

Revenues & Benefits Service Business Plan 2016-17

1. Service purpose and objectives

To support financial inclusion in the borough by ; ensuing access to council administered benefits , working closely with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Gloucestershire County Council to ensure effective implementation of welfare reform, actively promoting take-up of the different types of benefit available and collecting monies due to the council.

2. Progress against actions, projects, tasks or targets 2015-16

Non Council Plan actions only.

Action	Progress made	Date to be achieved	Complete ✓ or ✗
The transfer of the Benefits Anti-Fraud functions to the Single Fraud Investigation Service.	The new antifraud single fraud investigation service has been fully implemented. The borough council no longer investigates housing benefit fraud. All investigations passed over to DWP to continue with investigations. Action completed on time.	May 15	✓
The roll out of dual screens for revenues and benefits staff	Dual screens have been successfully rolled out to all revenues and benefits staff. This has had a very positive impact on performance with new claims being processed in 12 days and changes in circumstances in 6 days.	June 2015	✓
The role out of Universal Credit will commence in June 2015	The early stages of Universal Credit roll out have begun. Single clients are being taken on now. Arrangements are in place to help Universal Credit claimants with personal budgeting and support as well as help with accessing services via the web.	June 2015	✓
Financial Inclusion	This is very much a developing theme: 1) We have in place arrangements for personal budgeting and support. 2) We have developed a web page to enable those who need to access help quickly make contact with appropriate welfare organisations.	March 2016	✓
The implementation of the new Anite Server	The Anite Server (document imaging server) has been fully implemented. The old server had reached the end of its life and could not be upgraded or be repaired in the event of it breaking down. The new server has a longer shelf life and operates far more efficiently. The positive impact is that this will help our processing times in revenues and benefits.	August 2015	✓

Revenues & Benefits Service Business Plan 2016-17

Print Project	<p>Printing arrangements are in place and we are achieving positive results.</p> <p>1) All bulk produced mail is being issued by our printers.</p> <p>2) All appropriate documentation for the same recipient is being mail merged and sent in the same envelope.</p> <p>3) We are seeing cost savings and have already achieved a reduction in postage expenditure by £6k in the 2014/15 year.</p> <p>4) At the time of writing was £2k under budget for this financial year.</p>	December 2015	✓
FERIS	<p>The new government scheme to encourage the housing benefit recipient tell us about changes in circumstances is in place. So far the scheme has worked well in achieving reductions in benefit amounting to £87,900.</p>	March 2016	✓

3. Work programme 2016-17

Non Council Plan actions only.

Action	What difference will it make?	Date to be achieved
Council Tax Single Person Discount Review	<p>The revenues section will be working with the Gloucestershire Counter Fraud Hub to review council tax single person discounts. The review will look at over 9,000 accounts to establish whether the recipients are still eligible for the discount.</p>	October 2016
Welfare reform	<p>During 2016/17 the Government will be implementing significant changes to various welfare payments. Housing benefit will be at the forefront of welfare reform. During the year the council will have to implement some significant cuts in housing benefit. The timetable for implementing the changes has not yet been released by DWP. However, all arrangements must be in place by 31 March 2017 :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freeze on Local Housing Allowance rates. • The revised benefit cap anticipated to come in during the autumn of 2016. • Removal of the family premium in housing benefit. From the 1 May 2016 • Housing benefit backdating will be reduced so that new claims from working age claimants will be backdated for a maximum of four weeks. 	March 2017

Revenues & Benefits Service Business Plan 2016-17

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for the full roll out of Universal Credit when a date has been established. 	
Financial Inclusion	<p>An objective coming from the transformation project has been to create additional capacity within the service to carry out important work on financial inclusion such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a more joined up service to assist those who are in need. • Carry out a detailed analysis of our housing benefit data and council tax support to identify key areas of need within our borough. • The data will help identify the future impacts of welfare reform and enable us to better assist those households that are under financial pressure. • Create a framework for the delivery of a joined up range of services and this will build upon the work already achieved through the financial inclusion partnership. • Developing personal budgeting and support • Promoting digital inclusion, and the new web page created to help people get in touch with organisations that can help. 	March 2017
National Non Domestic Rates Revaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Valuation Office Agency is carrying out a national revaluation of all rateable values in the United Kingdom. The last revaluation was completed in 2010 and the next revaluation is due to be completed before the 31 March 2017 so that future years' rates bills will be assessed on the new values. The borough council will be engaged in the process and must have in place on its revenue's system all new rateable values ready for the 2017/2018 year. This will require testing of the systems and checking of data before going live. 	March 2017
The Council Tax Support Scheme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council Tax Support scheme is due to be reviewed. Currently, we operate using the default scheme or the old council tax benefit scheme. We need to ensure that the current scheme is still relevant and affordable. 	March 2017
Unoccupied domestic property reliefs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unoccupied domestic property reliefs are due to be reviewed to ensure that current arrangements are still relevant and appropriate. 	March 2017

Revenues & Benefits Service Business Plan 2016-17

4. Factors that may affect future service delivery

Factor
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Resources are at a premium and the impact of the financial constraint may have an impact on service delivery.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The significant growth in new domestic properties.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The impact of the Welfare Reform changes upon those claiming benefits including the implementation of Universal Credit.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The impact of successful rating valuation appeals on the Council's finances.