

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	12 April 2016
Subject:	Revenues And Benefits Improvement Project
Report of:	Richard Horton, Revenues and Benefits Group Manager
Chief Officer:	Rachel North, Deputy Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Councillor D J Waters, Lead Member for Finance and Asset Management
Number of Appendices:	1

Executive Summary:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee to receive a 12 month update on improvements made as a result of the systems thinking review in Revenues and Benefits.

Recommendation:

To CONSIDER the 12 month update on improvements made as a result of the systems thinking review in Revenues and Benefits.

Reasons for Recommendation:

No recommendations are included in the report.

Resource Implications:

To ensure that the section is working efficiently and that resource in the section is freed up to carry out work on financial inclusion.

Legal Implications:

None

Risk Management Implications:

No major risks identified.

Performance Management Follow-up:

The performance of the Revenues and Benefits section is being monitored constantly. Reported to Chief Officers, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and at Portfolio meetings.

Implications for Biodiversity:

None directly affecting the policy

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The transformation project had commenced in the summer of 2014 when ‘Ice Creates’ consultants had been appointed to facilitate a review of the Revenues and Benefits service. The main aim was to increase efficiency and cost savings within service in order to free up time to focus on outcomes by promoting financial inclusion and poverty reduction.
- 1.2** At its meeting on 7 April 2015, The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had received a presentation on the transformation project and had resolved that a further update be provided to the Committee in 12 months’ time.

2.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 2.1** The project is successfully sustaining our performance and in most cases outperforming last year.

2.2 Benefits

- Processing new claims in 12.73 days (February 2016) - previously 19.39 days (February 2015).
- Processing changes in circumstances in 6.4 days (February 2016) - previously 13.42 days (February 2015)
- Appendix 1 compares our performance with other District Councils in Gloucestershire.
- The improved accuracy and timeous processing in benefits has meant an improved return within our subsidy claim. Currently we are eligible for £58k in additional subsidy; we have never achieved this level of performance before within our subsidy claim.
- The additional capacity and the improvement in data matching arrangements have meant that we have identified a high number of unreported changes in circumstances and claimant error overpayments. We receive 40% subsidy for finding the overpayments. However; we can recover and keep 100% of the overpayment on top of the 40% subsidy received.
- Whilst our claims caseload is falling the numbers are not significant:

Claims	December 2015	December 2014
Housing Benefit Claims	4,085	4,089
Council Tax Support	4,650	4,749

- We are still receiving the same numbers of claims in on a weekly basis - between 20 to 25 claims.
- Failure phone calls have dramatically fallen from customers enabling staff to concentrate fully on processing.
- Having two members of the Benefit team permanently in the booth ensures expert information is being given to our customers from first contact.

2.3 Revenues

In Revenues, our collection rate is as follows:

- Council Tax 96.83% (February 2016) previously 96.11% (February 2015). We should take into account that we have collected £1M more than we did this time last year.
- Over the last 12 months we have seen a growth in new properties. The Borough has 38,955 domestic properties as at December 2015; an increase of 634 on last year's figure of 38,321. The Revenues team has been able to absorb the increase and shed half a post.
- Business Rates 96.21% (February 2016) previously 95.05% (February 2015). We are gradually recovering from the major impact of the large reduction in rateable value and refund made to a major account business rates account. We are starting to see an improved collection rate.

2.4 An objective was to create additional capacity within the service to carry out important work on financial inclusion:

- Our objective is to provide a more joined-up service to assist those who are in need.
- To achieve the objective we are carrying 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 us identify the future impacts of welfare reform and will enable us to better assist those households that are under financial pressure.
- We will be creating 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.

3.0 MONITORING OF WORKLOAD

3.1 All workload is monitored monthly and reported internally. Quarterly performance data is reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 None

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 None

6.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

6.1 The work being carried in the improvement project has been part of the Council's transformation strategy.

7.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

7.1 None

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 To ensure that the section is working efficiently and that resource in the section is freed up to carry out work on financial inclusion.

9.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

9.1 None

10.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

10.1 The section has an obligation to work efficiently and to work on its own transformation arrangements within the Council's transformation strategy.

11.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

11.1 None

Background Papers: None

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Appendices: Appendix 1 – County Benefits Performance