

5 YEAR SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN - REVENUES & BENEFITS

Appendix 2

SCHEDULE OF TARGETS 2005/6 - 2009/10

Target Ref	Description of Target	Brief Description of Action Plan	Progress @ 30/09/08	Achieved On Target	If NO or Partial Reasons	Evidence	Action
1	To continuously review the Revenues section , to provide a more direct customer focussed management of the service, improve collection rates and take account of efficiencies e.g. CRM development. KEY DATE 31/10/2008	Head of Financial Management reviewed the Revenues structure & included supervision aspects identified by the Barony Group , new DIPS System and Open System We will take account of CRM initiatives Audit Commission- Best quartile - improving	Recent reviews complete changes made to reflect imminent implementation of national concessionary travel scheme.	Yes		Revenues File	Dependant on combined report
2	To assist in the creation of a corporate Social Inclusion Strategy On going	Arrange working party of relevant external And internal bodies to work with Revs& Bens . Social Inclusion Officer appointed – to liaise	Discussions commenced with EDH on Corporate Debt policy	Ongoing	Corporate Strategy to be produced.	Benefits File Story Board Record of Events	Agree lead personnel A.Stevenson / P. Routh to work with Social Inclusion Officer
3	To pursue the principle of job shadowing/ training with the DWP.and Rent Officer services. KEY DATE : ANNUAL & REVIEW	Benefits Operations Manager has contacted local DWP Offices & Job Centre Plus Offices re job shadowing/ cross training.. Some training already completed with DWP staff. On going with new staff/job centre And possible pilot of new working methods	Closer working on-going. Job Shadowing with DWP re-instituted from Sep 01. Similar exercise re Job Centre Plus and Rent Officer Service to be discussed. Job shadowing with DWP staff – included as an induction process	Yes		Benefit File	Explore further opportunities for Job Shadowing and closer working with our Users Create new key actions Further days arranged with the Pensions Service And Job Centre Plus
4	To carry out a staff training & development review annually. KEY DATE: ANNUAL & REVIEW	Managers / Supervisors to carry out “ONE TO ONES” Managers to establish unit Training plan	New target established 31/08/04 I.I.P. – awarded to D.OE. for next 3 yrs Unit training plan established	Ongoing		Revenues & Benefits Training Record files	Development & Training needs identified. Unit training plans established. Monitor & Review Encourage principles of generic working
5	To continue dialogue with the Durham Districts and other authorities to generate ideas for partnership shared working and efficiency savings in light of Unitary Authority status for County Durham, March 2007. KEY DATE : ANNUAL & REVIEW	Revenues Manager & Benefits Manager to discuss and report back on partnership working with other Districts. Identify areas including E-Gov IT developments. CRM developed in partnership with other Councils in Durham County	DOE entered into joint Best Value Review. ICT Revenue Sub-Group - ongoing Unitary status for County Durham – bid accepted March 2007. Partnership work all areas.	Yes		Revenues File Benefits File I.E.G. Statement	Continue to work jointly County-wide CRM project Await instruction following unitary authority bid accepted by Central Gov by 2009
6	To roll out IT access and basic benefit training to Customer Services staff. KEY DATE : ANNUAL & REVIEW	Benefits Manager & Benefits Operations Manager to identify and deliver necessary training. Benefits calculator has been successful. On line claims are increasing. Fraud Awareness training tool now available	Training and access to Benefit system info, to coincide with CRM integration plan. Training complete access available	Yes		Benefits File	Monitor/Review/Measure Training needs Training for on-line calculator to advise public where necessary. Offered job shadowing to all EDH front line Fraud Awareness training offered to Customer Services staff.

7	<p>Rating and Income Section to carry out user satisfaction survey followed by a series of annual meetings with users to determine levels of services and identify efficiency opportunities. By the 31st December each year. KEY DATE : Annual & Review</p>	<p>Revenues Manager/Principal Rating Income Officer to prepare questionnaire, distribution and analyse results. Discussions on levels of service to link budget process. Development issues.</p>	<p>First year service review completed Meetings held re possibilities of reducing costs to Users. Results analysed and Action plan formulated SLA's to be introduced with Users Draft completed</p>	Yes		Revenues File	<p>Hold further meetings with Users to monitor improvements Benchmarking visit to arrange</p>
8	<p>To benchmark costs and processes each year in order to identify cost reduction opportunities and service improvements. KEY DATE : Annual & Review</p>	<p>Managers to use National PI's, Benchmarking Data, Process Maps and compare to best practice. Visit Best practice authorities. Revenues Manager to investigate Rating Data. Consider GERSHON implications for service Service Process Maps to be completed for all elements of service re CRM purposes</p>	<p>Processes redesigned as part of CRM rollout in each authority Unitary status to lead shared services agenda. Benchmarking visits carried out to Local Authorities in our area Benefit P.I.'s – benchmarked Nov 05 Cost of Collection to benchmark</p>	Ongoing	<p>Further training required. Limited to two Users/PCs - time consuming - Need Maps in conjunction with visits</p>	<p>Revenues File Benefits File System</p>	<p>More priority to the completion of maps Site visits to arrange Provide PC in separate location - re PROTOS work Encourage staff involvement in reviewing processes</p>

