

Service Plan: REVENUES COLLECTION & BENEFITS – 2007/08

Part 1. Purpose of the Service

The Council's Revenue service collects council tax, non-domestic rates, housing rents, sundry debts and overpayments of housing benefit; administers housing and council tax benefit and investigates fraudulent claims for benefit.

Our aims are;

- To ensure residents get the correct bill and all benefits and discounts that they are entitled to.
- To work in partnership with stakeholders to provide an efficient, modern and accessible Revenues Service.
- To discourage fraud and to identify and punish those who commit fraud.
- To take prompt and effective action against those who do not pay, whilst recognizing and assisting those customers with genuine financial difficulties.

Part 2. Plans to Improve Your Service in 2007/08

#	Action	Supporting Information (eg resources, outputs, outcomes and risks)	Complete by Month	Responsible Officer
Actions to Improve Customer Service (Council priority):				
1	Improve the customer focus of the benefit service by improving the service performance as measured by the Department for Works and Pensions' user focus performance standard	Resources: To be met from existing team resources Outputs: Score improved from 5/12 to 10/12 Outcomes: Improved customer focus Risks: There is a small risk that resources may be inadequate to meet target	Mar 08	Dawn Graham
2	Active participation in corporate initiatives to improve customer focus e.g. achieving Chartermark accreditation	Resources: To be quantified Outputs: To be quantified Outcomes: Improved customer focus Risks: There is a risk that resources may be inadequate to meet corporate requirements	Mar 08	Lee Phanco Dawn Graham Phil Bird
3	Rents Team to implement the findings from the survey of Council tenants conducted in March 2007 (additional direct debit date, revised rent card, rent free weeks etc)	Resources: To be met from existing team resources Outputs: Additional direct debit payment date Improved documentation for customers Outcomes: Improved customer satisfaction Risks: None identified	Sep 07	Phil Bird

4	Complete a peer review of the Rent service, evaluate the findings and where feasible implement the recommendations	Resources: To be quantified Outputs: Improved collection of rents Outcomes: Improved customer focus Risks: There is a risk that resources may be inadequate to meet the recommendations in full	Sep 07	Phil Bird
5	Develop links with local advice agencies to facilitate partnership approach to debt management and benefit advice services	Resources: To be met from existing resources Outputs: Quarterly meeting with representatives of local advice agencies Outcomes: Improved working relationship with advice agencies Signposting of customer to support agencies Risks: None identified	Sep 07	Lee Phanco Dawn Graham Phil Bird
6	Introduce on-line access for customers to view Council Tax and Business Rate account information	Resources: Project Manager required. Outputs: Customers have on-line access to a range of Revenues and Benefit service Outcomes: Greater accessibility, improved customer satisfaction. Risks: Considerable risk of failure. This enhanced service has been planned for over two years but insufficient staff resources (Revenues and ICT) have delayed implementation. Reputation risk if product not functioning correctly. Low take-up and therefore extremely high unit costs.	Mar 08	Lee Phanco
Affordable Housing and Growth Area milestones (Council priorities):				
7	Recruit and train three additional part time officers (Council Tax and Housing Benefits) to meet the demands of the growth in properties and population.	Resources: To be met from existing resources Outputs: Current performance levels maintained or improved Outcomes: Customer and stakeholder satisfaction Risks: None identified	Dec 07	Lee Phanco Phil Bird Dawn Graham
Actions to mainstream Council policies (Community Safety, Climate Change and Equalities):				

8	Raise awareness of equality and diversity issues through staff training.	Resources: To be met from existing training budget Outputs: All Revenues staff attend at least one training session Outcomes: Greater staff awareness of equality and diversity issues leading to improved accessibility of services Risks: None identified	Ongoing to be completed by Mar 08	Lee Phanco Phil Bird Dawn Graham
9	Develop and improve relationships with hard to reach groups to encourage take-up of benefits and discounts and to ensure Council Tax and other bills are paid promptly.	Resources: To be met from existing resources Outputs: Improved liaison with representatives of minority groups Outcomes: Greater awareness the needs of minority groups in accessing Revenues Services Improved access Risks: Staff resources are very limited and consequently work conducted will also be limited	Mar 08	Lee Phanco Phil Bird Dawn Graham
Actions to deliver LAA targets:				
		Resources: Outputs: Outcomes: Risks:		
Actions to improve the service provided by your team:				
10	Ensure a minimum of 50% of Revenues Service's Best Value Performance Indicators in the first or second national quartile.	Resources: To be met from existing resources Outputs: Outcomes: Improved performance and service delivery Risks:	Mar 08	Lee Phanco

