

SERVICE PLAN
2009/10 – 2011/12

**Benefits
&
Benefit Fraud**

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What we do and why we do it

Our Customers and their demands

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit applicants.

- A modern, efficient, effective, and secure benefit delivery service, which is customer-focused, tackles poverty and isolation, and minimises barriers to work.
- Assessment of benefit entitlement quickly and accurately
- Comprehensive information on benefits so that they are informed about their entitlements and enabled to claim and receive benefits.
- Clear explanations of how decisions on claims are reached; including information about appeal rights.
- That the correct amounts of benefit are paid on time, with proper safeguards against fraud and abuse. Where overpayments of benefit do occur, ensure recovery is made by the most effective methods without causing hardship.
- All forms, leaflets and correspondence written in clear, simple language, with the minimum use of jargon. We will aim to provide them in a format or language of their choice
- To be treated with respect at all times
- Multiple access routes to the service
- A comprehensive web site with online functionalities

Private Landlords

- Prompt and accurate assessment of their tenant's entitlement
- Prompt notification of any payments they are due to receive, and of the cessation of such payments
- To be treated with respect at all times

Housing Associations

- Very prompt assessment of new claims and changes of circumstance
- Prompt requests for further information
- Very high accuracy rates
- To be treated with respect at all times
- All enquiries to be dealt with immediately, whether they are in person, in writing, electronic or by telephone,
- Easy contact with dedicated officer
- Exchange of information
- Prioritisation of eviction cases
- Liaison meetings if and when required

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Advice Services (WSAB, Shelter etc.)

- Easy contact with experienced officers
- Liaison meetings (when required)
- Trust
- Exchange of information within permitted boundaries

DWP (admin)

- Completion of subsidy claim, HBRF, SHBE and HBMS scans within strict deadlines

DWP (benefits)

- Exchange of information,
- Meetings
- SLA's

Contribution to LAA Targets (WSC leading/key partner)

- **NI 4** – % of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality
- **NI 179** – Value for money

Contribution to Corporate Objectives

The service contributes to the Council's Corporate Priorities in the following way:

Economic Development and Tourism

- Encouraging high levels of benefit take up will ensure that household income is maximised. This will result in higher levels of disposable income in local households which may be spent in the local community

Community Including Leisure Culture and Well being

- The prompt and accurate payment of benefit will help to alleviate poverty and deprivation in households claiming benefit.

Housing and Well being

- The prompt and accurate payment of benefit will help to maintain security of tenure.

The Environment

- Reducing use of paper within the service, by the ongoing use of document management, and the introduction and promotion of the IEG4 "e-benefits" software
- Reducing the carbon footprint of our employees by encouraging home working

Implementation of the Improvement Plan

- Related issues in connection with housing improvement plan
- Benefits to form part of the 2009/10 improvement plan

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Service Priorities for 2009/11

Objective	Actions	Lead Officer	Date (Year)
Improve access to service	Investigate the use of mosaic software to profile our locality for benefit take up initiatives	T Bown	Q 1 2009
Improve access to service	Investigate the use of explanatory inserts with benefit notifications	P Lamb	Q1 2009
Service Improvements	Equalities training for all staff	S Rawle	
Service Improvements	Revise COA, NPB and review forms	D Flynn	Q1 2009
Improve efficiencies and access to service	E-benefits implementation	P Lamb	Q1 2009
Service Improvements / increased efficiencies	Investigate the use of additional DWP ring fenced funding to provide clerical support post	S Farmer	Q1 2009
Improve access to service	Investigate use of text messaging	T Bown / K Penfold	Q1 2009
Improve access to service	Re-write take up plan	D Flynn	Q2 2009
Improve overall level of service delivery	To implement the Benefits Service Improvement Plan	K Bachelor	Q2 2009
Improve overall level of service delivery, including access	Benefits equalities Impact assessment	S Rawle	Q1 2009
Service Improvements	Consideration of the use of software to simplify written correspondence	IS team	Q1 2009
Improve access to service	Specific group take up campaigns	J Ross	Q2 2009
To identify specific areas for improvement	New Benefits satisfaction survey	T Bown / K Batchelor	Q2 2009
Improve access to service	Pilot Saturday morning opening of customer centre	151 Officer	Q3 2009
Improve efficiencies	Exploring partnership working for fraud and processing functions with other local authorities, Pioneer Somerset etc.	S Farmer	Q3 2009
Improve access to service	Entitlement Information for migrant communities and young people	D Flynn	Q4 2009
To identify specific areas for improvement	Consultation with stakeholder and customers on performance standards	T Bown	Q1 2010
Improve Performance Management	Review of National Indicator targets and local Performance Indicators (including customer charter standards)	P Lamb / S Farmer	Q2 2009
Improved Efficiencies	Review of the use of Filestore (document management).	S Farmer	Q2 2009

Efficiencies to be achieved

The Council are required to identify 3% cashable efficiency savings per annum. The following table identifies those savings that are being targeted over the next three years.

