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**MEDIA RELEASE
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**BABERGH: SPEEDING UP TURNAROUND TIMES
FOR HOUSING BENEFIT CLAIMS**

“Babergh has made real improvements during the year in the time it takes to process Housing Benefit claims, in spite of administrative problems earlier in the year” said Bob Southgate, Head of Revenues, responding to a national press release and statistics published yesterday by Housing Benefit Minister, Malcolm Wicks.

“Babergh recognises how important it is for potential claimants that their case is processed as quickly and thoroughly as possible” continued Mr Southgate. “At the end of November 2002, Babergh was on average processing new claims within 37 days and changes in circumstances in just 6 days. 87% of Housing Benefit renewals are being processed on time. We have not lost any accuracy either in improving our performance. 98% of claims are calculated correctly from the outset.”

“Administrative problems earlier in the year mask this improvement, but Babergh remains committed to fully resourcing this important area of our responsibilities.”

“We still need to do more work improving the turn round of claims once we have all the information we need and making sure people get their rent allowance paid on time, but the improvement we have achieved shows we take our responsibilities seriously.” ENDS

Note for editors: Figures published yesterday by Benefit Minister Malcolm Wicks show that many authorities are not achieving satisfactory performance for Housing Benefit administration, publishing statistics is a challenge to improve.

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