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9	To reduce sickness levels to 5.14 days (Lost days p.a. per F.T.E.) by 31 st March 2007. KEY DATE 31/03/2009	Head of Service to monitor sickness and take necessary action. Liase with Personnel Unit on policy/procedures.	Back to work interviews held. Corporate Stress Awareness training given to Managers. Welfare interviews to do. Trend is that levels are falling i.e. 14.69 in 2003/04, current 6.5 days for Revenues	YES		Revenues File Benefits File	Welfare interviews to do and Corporate initiatives to implement
10	To reduce in real terms the controllable net cost of administering housing benefits and the net cost of council tax collection by 2% per annum over the next 5 years. KEY DATES 31 st March each year	Revenues & Benefits Manager to:- Analyse and review budgets (subjective base). Automate manual processes. Look for efficiencies within processes. Examine central recharges Reduce error Gershon efficiencies required Shared services / Unitary authority	Bank Giro Payment method removed w/e/f 01.04.06 for NNDR. Developed use of Bar codes on bills to remove paper payment slips. Automated Bailiff payments Sep 05 Testing automating DSS payments 2006 Potential to link with Rent use of card.	PARTIAL 85%	Reductions identified but overall cost affected by declining Council Tax base, Benefit caseload, population.	Revenue File Benefits File	Continue to look for efficiency savings Explore Partnership arrangements
11	To monitor and review the provision of bailiff services and examine ways of improving other enforcement practices KEY DATE : ANNUAL & REVIEW	To monitor contract at quarterly Intervals. Critically examine effectiveness of current enforcement practices Introduced an internal bailiff/ visiting officer to supplement external service Jan 06	Contract with external bailiffs now expired continuing to work on a non-contract basis Benchmarked other L.A.'s - introduced Bankruptcy as enforcement option Electronic information since Sep 05	YES		Revenues File	Monitor performance Evaluate current practices Make recommendations for improvements
12	To formalise a method to identify and reduce benefit local authority error, by 5% on the 2003/04 baseline. Reduction targets to be included in future Best Value Performance Plans. KEY DATE: ANNUAL& REVIEW On Going	Benefit Manager, and Benefit Operations Manager & Benefits Control Officer to produce a procedure/system to monitor benefits processing and produce performance data. Monthly checks established on performance Accuracy has improved. New software been implemented to reduce the risk of error.	10% check process established Findings communicated to staff weekly meetings - training needs identified Payment checks (V.F.) pre-payment check /pre payment visits Implemented	YES		Benefits File	Introduce SMART targets and baseline to review/set e.g. 10% reduction from baseline.
13	In order to reduce the incidence of benefit fraud and error and maximise Benefit subsidy, KEY DATE : ANNUAL& REVIEW	Benefits Operations Manager, to produce regular reports	New funding arrangements	Ongoing		Benefits File	Action Plan to implement when relevant info received. Keep processing up to date
14	To increase the take up of direct debits to 19,300 by 31 st March 2008 NNDR - to	Revenues Manager and staff to look for ways to improve further e.g. Auddis -	CTax 18950-31/03/08 (57.4% penetration) NNDR 918 31/03/08	YES		Revenues File	Benchmark with Best Practice sites eg BACS Winners Re-Take up