11	Introduce the facility for residents in receipt of Housing or Council Tax benefits to report changes of circumstances via the telephone without the need to follow up in writing.	Resources: To be met from existing resources Outputs: Formal agreement with DWP signed by Chief Executive Outcomes: Customers can more easily report changes in circumstances Improved accessibility of the service Risks: Small risk of increased local authority errors or fraud	Jun 07	Dawn Graham
12	Introduce targeted review of Housing and Council Tax Benefit claims to meet new Government targets for the number of benefit awards reduced each month, through visits, mailshots and telephone calls (DWP Performance Measure 10).	Resources: To be met from existing resources Outputs: Number of benefit awards reduced due to changes in circumstances increased Outcomes: Customers receive the correct amount of benefit Risks: This is a significant change to current performance standards and requires considerable changes to working practices. There is a risk that staffing resources may not be adequate to meet the new target.	Apr 07	Dawn Graham
12	Consult with advice agencies and landlords on future policy for the award of discretionary housing payments.	Resources: To be met from existing resources Outputs: Revised policy submitted to Cabinet 95% of budget utilised Outcomes: Awards focussed on residents most in need of assistance Risks: None identified	Dec 07	Lee Phanco
14	Introduce the facility for residents to pay bills (other than local taxation) by credit card. Evaluate the legality of accepting local taxation payments by credit card.	Resources: To be met from existing resources Outputs: Credit card payment facility Outcomes: Customers able to use credit cards to pay bills Risks: None identified in respect of non-local taxation bills. Further report to be submitted on potential financial risks associated with local taxation bills.	Sep 07	Lee Phanco

Actions to improve the efficiency or Value for Money of your service:

15	Restructure of non-domestic rating team to achieve budget savings	<p>Resources: To be met from existing resources</p> <p>Outputs: Restructure completed</p> <p>Outcomes: Team reduced by one FTE post resulting in budget savings. Current performance level maintained.</p> <p>Risks: There is a risk that current levels of service will not be maintained with the reduced resources, however the risk is considered low</p>	Oct 07	Lee Phanco
16	Increase income from summons and liability order costs	<p>Resources: None</p> <p>Outputs: New charges of £65 CT and £80 NNDR</p> <p>Outcomes: Additional £24K income received</p> <p>Risks: Demand led – number of summons issued may reduce due to more customers paying on time. Increased complaints.</p>	Mar 08	Phil Bird
17	Reduce the number of payments received by cheque by 35%	<p>Resources: Staff and stationery to complete mailshots</p> <p>Outputs: Fewer cheques received</p> <p>Outcomes: Less resources needed to process cheques Increased take up of electronic transactions</p> <p>Risks: Adverse publicity – reduced collection rates</p>	Mar 08	Phil Bird
18	Reduce the number of benefit payments made by cheque by 65%	<p>Resources: To be met from existing resources</p> <p>Outputs: 65% of payments made direct to customers' bank through BACS</p> <p>Outcomes: Reduced cost Improved security Improved customer satisfaction</p> <p>Risks: None identified</p>	Mar 08	Dawn Graham

19	Review prosecution and sanctions policy for benefit fraud to ensure that outcomes remain a cost effective deterrent following changes to the Department for Works and Pensions' funding mechanism.	Resources: To be met from existing resources Outputs: Revised policy submitted to Cabinet Reduced prosecution costs Increase income from administrative penalties Outcomes: Reduced demand on legal services and external solicitors Risks: A weakened policy may reduce the deterrent effect of prosecutions	Sep 07	Lee Phanco
20	Impose civil penalties against residents fraudulently claiming Council Tax discounts or attempting to evade liability for Council Tax of £50 for the first offence and £200 for subsequent offences.	Resources: To be met from existing resources Outputs: Penalties imposed resulting in small amount of income to the Council Outcomes: Residents encourage to notify the Council of changes to discount entitlement. Deterrent factor against false discount claims Risks: Small risk of increased complaints	Apr 07	Phil Bird
21	Ensure benefit overpayments due to local authority error are below the threshold required to attract 100% Government subsidy.	Resources: To be met from existing resources Outputs: Income of approximately £80K to the Council through subsidy grant Outcomes: Accurate payments made to customers – faster service delivery Risks: If overpayments exceed the threshold the income will be lost	Mar 08	Dawn Graham
22	Implement LoCTA web based IT system to allow on-line interrogation of other Councils' Benefits and Council Tax data bases	Resources: To be met from existing resources. Ongoing financial cost from 2008/09 if retained. Outputs: On-line access to other Authorities data Outcomes: Reduced costs for tracing absconders Improved collection of Council Tax Reduced levels of benefit fraud Risks: None identified	Mar 08	Lee Phanco

