

Item no.

Report to: **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date: **8th January 2008**
Report of: **Head of Financial Management**
Subject: **Position Statement - Revenues & Benefits**
Ward: **All**

1.0 Purpose of report

1.1 To present the committee with a position statement in respect of the above service.

2.0 Consultation

2.1 Consultation has taken place with the Revenues Manager, the Benefits Manager and the Revenues and Benefits staff.

3.0 Background

3.1 The table in Appendix 1 and 3 gives the sections performance from 1st April 2007 to date with references to earlier periods.

3.2 The tables show national upper quartile performance for previous years as comparators.

4.0 Position statement and Option Appraisal.

4.1 *Sickness levels - Revenues and Benefits*

4.1.1 The table below illustrates the most recent information available

Unit	Period	BVPI	Sick days	Work Days	Num. Staff	Holiday s	Weekdays
REVS	01/04/05 - 31/03/06	6.76	168	5631	37	829	6460
REVS	01/04/06 - 31/03/07	1.33	24	4480.5	28	196.5	4677
REVS	01/04/07 - 30/11/07	14.34	247.5	3821	278	580	4401
BENS	01/04/05 - 31/03/06	14.05	538.5	8701.5	45	1264.5	9966
BENS	01/04/06 - 31/03/07	2.99	79.5	6605	30	312	6917
BENS	01/04/07 - 30/11/07	9.89	269.5	6140	46	948	7088

4.1.2 The BVPI figures shown are the number of sick days lost per annum per full time equivalent employee.

4.2 *Benefits Claims*

4.2.1 The figures contained in Appendix 3 summarises recent benefit performance.

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- 4.2.2 The average time taken to calculate new benefit applications for the current year is 25 days. This is a reduction on year 2006/7 of 6 days, with the most recent month (Nov 07) figs showing 23.6 days.
- 4.2.3 The figures shown in Appendix 3 in respect of the average time taken to calculate change in circumstances for the current year is 5.99 days which shows .4 days improvement over the year. The most recent month (Nov 07) figures showing 5.4 days.
- 4.2.4 The figures contained in 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 are calculated from the time the Council receives a new application or is notified of a change in circumstances.
- 4.2.5 The amount of benefit paid correctly, calculated using a Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) determined sample, is 100%. This indicator measures the benefits that are properly determined at the time of calculation.
- 4.2.6 The figures given in Appendix 3 in respect of ' all claims processed within 14 days ' refer to time taken to calculate benefit after all information required to complete a claim is received. The figure shown is 95% which is a 14% increase on 2006/7.
- 4.2.7 I also show, in Appendix 3 "Rent Allowances processed in 14 days" These figures refer to privately rented accommodation and show 93% completed in this time which is an increase of 22% on the previous year and again is calculated from the date all information is received.
- 4.2.8 Contained in Appendix 3 I have shown grades for the relevant performance figures. These grades are set by the DWP at 1 -4 where 1 is poor and 4 is excellent. The levels are set out in Appendix 4.
- 4.3 *Revenues Issues*
- 4.3.1 The % of council tax collected in the year 2006/7 was 96.55% which is increase of 0.3% on the previous year. This is the highest collection rate we have ever achieved.
- 4.3.2 Arrears for previous years was reduced by £1.3 million (approx 33%)
- 4.3.3 The revenues section target overall debt, not just in-year collection, which means we collect 99% in the longer term and keep writ-off to a minimum.
- 4.3.4 This strategy has enabled the Council to record efficiency savings by reducing our bad debt provision by more than £200k
- 4.3.5 The Best Value inspector has stated our performance compared well to authorities with similar deprivation levels to ours.
- 4.3.6 The % of Business Rate collected for 2006/7 (BVPI 10), was 97.82% an increase of 0.6% on the previous year. The collection rate has been effected by an increase in debit raised of £3.1 million due to the Enterprise Zone status in late 2005
- 4.3.7 The cost of collecting Council Tax per property (Local PI) FOR 2006/7 was £15.12. This represents a decrease of 65 pence per property per year on the previous year.

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4.3.8 The Revenues Section will be carrying out a single person discount review throughout the district. This involves using an external agency to compare data and provide the Council with addresses where the information may be incorrect.

4.4 *Record of complaints*

4.4.1 Record of written complaints April - December 2007.

<u>Section</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Justified</u>	<u>Unjustified</u>	<u>Resolved</u>
Revenues	2	0	2	1
Benefits	8	2	6	8
Total	10	2	8	9

4.4.2 Although there is no room for complacency the level of complaints should be considered against the activity of 40,000 (revenues) and 12,500 (benefits) customers during the year.

4.5 *Summary of Overall Performance*

4.5.1 The workload in the Benefits section continues to be at a manageable level.

4.5.2 The Benefits Section continue to work with our partners to encourage benefits take-up.

4.5.3 The Council have launched an on-line Saturday morning benefits application service where members of the public ring us and a benefit officer completes a benefit application giving benefit entitlement instantly.

4.5.4 The Benefits Section have spoken to all the area forums throughout the District encouraging the Benefit take-up and giving further presentations to residents groups.

4.5.5 The Benefits Section have requested contact details for Parish Magazines in order to publish articles relating to benefits. We have received a number and are awaiting publication.

4.5.6 Working with a local Primary School Benefit surgeries have been held on the premises after all the children received letter informing their guardians of the event.

4.5.7 The Benefit service faces major changes in regulations relating to rental levels paid to private landlords. A programme of information events scheduled for February 2008 has been arranged. These involve road shows in the district, mobile displays, press releases and tailored training and information presentations. Members will be updated and information given over the coming months.

4.5.8 The Benefits Section continue to be proactive in respect of fraud and during this financial year, 2007/8 we have prosecuted 12 cases and issued 40 formal cautions. This shows a DWP grading on performance as ' excellent '

4.5.9 The use of a collection agency for overpayment of benefit has been piloted. Older overpayments and debts relating to previous tenants have been passed to the company and although this initiative is in its early stages it is proving very successful. This method of collection will be monitored.

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- 4.6 *Percentage of invoices paid on time*
- 4.6.1 This area of work remains to be amongst the top performing Councils in the county. Current performance for 1/4/07 - 31/9/07 is 99.13%.
- 4.7 *Best Value Service Improvement Plan 2005/6 to 2009/10*
- 4.7.1 The improvement plan is set out as Appendix 2. The document sets out progress as at 30 November 2007.
- 4.7.2 As previously reported the plan is a living document and progress continues within the plan.
- 5.0 Implications**
- 5.1 *Financial*
- 5.1.1 There are no financial implications
- 5.2 *Legal*
- 5.2.1 There are no legal implications
- 5.3 *Policy*
- 5.3.1 There are no policy implications
- 5.4 *Risk*
- 5.4.1 A risk assessment has been completed and the necessary actions required to manage the identified risks have been implemented.
- 5.5 *Communication*
- 5.5.1 There are no communication implications.
- 5.6 *Corporate implications*
- 5.6.1 Corporate plan and priorities
- 5.6.1.1 There are no corporate plan implications.
- 5.6.2 Equality and Diversity.
- 5.6.2.1 There are no equality and diversity implications.
- 5.6.3 E-Government
- 5.6.3.1 All issues in this report are reflective of the latest E-Government and Transitional Government positions.
- 5.6.4 Procurement
- 5.6.4.1 There are no procurement implications
- 6.0 Recommendation**
- 6.1 That members note the contents of the report.

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Background papers/documents referred to

1. Service improvement plan
2. Performance indicator calculations
3. Audit commission published performance indicators 2006/7