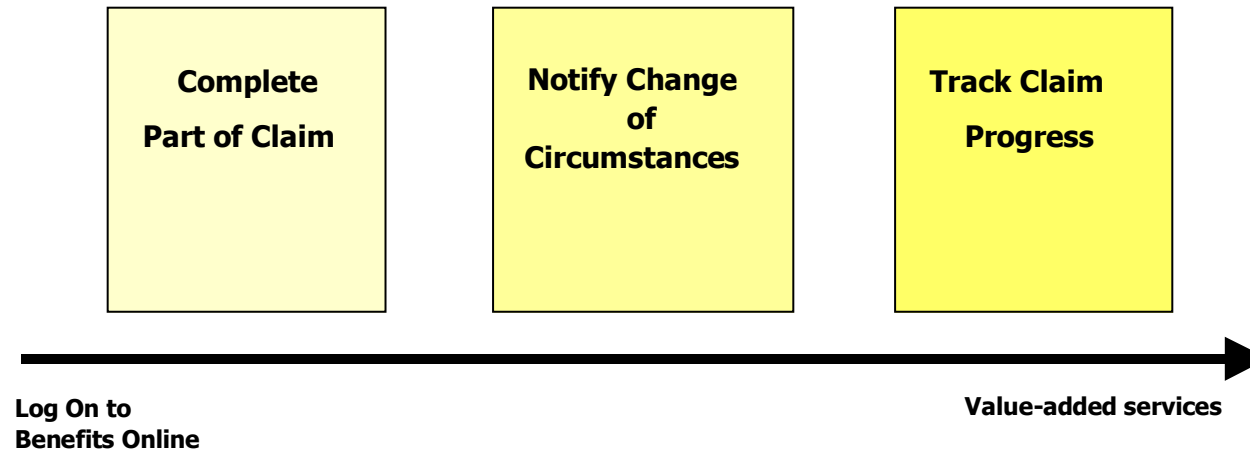


Log On to Benefits Online

Submit HB/CTB Application

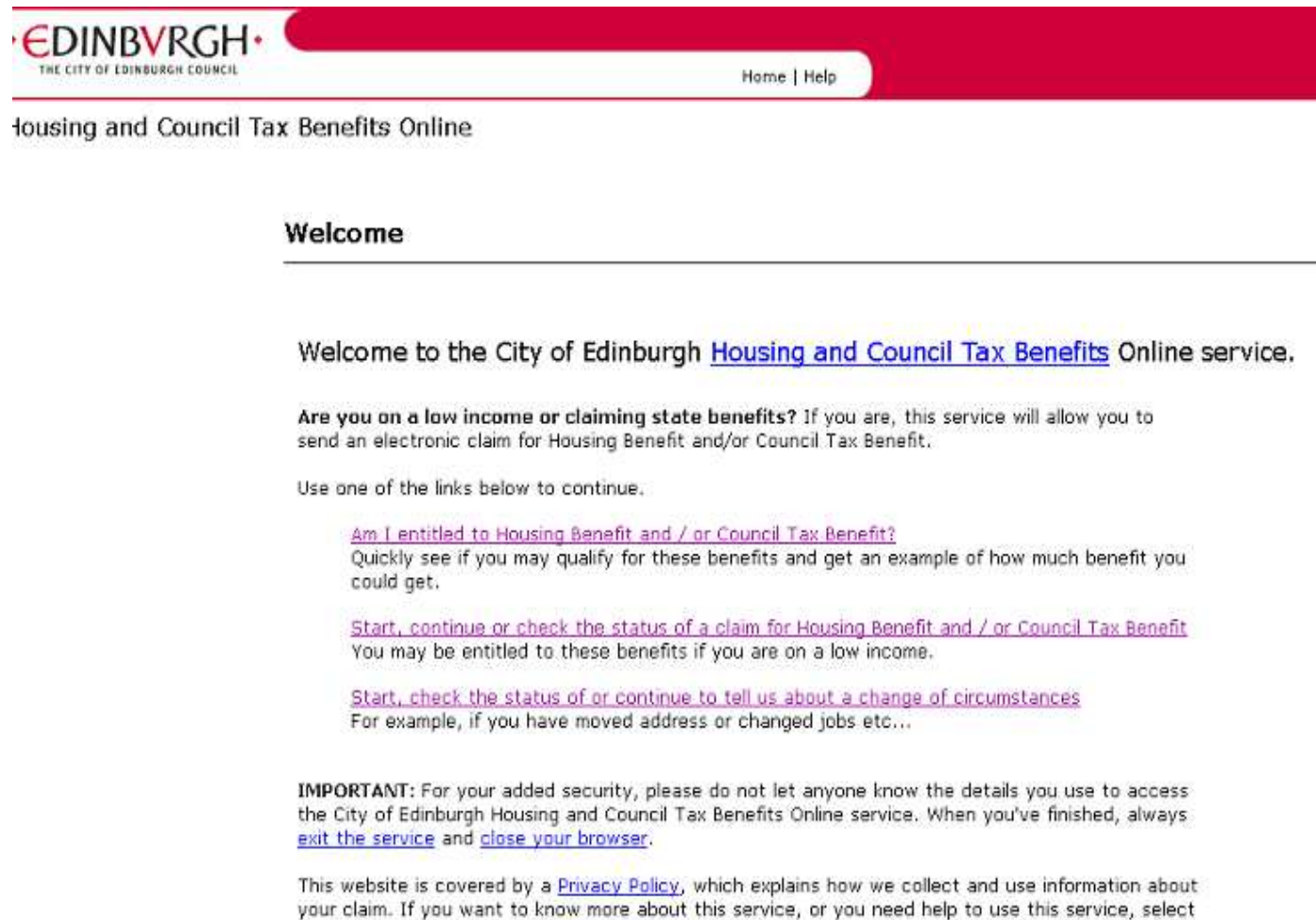
- **Eligibility and Entitlement** - standalone, anonymous interactive benefits calculator provides an immediate indication of eligibility and a provisional entitlement amount
- **Verification of Identity** - Revenues and Benefits Officers carry out offline verification of documentation
- **Authentication and Authorisation** - Citizen authentication by manual checks. Citizens are given a PIN number when they start a claim and asked to provide a 'known fact' to enable them to resume a part-completed claim.
- **Information Capture** - interactive, online "smart" form that facilitates "once only" data entry and applies prompts and checks to validate form as it is completed
- **Data Pre-population** - elective pre-population of data from benefits calculator
- **Claim submission** - electronic applications are indexed by EDM system as they are received and are fed into workflow system.

What else will Benefits Online do?



- **Part Completion of Claim** - users can save and close an application without submitting and are able to retrieve application at later date and continue from point of interruption
- **Change of Circumstances** - electronic notification of change of circumstances submitted to Electronic Document Management system for evaluation by Revenue and Benefits Officer
- **Claim Tracking** - citizens able to track progress of a claim and receive details of its status

Benefits Online - Welcome page



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Edinburgh Council website. It features the Edinburgh Council logo on the left, a 'Home | Help' link in the center, and a red background on the right. Below the navigation bar, the page title 'Housing and Council Tax Benefits Online' is displayed. The main content area is titled 'Welcome' and contains a message from the City of Edinburgh. The message includes a link to the 'Housing and Council Tax Benefits Online service' and three links for users to check their eligibility, start a claim, or report a change of circumstances. An important security notice is also present, advising users to exit the service and close their browser. At the bottom, there is a link to the Privacy Policy.

EDINBURGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Home | Help

Housing and Council Tax Benefits Online

Welcome

Welcome to the City of Edinburgh [Housing and Council Tax Benefits Online](#) service.

Are you on a low income or claiming state benefits? If you are, this service will allow you to send an electronic claim for Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit.

Use one of the links below to continue.

[Am I entitled to Housing Benefit and / or Council Tax Benefit?](#)
Quickly see if you may qualify for these benefits and get an example of how much benefit you could get.

[Start, continue or check the status of a claim for Housing Benefit and / or Council Tax Benefit](#)
You may be entitled to these benefits if you are on a low income.