23	Implement Aspiren National Performance Management Framework web base system for Housing and Council Tax Benefits	Resources: To be met from existing resources Ongoing financial cost from 2008/09 if retained. Outputs: Access to purpose designed H&CTB performance management software. Simplified benchmarking with other Councils. Outcomes: More efficient service Risks: None identified	Mar 08	Dawn Graham
24	Complete the review of transactional business processes as part of the transformation project and implement improvements identified by the review	Resources: To be identified Outputs: More efficient service. Reduction in costs. Outcomes: Improved customer satisfaction. Risks: There may be inadequate resources to implement the recommendations.	Mar 08	Lee Phanco Dawn Graham Phil Bird
25	Implement the security module for the e-payments ICT system to meet the new security standards required by Mastercard and VISA	Resources: £7,000 capital expenditure required for software £700 per annum maintenance charge Outputs: Software module installed and functioning. Outcomes: E-payments facility available to customers Reduction in transaction fee costs by £0.01 per transaction Risks: The facility to accept some debit card transaction will be unavailable after July without the new security module	Jun 07	Lee Phanco
26	Procure new contract for the provision of payments at post offices and other high street outlets	Resources: To be met from existing resources with assistance from the Procurement Officer Outputs: New contract agreed Outcomes: Customer able to pay at post offices and other high street outlets Potential for cost savings Risks: None identified	Oct 07	Lee Phanco

Actions to develop and support your workforce and learning:

27	Complete training needs analysis for Revenues Service staff and develop focussed training programme based on the results of the TNA	Resources: To be met from existing resources. Outputs: Training needs identified and met Outcomes: Employees more confident. Greater service resilience Improved customer service Risks: None identified	Oct 07	Dawn Graham Phil Bird
28	Develop a training needs analysis and training programme for Contact Centre staff	Resources: TNA to be met from existing resources. Resource requirements for training programme to be evaluated Outputs: Contact Centre staff fully trained to provide Revenues contact service Outcomes: More customer queries resolved at first point of contact Risks: None identified	Sep 08	Dawn Graham Phil Bird
29	Minimum of 2 employees undertaking professional training	Resources: To be met from existing training budget Outputs: Two staff attaining professional qualification Outcomes: Improved level of technical knowledge for the Service Risks: None	Sep 08	Lee Phanco
30	Introduce home-working where feasible and appropriate	Resources: To be identified Outputs: Staff able to work from home Outcomes: Improved staff morale Improve staff performance Reduced road journeys and demand for parking spaces Improved staff retention Risks: Health and safety, and data security risks The required ICT resources may not be available	Mar 08	Lee Phanco Dawn Graham Phil Bird

31	Develop staff training programme for introduction of Local Housing Allowances in April 2009	<p>Resources: To be identified</p> <p>Outputs: Staff confident and competent in dealing with the new LHA claims</p> <p>Outcomes: LHAs paid promptly and correctly to customers</p> <p>Risks: Considerable reputation risk in introducing a new type of benefit</p>	Nov 07	Dawn Graham
Actions to address risks to your service:				
32	Produce comprehensive report to Portfolio Holder highlighting the costs associated with procuring ICT products to enable Revenues Service to maintain up to date ICT systems to facilitate the delivery of the service.	<p>Resources: To be identified through the report</p> <p>Outputs: Staff confident and competent in dealing with the new LHA claims</p> <p>Outcomes: LHAs paid promptly and correctly to customers</p> <p>Risks: There is a high risk that the current financial and staff resources dedicated to maintain currency of ICT systems is inadequate to cope with this rapidly changing environment.</p> <p>There is a consequent risk that Revenues Services will fall behind other Council with consequent deterioration of service in comparison to others.</p>	May 07	Lee Phanco
33	Complete written procedures of all key tasks	<p>Resources: To be met from existing resources</p> <p>Outputs: Comprehensive written procedures in place</p> <p>Outcomes: Improved service resilience, greater diversification of skills</p> <p>Risks: This is a staff resource intensive process, there is a risk that resources will be unavailable, or that allocation of resources to this action will be detrimental to performance in other areas.</p>	Mar 08	Dawn Graham Phil Bird

