

Item no.

Report to: **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date: **28th October 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 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

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Period</u>	<u>BVPI</u>	<u>Sick days</u>	<u>Work Days</u>	<u>Num. Staff</u>	<u>Holidays</u>	<u>Weekdays</u>
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
REVS	01/04/08 - 30/03/09	14.87	198.5	3022	28	447.5	3470
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
BENS	01/04/08 - 30/09/08	11.45	235	4687	44	650	5337

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 2008/9 year is 21 days. This is a reduction on year 2007/8 of 5 days, with the most recent month (September 2008) figs showing 21 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 2008/9 is 7 days. The most recent month (September 2008) figures showing 7 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 Since April 2008 this indicator shows a figure of 10 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 in year efficiency savings by reducing our bad debt provision by more than £200 000
- 4.3.5 The Best Value inspector has stated our performance compared well to authorities with similar deprivation levels to ours.
- 4.3.6 Current Year Business Rate collected for 2008/9 are 99.01% i.e. 0.98% increase on 2007/8 figure.
- 4.3.7 At the end of September 2008, 54.8% of the total Council Tax charge has been collected. Although this is 0.2% down on this time last year, given the current economic climate, this is still compares well with similarly deprived authorities.

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4.3.8 The cost of collecting Council Tax per property (Local PI) FOR 2007/8 was £13.75. This represents a decrease of £1.97p per property per year on the previous year.

4.3.9 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 with external information. At present around 10,000 single person discount claimants have been reviewed (about 65% of the total number receiving this discount). As a result, 512 discounts have been withdrawn, resulting in an extra £146,000 in charges being raised. The remaining claimants will be reviewed by the end of financial year.

4.4 *Record of complaints*

4.4.1 Record of written complaints April 2008 - September 2008.

<u>Section</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Justified</u>	<u>Unjustified</u>	<u>Resolved</u>
Revenues	1	0	1	0
Benefits	3	2	1	1
Total	4	2	2	1

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 12,900 (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 Department of Works and Pensions, (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 are about to begin a County wide take-up campaign involving all the County LA's and DCC Welfare Rights where residents not in receipt of Council Tax will be contacted by phone to encourage them to claim benefit.

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.

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- 4.5.7 The Benefits Section have introduced a new procedure whereby if a customer attends the office with all relevant documentation, an officer will process the claim instantly.
- 4.5.8 A further measure introduced is the online claims/telephone claims procedure. If a customer requests an application form, an officer will contact the prospective claimant to conduct a telephone claim. If the claimant requests a home visit we would continue to offer this service.
- 4.5.9 The Benefits Section continue to be proactive in respect of fraud and during this financial year, 2008/9 we have issued 18 Fraud sanctions. This shows a DWP grading on performance as 'excellent'
- 4.5.10 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 2007/2008 year.
- 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 1/4/08 - 30/8/08 is 99.4%.
- 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 September 2008.
- 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

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- 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.

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- 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.

Background papers/documents referred to

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