

Revenues & Benefits Service Business Plan 2017-18

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 2016-17

Non Council Plan actions only.

Action	Progress made	Date to be achieved	Complete ✓ or ✗
Council Tax Single Person Discount Review	Has been completed with the involvement of the Gloucestershire Counter Fraud Group. Over £22,000 of over claimed discounts has been found as a result of the exercise. The outcome has proved to be beneficial and revenues will be looking to run this exercise at some point in the future.	October 2016	✓
Welfare reform	<p>From April 2016 the Government introduced a 4 year freeze to working age benefits including housing benefit and council tax support. Pensioners and disabled people have been protected and continue to receive increases. Our software systems have been updated to reflect the Government's requirements.</p> <p>The Government has introduced the national living wage and this has impacted on housing benefit and council tax support, all relevant claims have been reviewed to ensure that the correct incomes have been declared.</p>	March 2017	✓
Financial Inclusion	<p>The main focus around financial inclusion has been the impact of welfare reform and the consequences of dealing with it.</p> <p>At the beginning of the year Policy in Practice produced a very informative report on the impacts of dealing with welfare reform. The report was shared with our partners and resulted in working more closely with partners.</p> <p>The report gave us a good head start on dealing with the impact of the benefit cap and getting all affected to deal with implementing the changes. Initially, 93 people were affected and by the end of the exercise a little over 70 cases remained affected. The positive news is that a number of claims have ended due to the</p>	March 2017	✓

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	<p>recipients finding work or becoming eligible for working tax credits due finding work which is not affected by the cap.</p> <p>The revenues and benefits section has organised a job fair in conjunction with Job Centre Plus. The event targeted those people looking for work, plus some of those heavily impacted by the benefit cap. The event was well attended with over 23 employers and over 100 potential job applicants. Everyone who attended considered the event to be a success.</p>		
National Non Domestic Rates Revaluation.	The Valuation Office Agency has carried out the first revaluation of business rates in 7 years and the new values have to be in place for the 1 st April 2017 ready for the new financial year. The Revenues section has worked closely with the Valuation Office Agency in bringing in the new values ready for business rates annual billing. This has been successfully achieved and all ratepayers have been notified of the new charges. Since the rates bills have been despatched, the Government has announced measures to help those ratepayers adversely affected by changes The Revenues Section is working on the details and will be contacting hard pressed businesses to offer financial assistance.	March 2017	✓
The Council Tax Support Scheme.	Has been reviewed and it has been agreed that the scheme should not change for 2017/2018.	March 2017	✓
Unoccupied domestic property reliefs.	Carried out by the Gloucestershire Counter Fraud Partnership. This was a highly successful review identifying an additional £50,000 in rates due to the Borough Council. In addition identified a number of properties which have been altered and needed revaluing. More checks are being made on unoccupied properties.	March 2017	✓

3. Work programme 2017-18

Non Council Plan actions only.

Action	What difference will it make?	Date to be achieved
Welfare Reform	Full service Universal Credit will be rolled out in the Borough from December 2017 onwards. Up until now the Borough has been engaged in a small pilot to deliver Universal Credit. This change will impact upon the benefits section as they will see new claims to housing benefit effectively being administered by the DWP. They	March 2018

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	<p>will be paid universal credit instead of housing benefit. For the moment benefits will keep existing claims to housing benefit. When working age claims move off housing benefit if they ever need to claim again will join the Universal Credit scheme and not go back on to housing benefit. For the moment pensioner claims will continue to be administered housing benefit and will stay with the benefits team.</p> <p>The Government will be introducing further welfare reforms to households. From April 2017 where a new claim to Housing Benefit is received and a child is born after the 6th April 2017. Those households that have 3 or more children will have their housing benefits restricted to no more than the 2 children rate.</p>	
The Revenues and Benefits restructure.	<p>Because of the implementation of Universal Credit and the impact of outsourcing revenues and benefits printing the Borough Council has carried out a review of the service and will see the Head of Revenues and Benefits post deleted from the structure from July 2017. There will be a new Revenues and Benefits Manager post created and it is anticipated that the new manager will be in post by July 2017. There will be other posts due to be deleted by January 2018.</p>	January 2018
Consider implementing electronic arrangements for sending out business rate and council tax bills.	<p>Consider the feasibility of sending bills electronically to tax payers. Potential cost saving in postages and efficient delivery of documentation.</p>	March 2018

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"> Head of Revenues will be leaving the council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The significant growth in new domestic properties and 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.