	1000 by March 2009 KEY DATE 31/03/2009	paperless D/D To implement Auddis Oct 2008	(43% PENETRATION)				Average is 53 %
15	To increase the amount of recovered overpayments by 5% per annum from 2001/2. Baseline. (National Performance Indicator). KEY DATE : ANNUAL & REVIEW	Benefit Operations Manager and Benefits Enquiry Officer to investigate more effective ways of collecting. New IT or existing systems to be examined. New methods of recovery now examined. HB-O/Payments for Council tenancies on Ben Recovery rates improving.	Staff in place formalised arrangements with collection agency	YES		Benefits File	Review Target description eg not specific to Rent All Identify & Cost computer Resource Create new key actions
16	To increase the amount of council tax collected by the end of each year to 98% over the next 5 years. (National Performance Indicator) KEY DATES 31 st March each year	Revenues Manager and staff to examine ways of improving performance. Write Off Policy Incentives for clear accounts/ discounts Recovery procedures Reviewed policy of overall years debt management. Audit Commission adjusted 04/05 rate by deprivation factor and we are now in <u>BEST QUARTILE and Improving</u> 2005-06 improved by 0.9% 2006/07 improved by 0.3%	Write-Off Policy Drafted Bad Debt provision reduced by over £200 K (Gershon efficiency) written off for 1993,-to 2001 as irrecoverable (Council Tax) Draft enforcement strategy produced. Trend is that collection rates are improving	YES	Automate procedures IT behind schedule Resource problem	Revenues File	Need to implement incentives for clear A/c's. Review Target - Monitor & Review IT assistance

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17	To increase and maintain the level of Business Rate Collections to 99% over the next 5 years. (National Performance Indicator) KEY DATES 31 st March each year	Revenues Manager and staff to examine ways of improving .e.g. incentives re clear accounts Write Off Policy Recovery procedures-direct contact – telephone/person	Write-Off Policy Drafted.	NO		Revenues File	Maintain Procedures and implement write offs on regular basis . Prioritise work of revenues unit
18	Monitor performance against baseline figure for a sundry debtor collection rate for accounts raised within 2 weeks of the 31 st March each year. Target improvement set from 2001/2. KEY DATE: ANNUAL & REVIEW	Principal Rating & Income Officer and Revenues Manager to set baseline from end of year data and procedure targets from 2001/2 onwards. Review Sundry Debtor Enforcement Strategy by 30th Sep. 2007.	Baseline set 93.2% @ 14/3/01 Recovery Timetables - formalised Introduced bar codes on bills 2005/06	NO		Revenues File	Monitor and Review Look for ways of involving Users in preliminary set up work Issues to be resolved or debited to cost centres
19	To establish a fraud sanctions and prosecutions policy KEY DATES 31 st March each year LGR work stream group have agreed sanctions policy.	Sanctions policy to be agreed by Committee. To consult with legal and partners etc Updated policy /new code of conduct for investigators policy both awaiting committee approval.	Benefits Operations Manager has new arrangements in place. Ongoing joint working with DWP fraud Prosecution and sanction policy ready for member approval	YES		Benefits File	Set Baseline and future years targets Monitor & create new key actions Target set for prosecutions/cautions

