

Revenues & Benefits Service Business Plan 2015-16

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 and 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 2014-15

Non Council Plan actions only.

| Action | Progress made | Date to be achieved | Complete ✓ or ✗ |
|---|---|---------------------|--------------------|
| Deliver Improvement Project in the Revenue and Benefits Service | <p>Throughout the summer of 2014 Revenues carried out a full review of its service. The purpose was:</p> <p>To increase efficiency and save costs: Whilst the outcomes have yet to be fully realised there has been a significant improvement in efficiency. Average days to process a new claim has reduced from 27.17 days in 13/14 to 18.75 days in 14/15. The outturn is the service's best ever performance. In the last quarter of 14/15, processing time was 13.02 days.</p> <p>Average days to process change of circumstances has reduced from 13.41 days in 13/14 to 10.51 days in 14/15. In the last quarter of 14/15 the outturn was 4.36 days.</p> <p>The total, estimated, cost savings identified by the project over two financial years 2014/15 and 2015/16 could amount to over £227k. The daily meeting of the teams to discuss issues has caused a significant change in culture and brought about a positive approach to our work. Considering that</p> | March 15 | ✓ |

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| | <p>the project only started in the summer of 2014 it has produced some very significant results.</p> <p>The project has also created resource to re-orientate the service to focus on outcomes by promoting financial inclusion and poverty reduction. .</p> | | |
| The implementation of the new Revenues and Benefits Server | The project has been successfully delivered on time and in budget. A more modern and efficient system has been implemented. | July 14 | ✓ |
| Review of the council tax support scheme | The new council tax support scheme has been successfully implemented. The Council Tax Support Scheme has been reviewed and the existing scheme will remain in place for 2015/16 year. | January 15 | ✓ |
| The transfer of the Benefits Anti-Fraud functions to the Single Fraud Investigation Service. | The Government will be setting up a Single Fraud Investigation Service to investigate all Benefit fraud. The transfer of the Benefit Fraud function from Local Authorities will commence nationally from October 2014. From the 1 st May 2015 the Housing Benefit fraud element has been passed to the Single Fraud Investigation Service investigate. The investigation of Council Tax Support fraud will remain with the Borough Council. | March 15 | ✓ |
| Implementation of the Retail Rate Relief software | Software needed to calculate the new retail rate relief for business rates has recently been received. It must be tested and fully implemented by April 2014. This has been successfully achieved and now being administered. The retail rate relief is being claimed by 272 retailers. | April 14 | ✓ |
| Annual Billing for Council Tax and Business Rates | This has a major financial impact for the Council and must be done annually. Once again this has been successfully carried out and: 38,000 council tax bills, 2,500 business rates bills, plus benefit notifications to 5,400 recipients issued. | Mar 15 | ✓ |

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| <p>Print Project (b/fwd 2013-14)</p> | <p>Project has been implemented and a range of benefits realised;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • software and packing machine have been de-commissioned • staff time significantly reduced <p>The first Council Tax annual billing process was handled by the new contract and resulted in a vastly more efficient and accurate service.</p> <p>Next stage is to consider corporately the benefits for other services</p> | <p>Feb 2015</p> | <p>✓</p> |
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3. Work programme 2015-16

Non Council Plan actions only.

| Action | What difference will it make? | Date to be achieved |
|---|--|---------------------|
| <p>The transfer of the Benefits Anti-Fraud functions to the Single Fraud Investigation Service.</p> | <p>The Government will be setting up a Single Fraud Investigation Service to investigate all Benefit fraud. The Borough Council will be transferring across housing benefit and council tax benefit investigations to the new service in May 2015. This has been successfully carried out.</p> | <p>May 15</p> |
| <p>The role out of dual screens for revenues and benefits staff</p> | <p>New dual screens will be implemented for Revenues and Benefits staff by June 2015. The screens will allow staff processing revenues and benefits work the ability to access both the Northgate System processing system and the Anite document management system simultaneously. This will help to increase productivity and improve on the good performance achieved by staff under the transformation project.</p> | <p>June 2015</p> |
| <p>The role out of Universal Credit will commence in June 2015</p> | <p>The government's Universal Credit system begins its role out in Tewkesbury from June 2015. The new streamlined benefit system will merge a total of six benefits under Universal Credit and will include housing benefit. It impacts upon working age claims only. To begin with our Job Centre will start to receive Universal Credit from sole claimants, followed by couples and then all households. No definite timetable has been fixed for the full implementation of Universal Credit. The Borough Council is involved in a multi-agency approach to the role out of Universal Credit. It will be working closely with DWP, Citizens Advice Bureau, Job Centre Plus, and Severn Vale Housing among some of the partners. One of the key aims of the implementation of Universal Credit is to provide clients with help with their budgeting and getting back into work.</p> | <p>June 2015</p> |

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| Financial Inclusion | <p>Revenues and Benefits are contributing to a partnership whose objectives are to work with other organisations and agencies to effectively tackle financial exclusion. The Borough Council is facilitating and co-ordinating the partnership to share ideas and capacity to work differently. The work is focussing on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Increasing awareness of financial and advice services available to residents. 2) Action planning on the implementation of Universal Credit. 3) People being able to access services via a hub and ultimately, through the service, being able to support themselves. 4) To develop a single referral system which can link in and sign post people to various services. | March 2016 |
| The implementation of the new Anite Server | <p>The computer system on which our correspondence is stored electronically and must be replaced as it has reached the end of its life. This will not only involve the implementation of the new server but also new software. This will mean a whole new look for the system with new functionality. Training will be undertaken for all staff engaged with the system.</p> | August 2015 |
| Print Project | <p>The print project has been fully implemented in revenues and benefits. It will need to go out for procurement by December 2015.</p> | December 2015 |
| FERIS | <p>The Fraud and Error Incentive Scheme was launched by the DPW back in November 2014 to get local authorities to tackle fraud and error in the housing benefit system. Targets have been set and funding provided for the implementation of the scheme. The full outcomes of the work will not be known until March 2016</p> | March 2016 |

4. Factors that may affect future service delivery

Factor

- Resources are at a premium and the impact of the financial constraint may have an impact on service delivery.
- The significant growth in new domestic properties
- The impact of the Welfare Reform changes upon those claiming benefits including the implementation of Universal Credit