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Description	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	2011/12 £	Evidence
Cashable Efficiency Gains				
To be identified during year				
Non Cashable Efficiency Gains				
Implementation of Victor software	10,974	9,327	7,928	"Efficiencies Details" document
E-benefits implementation	772	772	772	"Efficiencies calculation" for e-benefits purchase
Working with Registered Social Landlords to verify documents	926	1,853	1,853	"Efficiencies Details" document
Total	12,672	11,952	10,553	
% of Service Budget				

Resources

Staff

The Council's staff operate in a completely flexible environment and as such are, in a lot of instances, expected to assist with the delivery of a number of services. The table below provides an estimation of the proportion of time spent delivering the services referred to in this plan.

Name	%	F.t.e.'s.
P Lamb	100	1.00
K Bohun	100	1.00
L Winstone	100	1.00
J Ross	100	1.00
P Slade	100	1.00
D Flynn	100	1.00
D Floyd-Green	100	0.65
S Farmer	30	0.30
Vacancy	100	1.00
TOTAL	828%	7.95

In addition to this, the Authority has engaged RB Solutions to supply a remote processing service on an as needed basis. The use of this company is at worst self-financing by way of reducing lost subsidy, and at best provides considerable savings against possible lost subsidy.

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Budget

The budget figures detailed below are those directly related to service delivery and do not include estimated salary costs or projected internal recharges.

Service Element	Budget		
	2009/10 (£)	2010/11 (£)	2011/12 (£)
REVENUE			
Benefits & Fraud Administration	-266,500		
Council Tax Benefits	-10,000		
Homeless	20,000		
Housing Benefits	-35,000		
SALARIES	176,434		
GRAND TOTAL	-115,066		
CAPITAL			
None	-		
GRAND TOTAL	-		

Service Contribution to Reducing Inequalities

See final benefits EIA when completed, and refer to the actions

Performance

Indicators

There are national indicators (NI) and local performance indicators (LPI) for this service. The service also contributes to corporate national indicators, NI 14 and NI 179.

Indicator	Description	Actual	Targets		
		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
National Indicators:					
NI 180	"Right Benefit" - Changes in Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit entitlements within the year		3700	3800	3900
NI 181	"Right Time" – Time taken to process new claims and changes of circumstance		12	11.5	11
Local Performance Indicators:					
BenLPI 1	% lost subsidy – The percentage of subsidy lost against expenditure of benefit		1.5	1.45	1.4
BenLPI 2	The number of prosecutions and sanctions		10	11	12
BenLPI 3	% of new cases assessed over 40 days				
BenLPI 4	Net lost subsidy				
BenLPI 5	% of overpayments collected				
Corporate National Indicators:					
NI 14	Avoidable Contact: The average number of customer contacts per resolved request				
NI 179	Total net value of ongoing cash-releasing value for money gains				

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Achievements Against Previous Years Service Objectives

Being the first year that service plans in this format have been produced this section has been left blank and will be completed next year.

Business Risks

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Overall	NEW Mitigating Actions
Assessment of claims- Permanent or long-term loss of Staff	M	H	H	Already working with RB solutions, who will be able to increase capacity for a for required period
Assessment of claims- Denial of site or Geographical area	L	M	M	Use of homeworking and remote processing should enable processing to continue, but customer contact may be an issue
Loss or Damage To IT Systems	H	M	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tapes backed up and kept in fireproof safe. IT continuity contract with "Adam Continuity" Disaster recovery Rolling replacement programme for hardware
Workload backlog	L	H	M	Already working with RB solutions, who will be able to increase capacity for "backlog busting"
Benefit Fraud	M	M	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HBMS matches Proactive drives Staff training DWP joint work National TV adverts Investigation of working with another Authority Benchmarking
Over reliance on key staff	H	H	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedure guides Networking via CIPFA etc Analyse what each member of staff does
Low staffing levels	H	M	H	Offer overtime
Politicians not aware of the Benefits service	H	M	H	Regular meetings with Portfolio Holders
Economic climate – redundancies/job losses increase workload of the section	M	H	H	Review customer contact centre presence
Morale suffers as a result of staff dissatisfaction with JE results	H	H	H	Robust appeals process