[Start, check the status of or continue to tell us about a change of circumstances](#)
For example, if you have moved address or changed jobs etc...

IMPORTANT: For your added security, please do not let anyone know the details you use to access the City of Edinburgh Housing and Council Tax Benefits Online service. When you've finished, always [exit the service](#) and [close your browser](#).

This website is covered by a [Privacy Policy](#), which explains how we collect and use information about your claim. If you want to know more about this service, or you need help to use this service, select



Benefit Calculator

- Eligibility – initial guiding questions to give quick result on customer eligibility for benefit
- Entitlement – once eligibility is established entitlement can be calculated



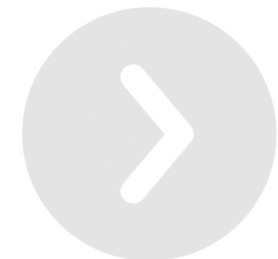
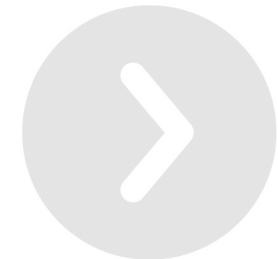
Benefit Claim

- Smart form – customer led through the application following guiding questions
- Contextual help throughout
- Validation throughout
- Online submission and tailored verification list
- Confirmation of receipt at LA



What are the Benefits to Customers?

- Customers have an improved customer experience due to faster completion of claim and greater choice and flexibility. Like other internet applications it will be available 24/7
- The real-time online calculator provides an immediate assessment of the likely amount claiming citizens could receive before the claim process starts
- Benefits Online provides a tailored checklist explaining what information is required to support the on-line form & reminds the customer to send the information to us
- Clear, self-explanatory form with Help-text and Council contact details



What are the Benefits to the Council?

- Increased take up of benefits as this is an additional service delivery channel
- A reduction in the number of incomplete forms and unreadable information, leading to an improvement in the speed of processing
- Processing staff prefer the clear output from Benefits Online
- Reduction in service delivery costs, for example printing, distribution and telephone bills
- Reduction in customer enquiries to Revenues and Benefits Officers because of form tracking facility
- Reduction in time taken to process a claim (compared to paper form)
- Improvement in the Council's relationship with third parties as they are able to provide a better service to their customers



Joined-Up Service Delivery

- Partnership working
 - City of Edinburgh Council
 - BT
 - EzGov Europe
 - Comino
 - Third Parties involved in the benefits application process e.g. RSLs
- Critical project factors:
 - Senior management support from outset
 - Extensive user requirements capture process and stakeholder consultation
 - Thorough testing and documentation
 - Awareness and training days for internal staff and third parties



Obstacles

- Main Obstacles:
 - Complexity of benefits system
 - Supplier not benefit “experts”
 - DWP requirement for physical signature from the claimant
 - Developing an acceptable output from Benefits Online for Revenues and Benefits Officers to evaluate within Comino EDM system
- Overcoming obstacles:
 - Building an accessible solution with extensive online help
 - Designing an improved customer experience that provides accurate, validated data to Revenues and Benefits Officers
 - Informing and improving existing business processes, such as registration and identification, through the electronic process
 - Creating a 'one size fits all' solution - expert users, such as Housing Association officers, and novice claimants can use the same application



Conclusion

- Results so far:
 - Better quality of information due to online validation - less need for re-work
 - Time saved in processing information
 - Assurance that claim has reached the Council and ability to track the process, for both claimants and landlords
 - Quicker turn around of claims, claimant receives benefit sooner
 - Assists disadvantaged claimants
 - COSLA Excellence Award for Innovative use of technology
 - Invitation to share the project experience at the 4th Quality Conference for in Public Administrations in Europe
 - Finalist in GC Awards for Innovation, Government to Citizen category
- Most important lessons learned:
 - keep citizen experience at the centre of development
 - utilise the knowledge and experience of your expert users
- Next steps
 - changes suggested by users
 - Wider use of online smart forms, e.g. free school meals, common assessments



Thank you for your time

For more information please visit
www.benefitsonline.edinburgh.gov.uk

or email

lynne.harvie@edinburgh.gov.uk