34	<p>Recruit to the new posts agreed by Council to meet the growth demands. Minimise effect of vacancies by prompt recruitment, effective use of agency staff and effective budget management</p>	<p>Resources: Financial resources in place Outputs: New employees recruited and trained Outcomes: Service standards maintained and improve despite increased demands Risks: Risk of overspend on salary budget if there is reliance on agency staff to provide cover for vacancies, maternity leave and sickness. High risk of service deterioration if agency staff are not used to maintain full staffing levels.</p>	Mar 08	<p>Lee Phanco Dawn Graham Phil Bird</p>
Actions Required by Changes in Legislation:				
35	<p>Project to implement the new Local Housing Allowances from April 2008. Including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluation of impact on residents – lobbying Government agencies to minimise adverse impact on residents 2. Staff training 3. Software implementation 4. Stakeholder and customer communication 	<p>Resources: LHA Project Officer required on fixed term contract (12-18 months) from September 2007 – estimated cost of £17K in 2007/08 Software enhancements required – cost unknown but likely to exceed £10K Specific implementation grant to be paid by DWP amount due to be confirmed in May 07 Outputs: LHAs paid promptly and correctly to customers Risks: DWP grant may not fully meet the cost of implementation.; Considerable reputation risk in introducing a new type of benefit</p>	Mar 08	<p>Dawn Graham</p>

Part 3. Performance Indicators

Key to Colour Code in 05/06 "Top Quartile" column:

Top quartile		Middle to top quartile		Bottom to middle quartile		Bottom quartile	
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PI Code	PI Description	Past Performance					Future Targets		
		05/06			06/07		07/08	08/09	09/10
		Target	Actual	Top Quartile	Target	Estimate	Target	Target	Target
Customer Service									
BV78a	Average days to process new claims	27	25.4	25.5	30	30.0	26.0	25.5	25.0
BV78b	Average days to process notifications of changes in circumstance	7	8.5	8.5	8.9	8.9	8.0	7.5	7.0
BV80a	% satisfied with ability to contact benefits office	85 %	80 %	84 %	84 %	?			?
BV80b	% satisfied with the office benefit service	88 %	79 %	86 %	86 %	?			?
BV80c	% satisfied with benefits telephone service	80 %	83 %	80 %	80 %	?			?
BV80d	% satisfied with staff in benefits office	87 %	83 %	86 %	86 %	?			?
BV80e	% satisfied with clarity of benefit forms etc	70 %	63 %	67.5 %	67.5 %	?			?
BV80f	% satisfied with time to advise of benefit claim success	85 %	79 %	77 %	77 %	?			?
BV80g	% satisfied with benefits service overall	80 %	84 %	84 %	84 %	?			?
Affordable Housing and Growth Areas									
Community Safety, Climate Change, Equalities									
Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets									
Service Quality/Provision									
BV76a	No: benefit claimants visited per 1,000 caseload	415	421	N/A	400	400	N/a	N/a	N/a
BV76b	No: fraud investigators employed per 1,000 caseload	0.19	0.18	N/A	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17
BV76c	No: fraud investigations per 1,000 caseload	45	43.91	N/A	44				?
BV76d	No: prosecutions/sanctions per 1,000 caseload	7.5	10.09	N/A	10	?	10	10	?
Finance, Efficiency and Value for Money									
BV9	% Council Tax collected	98.6 %	98.2 %	98.5 %	98.8 %	98.6%	98.8%	99.0 %	99.2 %
BV10	% non-domestic rates received	98.8 %	98.6 %	99.3 %	99.0 %	99.4%	99.5%	99.6 %	99.7 %