			On target for Top Quartile performance New ways of measuring fraud have been introduced and staff trained Leading NE L.A.'s for fraud targets				
20	Review Concessionary travel scheme and implement new schemes when directed. KEY DATES: ANNUAL & REVIEW	Implement free scheme by 31 st May 2006. Implement national scheme in 2008 Introduce Carer pass by 01.01.07	New scheme implemented on target Carer scheme delayed due to criteria for eligibility to be agreed with Social Services	Ongoing		Revenues File	Constant review and monitoring of scheme to establish success
21	Monitor and review service standards for each aspect of the functions. Link with new CRM and agree S.L.A.'s KEY DATE : by 31 st March each year.	Managers and staff to document standards from consultation feedback Monitor set standards Review standards in terms of CRM involvement	Standards shown on Bills & Info point New standards re Contact Centre	YES		Revenues File	Benchmark, other LA's ie how to measure waiting times at reception Review comments, Publish Monitor
22	Review the operation of the Cash Office and the Cash receipting system in general by 31 st March 2007. To implement credit/debit card payments through the internet KEY DATE: 31/03/2009	Identify efficiency savings and improvements that can be achieved, within the Cash Office and in the current cash receipting system I.T. assistance required to review & improve cash posting programs i.e. to remove manual procedures and duplication. Analyse E-gov Adaptations required e.g. C.R. M. system	Determine scope of review and implement Review E-Gov requirements re cash receipting . DCC will do no further development work. Need to look at external bespoke providers	Ongoing		Revenues File	Benchmark other L.A.'s Examine, review and report
23	To review the internal customer complaints system to provide a more effective means of improving services by 31 st March each year. KEY DATE 31/03/2009	Managers to develop a register of complaints within the Unit. Tool to highlight areas for improvement Contact centre will deal with complaints	Corporate complaints procedure in review CRM to provide more citizen feedback and coordinate system	YES		Revenues File	Ongoing - Monitor Report & Review Examine Front/Back Office call system
24	Provide clearer communications /information by reviewing all forms/communications. Assess impact of CRM on service communications. KEY DATE 31/03/2009	Managers and staff to review all forms and present for Crystal Mark Recognition/Plain English New Benefit Application form crystal marked. CRM will radically change communication with public.	Application form given Crystal Mark recognition Web Site - Partnership other LA's System produced forms reviewed Ben instructions software implemented Letters achieved plain English standard	Ongoing	IBS-New system in place	Revenues File Benefit File	Examine ESD as per IEG form. joint web input produced Consult CAB etc Review standard letters re IBS
25	To review explanatory leaflets for accessing benefits and council tax service . LGR Work stream are reviewing all leaflets. KEY DATE :31/03/2009	Following consultation with forum. Identify areas where information is required and produce leaflets/guidance. Shared services should highlight best forms. On going review due to LGR.	Meetings held with " hard to reach groups" Guidance Produced. Links with disable bodies DWP-Joint working with pension service- Provide joint publicity/leaflets In public outlets	YES/on-going Web site developed & reviewed		Benefits File Revenues File	Key date on-going Need to consult CAB + Age Concern Benchmark other LA's
Target Ref	Description of Target	Brief Description of Action Plan	Progress @ 30/09/08	Achieved/ On Target	If NO or Partial Reasons	Evidence	Action
26	To increase benefit take up by 10% over the next 5 years.	Benefits Manager to consider ways of encouraging application - eg Roadshow/Advertising/ Marketing	Benefit surgeries held in Hsg area offices Held Roadshows - throughout area Recent joint working with the DWP has	Ongoing		Benefits File	Continue to target relevant groups eg elderly owner occupiers

	KEY DATE ONGOING TARGET	Benefit Operations Manager has agreed joint working with the DWP Pensions service and Job Centre Plus to improve take up. Also joint working with the Welfare rights service is on-going. Investigation into " blitz bus " for road shows Consider take up flier with annual bills. C/Tax Ben. Take-up district campaign On going work in progress.	been positive, £115 K additional Benefits claimed Meetings with Welfare Rights CDPAP – meetings ongoing Ongoing take up campaign, now operational New joint working procedures established				Create new key actions Yr3 On-going New take up arrangements in place for Pension Credits-Joint Working with DWP and Welfare Rights Anti-Poverty group established- With terms of reference
27	Review the procedures for dealing with telephone/counter enquiries to enhance customer care. KEY DATE : ANNUAL & REVIEW	Revenues & Benefits Managers to discuss and report back. Involve the IT Manager on the practicalities. Needs to be linked to CRM systems to be introduced as part of E-Gov strategy Established bank of telephones for Benefits – to introduce within CRM	Established E-Mail address or public to notify of changes. Part of Access Working Group and Established E.GOV Strategy Contact centre to absorb simple service enquiries pre Unitary authority introduction	YES	Awaiting corporate funding corporate problem IEG Statement identified potential solutions/ partnerships	Revenues File Benefits File	Explore issues identified with Asset Management Plan Costs for options to the Council Partnership opportunities explored Look for Funding (C.R.M.) initiatives
28	Taking into account the Government initiated national survey, carry out satisfaction surveys for revenues and benefits on an annual basis. KEY DATE - ANNUAL & REVIEW	Managers to review questionnaire and survey the public year on year. Introduce survey of Internet payment users re added value.	Surveys (Revenues) carried out and analysed over first three years Benefit PI return done locally NWA survey latest August 2006 Corporate Surveys carried out	YES		Revenues File Benefits File	Continue to Report to Forum on Action taken. Review survey form to include ESD issues Avoid Survey Overkill Dec 05- NWA survey conducted
29	Examine existing methods of consultation to widen to all groups. For example elderly, disabled and young people, i.e. ensure social Inclusion principals adhered to. KEY DATE : ANNUAL & REVIEW	Managers to investigate the process with other organisations to enable minority group to access the council. Establish link to Organisations for the Disabled	Member of CDPAP working group Consulted Forum group Advertised in local Carers newspaper. Recognised parallel work ongoing using Consultants to improve Wards	PARTIAL 80%	Raised issue no positive feedback No benchmarking done with other LA's	Revenues File Benefits File	Include member –Social Inclusion Consult with Welfare Rights - re campaign and Forum members Member CDPAP group Liase with Consultants re - cross cutting area improvements.
30	To hold twice yearly meetings with the focus group if agreed by the group. KEY DATE : ANNUAL & REVIEW	To contact key players/dates set up meeting Consider engaging taxpayers at more local venues i.e. in parish locations. We go to the people. Circulate Minutes/Reports in advance.	Meetings held ½ yearly - Forum members invited to Quality Circles Feedback requested on Involvement Plan and targets - Public participation established	YES		Revenues File	Improve User participation + feedback. Look at Best Value Review results + compare
31	To increase the % of claimants satisfied with the benefits service. The baseline will be set in 2004. (National Performance Indicator for Benefits Administration). KEY DATE: 31/03/2009	Managers/staff to examine feedback from the public. Identify areas of dissatisfaction. Investigate and rectify where possible.	Backlog eradicated. Baseline Set Average processing turnaround reducing DIPS rolled out to 2 area offices Analysing Norma Welburn survey to identify weaknesses. User Dissatisfaction - Reporting developed	YES		Benefits File	Implement ESD proposals Monitor and review Surveys Action on weaknesses Improve standards of performance
32	To reduce the average time to process new	Benefits Manager to continuously review	Baseline set at 25 days	YES	New systems led	Benefit File	Cost Resources issues

