

Introduction

At the end of 2008 unemployment in Britain reached 1.97 million, an increase of 146,000 and the highest for 10 years. In addition the number of Job Seekers Allowance claimants was up 73,800 in January to 1.23 million, an increase of 438,100 over the year.

For the three months to December 2008 redundancies increased by 104,000 to 259,000, up 148,000 over the year. This level has not been higher since comparable records began in 1995.

This trend looks set to continue which means more benefit claims and a huge increase in workload for Local authorities.

What does this mean for Local Authorities?

It means a significant increase in the number of claims for housing and council tax benefit and Council Tax enquiries. Croydon, Tandridge District and Northampton Councils have all experienced increases in their workloads.

Mark Fowler, Head of Revenues & Benefits at Croydon says

"We are actively promoting other channels such as the web self service portal. We feel this will help free up our practitioners to spend time with those who need it most. Resource demands have greatly increased, for example our benefits caseload last year increased by 10%. By using this channel customers' can now answer enquiries themselves such as 'how much do I owe?' and 'when is my next payment due?'; 24 hours a day 7 days a week."

Head of Revenues and Benefits at Tandridge, Julie Holden has seen her benefits caseload rise by 8% with new claims increasing by 23% and Richard Austin, Programme Manager for Northampton has experienced a 13% rise in his benefit caseload.

How can Gandlake help?

Gandlake can provide your council with a web channel enabling your citizens, landlords and customer services staff to access Revenues and Benefits services online. Encouraging citizens away from the phone and on to the web means a reduction of traffic through your call centre - vital if you are expecting an increase in claims and contact relating to payments. It means customer services teams can view the same information that the caller can see regardless of whether it is a citizen viewing their statement, checking an outstanding balance or a landlord querying a payment. More importantly the calls you do receive are handled much more quickly and efficiently, providing an all round better experience for the caller.

Keeping costs down

The DWP recently reported the cost of processing a brand new benefit claim is estimated at £33 and to process a change of circumstance averages out at £13. The average gross administration cost for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit application forms across Scottish Councils in 2007/2008 is £44.75.

How can Gandlake help?

Gandlake can also massively reduce the cost of each transaction by eliminating the majority of data entry required by your back office staff. The intelligent e-forms ensure this is kept to a minimum, much of the information is automatically populated online and then in turn seamlessly populated in to your back office systems.

It also increases the accuracy of data by leading the citizen through the various forms and ensuring all relevant sections are completed. Finally, it seamlessly completes the transaction by sending the information to the back office.

The need to to improve performance even further.

The DWP's Strategic Objectives 6.1 is to pay customers the right benefits at the right time. There's no doubt Local Authorities in the UK have been working incredibly hard in this area and made significant improvements when it comes to administering Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefits. In fact the average time to process a new claim in 2001 was 62 days. Now it has been massively reduced to 33 days. However, with the huge increase in benefit claims continuing to rise, what will happen to this 33 day average? Furthermore, how will the increase in workload impact on Revenue collection and recovery?

How can Gandlake help?

To minimise the impact on your Revenues and Benefits Department Gandlake's range of intelligent e-forms cuts down the data entry required from the citizen and populates your back office applications and CRM systems. This turns a standard e-form into a web transaction and reduces the intervention required and the time taken to process this information making the service much easier and faster for the citizen.

The intelligent e-form enables decisions to be made straight away.

How can errors on claim forms be reduced?

As an example, an area for improvement identified by the DWP, is the increase in customer errors. £19bn was spent on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit in 2005/6. Out of this figure the DWP estimates 1.4% was underpaid and 5.5% was overpaid. This is mostly due to customers entering incorrect data in claim forms. In the run up to March 2011, the DWP's priorities for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are to ensure that all Local Authorities provide an effective and efficient benefit service that is protected against fraud and error.

How can Gandlake help?

Introducing human intervention to any process means the potential for introducing errors. Gandlake's e-forms reduce the data entry required from the citizen and populate your back office applications and CRM systems. By removing much of the re-keying required by members of your Revenues and Benefits staff, Gandlake's intelligent e-forms help to ensure the data captured is correct and errors are kept to a minimum. Additionally, as the citizen enters the data the intelligent forms tell them exactly what evidence is required.

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