

Item no.

Report to: **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date: **3rd June 2008**
Report of: **Head of Financial Management**
Subject: **Service Unit Performance Reporting - 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 - 31/03/08	18.1	468	5779	29	955	6734
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	01/05/07 - 30/04/08	9.01	374.5	9388	48	1420	10808

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 2007/8 year is 26.03 days. This is a reduction on year 2006/7 of 4.75 days, with the most recent month (April 2008) figs showing 28.1 days.
- 4.2.3 The figures shown in Appendix 3 in respect of the average time taken to calculate change in circumstances for the year 2007/8 is 5.55 days which shows .75 days improvement over the year. The most recent month (April 2008) figures showing 3.14 days.
- 4.2.4 A new combined indicator, 'Right time indicator' replacing 'Days to process new claims and days to process change of circumstances' has been implemented with effect from 1 April 2008.
- 4.2.5 For the month of April 2008 this indicator shows a figure of 7.53 days for all benefits, new applications and changes in circumstances. Although we have no comparisons or benchmarks we expect our performance to show an "excellent" performance.
- 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 91.5% for 2007/8 which is a 9.5% 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 87.5% for 2007/8 completed in this time which is an increase of 16.5% 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 2007/8 was 96.3%. Although this is a decrease of 0.3% on the previous year this still represents one of the highest collection rates achieved by this Council.
- 4.3.2 Arrears for previous years was reduced by £979,000 (approx 30%)
- 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 write-offs 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 2007/8 (BVPI 10), was 97.03% a decrease of 0.79% on the previous year. The collection rate has been effected by an increase in debit raised of £800,000 (Byron Place Shopping Centre) and an increase in the number of company liquidations and administrations in 2007/8.
- 4.3.7 The cost of collecting Council Tax per property (Local PI) FOR 2007/8 was £15.75. This represents a decrease of £1.37p per property per year on the previous year.

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4.3.8 The Revenues Section are part way through the process of carrying out a single person discount review. This involves using an external agency to compare data held. At present around 5000 single person discount claimants have been reviewed (about 33% of the total number receiving this discount). As a result, approximately 170 discounts have been withdrawn, resulting in an extra £49,000 in charges being raised. The remaining claimants will be reviewed by the year end.

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. We have produced a promotional DVD which we intend to send to prospective claimants through the use of a DWP Scan list. This provides the Council with a list of all Pension Credit Claimants who should receive benefit but are currently not receiving Housing or Council Tax Benefit.

4.5.3 The Council have continued with its 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 We have a monthly column in local free papers and 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 There were major changes in legislation with regards to rental levels for private landlords benefit from April 2008 and tenants having rents paid directly into their bank accounts. The procedure of paying all private tenants direct to bank accounts will be pursued over the coming months.

4.5.7 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'

4.5.8 We have been very successful in the recovery of older and previous tenant overpayments, using an outside collection agency resulting in £42,191 being collected in this manner.

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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 country. Current performance for 1/4/07 - 31/03/08 is 99.07%.
- 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