	claims for council tax benefit, rent allowances and housing benefit. . (Target & Performance Standard 2004) KEY DATE ONGOING	the procedures for benefit administration to identify bottlenecks and remove. Use feedback from internal and external users of the service	Average time taken to process new applications 23 days Introduced V.O. and Homeless Officer		to Backlogs following Initial implementation Backlog now reducing		Look for Funding Continue to check system for efficiencies CT to change target description Evaluate VF implications-Nov 05 New procedures introduced 0204
33	Create high level action plan for implementation of BVPI 157 i.e. E-government electronic service delivery requirements KEY DATE : ANNUAL & REVIEW	Revenues Manager & Benefits Manager to review electronic bens applications	Evaluate options for electronic provision of service . Gov Gateway – authentication requirements – Share point established Web site development complete for Benefits	Partial	Linked to CRM roll out	Revenues & Benefits file	Action plan to be implemented
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34	To carry out a staff satisfaction survey annually. KEY DATE : ANNUAL & REVIEW	Revenue & Benefit Service to be surveyed during the year. Questionnaires prepared. Revise questions , Obtain staff suggestions Benefits Operations Manager has issued the first survey for 2006	Survey completed in 2003. Current staff survey carried out by customer services	YES	Action Plan not developed yet Corporate Issues to resolve	Revenues File	Benefits to do own survey. Action Plan to be agreed with staff Monitor, Review with Surveys Review wording of Survey form
35	Assess current performance in accordance with North East Centre of Excellence (NECE) KEY DATE:: ANNUAL & REVIEW	Review performance against new ideas etc from the Centre to improve efficiency	Performance analysed	NO	Action plan to develop	Revenues File	Establish Plan Set targets for improvements Review in light of CPA changes
36	To assess the implications of sending out bills and benefit notifications together. KEY DATE: 31/03/2009	Manager and staff to discuss the implications of this and implement. Savings potential £2000 pa Review in light of Unitary status	Annual billing - only time this is feasible. Partial success in March 2001. Small saving realised Unable to match 2006/7 bills & notifications due to print problems	NO	New system Concentrated on Producing correct output	Revenues File Benefits File	Review previous year and plan accordingly. Timing for printing etc.
37	To assess the implications of including the rent liability on benefit forms or alternatively producing a rent liability letter following benefit assessment. Local Housing Allowance has been introduced. KEY DATE: On Going	Benefits Manager/staff to discuss IT implications of producing this information and come up with a solution - major source of conflict with customer.	Orchard Housing system introduced by EDH in April 2005	NO	Existing system not compatible Awaiting new open system	Benefits File	Examine existing system Cost new systems
38	Review the Plan on an annual basis. Unitary bid for County of Durham will require numerous new targets prior to	Plan, tasks, targets and performance measures to be updated.	Reviewed Improvement Plan at regular intervals through Quality Circles, Management meetings	YES		Revenues File	Review targets, target dates and monitor Ensure evidence and costing

	implementation. KEY DATES - ANNUAL REVIEW	Review to take account of views of users and employees.	Currently reviewing year two of new plan			Benefits File	info Add targets re IEG Statement on ESD
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PS-report/THB/CS