PI Code	PI Description	Past Performance					Future Targets		
		05/06			06/07		07/08	08/09	09/10
		Target	Actual	Top Quartile	Target	Estimate	Target	Target	Target
BV66a	% rent collected	98 %	97.29 %	98.84 %	98 %	97.6%	98.3 %	98.5 %	?
BV66b	% tenants with more than 7 weeks arrears	Not set	6.03 %	3.39 %	5.5 %	?	5 %	4.5 %	?
BV66c	% tenants in arrears with Notices Seeking Possession (NPS) served	Not set	20.18 %	13.55 %	30 %	?	25 %	20 %	?
BV66d	% tenants evicted due to arrears	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	?	0 %	0 %	?
BV79a	% cases where benefit calculation was correct	99.1 %	98 %	99 %	99 %	?	99 %	99 %	?
BV79bi	% recoverable overpayments (excl: Council Tax benefit) recovered (was BV79b)	Not set	51 %	79.46 %	52.5 %	?	53 %	53.5 %	?
BV79bii	% HB overpayments recovered	Not set	28.04 %	41.22 %	29 %	?	29.5 %	30 %	?
BV79biii	% HB overpayments written off	Not set	3.27 %	N/A	3 %	?	3.5	2.9 %	?
Workforce and learning									
RS13	Number of employees undertaking professional training (Polarity ↑ higher is better)		0	N/A	N/A	1	2	2	2
Local PIs									
RS1	Number of Revenues Services BVPIs in first or second national quartile (this refers only to those BVPIs for which the Government publishes quartile tables). (Polarity ↑ higher is better)			4/10	N/A	5/10	6/10	7/10	8/10
RS2	Performance Standards score for benefits service (Polarity ↑ higher is better – maximum score 4)			N/A	4	4	4	4	4
RS3	Number of payments received by cheque (Polarity ↓ higher is better)			N/A	N/A				
RS4	% of postal remittances processed within 5 working days (Polarity ↑ higher is better)			N/A	N/A	N/A	100%	100%	100%
RS5	Number of benefit payments made by BACS (Polarity ↑ higher is better)			N/A	N/A	0			
RS6	% of sundry debts due that are paid (Polarity ↑ higher is better)			N/A	N/A				
RS7	% of discretionary housing payment grant paid in awards (Polarity ↑ higher is better)			N/A					
RS8	Increase in the number of accounts paid by direct debit (The total number of Council Tax, Business Rates sundry debt and rent accounts currently paid by direct debit in comparison to January 07)			N/A	N/A				

PI Code	PI Description	Past Performance					Future Targets		
		05/06			06/07		07/08	08/09	09/10
		Target	Actual	Top Quartile	Target	Estimate	Target	Target	Target
	(Polarity ↑ higher is better)								
RS9	Number of user focus enablers (as measured by the Department for Works and Pensions Performance Standards) in place for the Benefits Service (Polarity ↑ higher is better)			N/A	N/A	5	10	11	12
RS10	Service First Standards?????????			N/A					
RS11	% previous years Council Tax arrears paid (Polarity ↑ higher is better)			N/A	N/A	51.5%	54.0%	56.0%	58.0%
RS12	Income received from Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates summons and liability order costs (Polarity ↑ higher is better)			N/A	£153K	£174K	£177K	£177K	£177K

Part 4. Looking to the Future

Major issues or needs which your service will need to address (to maintain the level of service and new issues such as legislation, growth areas, demographic change)	Resource Requirements (Finance, staff, skills equipment etc)	Please tick appropriate years				
		2008/ 09	2009/ 10	2010/ 11	2011/ 12	2012/ 13
Introduction of Local Housing Allowances to replace Housing Benefit beginning in April 2008	LHA Project Officer – Fixed term contract for 12-18 months. New software module.	✓				
Continuing growth in the number of properties in the District	Already quantified in the medium term financial strategy report to Council					
Bailiff contract must be renewed by November 2008. Significant changes to legislation in this area are anticipated as a result of the Courts, Tribunals and Enforcement Bill currently being considered by Parliament.	Staff resources to carry a tendering process. If current proposals are enacted a new up front fee will be payable on all cases referred to bailiffs of up to £50 per case, recoverable from the customer. This would be a significant up-front cost to the Council of up to £100K per year.	?????	????	???	????	????
Potential for a Large Scale Voluntary Transfer of housing stock	Not yet known – but if a transfer takes place there will be a significant impact on the Housing Benefits and Rents Services					
Lyons Review of Local Government Finance	Not yet known					