

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**HOUSING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING
CABINET MEMBER**

BENEFITS SECTION – QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE UPDATE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the cabinet member of the additional workload taking place in benefits due to the recession, and action being taken within the service

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The most recent (end of October 2010) figures from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for North Lincolnshire show that the number of claimants for job seekers allowance (JSA) decreased by -0.2% (-7 claimants) from September 2010 and decreased by -12.7% (-614 claimants) when compared to the same time last year.
- 2.2 The amount of incoming telephone calls for housing benefits for the period April 2010 to October 2010 was 19715. This compares to 25430 for the same period last year, a decrease of -5715 (-22.5%). This may be due to the fact that new claims and change events are being processed more quickly and improvements have been made to procedures. Although the amount of calls received has decreased, the number *answered* has remained largely the same (April to October 2009 - 16874; April to October 2010 - 16611).
- 2.3 Overall Housing Benefit caseload has increased by 1.18% since the beginning of 2010/11, but that for working age claimants is increasing at a faster rate than for pensioners, as shown in the table below.

	Working age	Pensioners	All
Cases at 15.3.08	6339	8004	14343
Cases at 28.2.09	7322	8113	15435
Cases at 31.3.10	8298	8230	16528
Cases at 31.8.10	8418	8322	16740
Cases at 31.10.10	8426	8298	16724
Increase since 15.3.08	2087 (32.9%)	294 (3.67%)	2381 (16.6%)
Increase since 31.3.10	128 (1.5%)	68 (0.82%)	196 (1.18%)

- 2.4 Only one National Indicator (NI181 - time taken to process HB/CTB new claims/changes in circumstances) judges the performance of the benefits service. Performance has improved on this measure from 11.82 days at the end of 2009/10 to the current figure of 11.81 days.
- 2.5 Although it has been announced that the Audit Commission is to be abolished, it is unclear as to whether the benefits service could still be inspected under key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) measures. However, work is continuing on the KLOEs action plan, particularly on actions to measure satisfaction with the service and front-line services. See separate report.
- 2.6 The service also continues to separately measure - amongst other things - the average time taken to process new claims. This currently stands at 19.28 days compared to the 2009/10 performance of 23.54 days. Similarly, the average time taken to process changes in circumstances has improved from 10.61 days (2009/10) to the current position of 10.15 days.
- 2.7 The pathfinder project to move benefits assessors into the Local Link office at Church Square House began on 18/10/10. Early indications are that it is being very successful. New claims have been processed under the pathfinder arrangement in an average of 4.56 days. Changes in circumstances have been processed under the pathfinder arrangement in an average of 3.15 days. Feedback from customers has also been positive.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 There are no decision options to be considered but the Cabinet Member is asked to note the contents of this report.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 None to be considered

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

There are no Financial, IT or property implications. There may be staffing implications from moving staff to front-line service at Church Square House on a rota basis. See 2.7 above. We are currently consulting with relevant staff and HR on this matter.

6. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)**

6.1 The council has a statutory duty to provide benefits service and in order to meet that duty we need to ensure that the service has adequate resources.

6.2 By ensuring that the right people get the right benefits as quickly as possible the council is ensuring that there is additional income in the local economy, thus helping with the general economic situation of the area.

7. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

N/A.

8. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 That the Housing and Strategic Planning cabinet member notes the contents of this report and endorses the efforts being made in the benefits service to meet the increasing demands on the service.

SERVICE DIRECTOR – FINANCE

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report

Information from DWP job centre plus
Monthly benefits progress report
KLOEs action plan

BENEFITS KLOE's ACTION PLAN 2010						APPENDIX 1
Action No.	KLOE No.	To achieve level:	Action	Target date	Responsibility	Update (incl. date)
1	2.1	3	Analyse complaints and ensure that they are used to positively change the service		LT/CS	Nov 10 - corporate procedures now embedded. Complaints used to improve procedures.
2	2.1and 2.2	2	Develop use of GIS system and Mosaic profiling software to provide detailed information about our customers , where they are and their nature.		LK	Nov 10 Met with IT staff 17/11/10. Action plan to be completed by Jan 2011.
3	2.1	2	use info at action 3 to develop a clear consultation strategy to find out what people want and need from the service.		AG	Spoke to Adrian Capon to see what is happening re consultation. Obtained the last BVPI benefit survey and results for information. Plan to survey all benefit customers May10. Draft questionnaire completed. Need to do Research Brief
4	2.1	3	Develop a strategic action plan to address putting the needs of the customer at centre of our service		CJ/ME	Refer to LT & B CAP efficiencies re any relevent actions.
5	2.1	3	Monitor types of enquiries by phone and at local link to try to reduce avoidable contact (NI14)		AG/SB	Nov 10. NI14 abolished wef 01/04/10 although ongoing work to analyse reasons for contact..
6	2.1	3	Ensure training action plan in place for all front line staff who provide benefits advice		SB/LT/CS	Obtained training plans from customer Services and Local link
7	2.2	3	Develop and implement a strategy for improving take up of benefits targeted to those most in need		PK/AG/CD	Link to 2 above and develop Benefit Take up strategy.
8	2.2	3	Update and relaunch the "payment promise" process		AG/PK	Nov 10. Pathfinder project in Local Link at Church Square House using 'Payment Promise' .

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9	2.2	3	Carry out feedback exercise on application forms and claim process to find out what the customers experience in claiming is really like.		FSDT	Nov 10. Collecting feedback from customers - to be analysed. We did a journey mapping exercise last year which may be worth looking at with regards to the customer experience. May be worth doing again (smaller sample) to see if changes implemented have improved
10	2.2	2	Carry out feedback exercise on quality of letters sent out to ensure they are understandable.		FSDT	See NI14 exercise to see how many people had to contact us for an explanation of the letter they have received.
11	2.2	2	Make use of data from NI14 to improve letters		FSDT	see above
12	2.2	2	Set up a strategy for working with partners and internally to provide access to money advice		CJ/ME	See Recession group minutes/talk to Carol. Meeting held with DWP financial inclusion champion jan10
13	2.2	3	Update the consultation strategy and ensure customer satisfaction surveys are undertaken.		AG/PK	Nov 10 - on-line survey set up. Also paper copies given out in L/L offices.
14	2.2.1	2	Benefit take-up is co-ordinated and targetted at people most likely to be entitled, and supports plans to reduce poverty in the community		AG/PK	Take up campaign done re benefit changes in October 2009. Targetted families via all school children and nurseries,press,websites etc. Outcomes published

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Action No.	KLOE No.	To achieve level:	Action	Target date	Responsibility	Update (incl. date)
15	2.2 and 5.1.2	3	Improve relationships with the voluntary sector, welfare agencies etc to ensure more effective collaborative working on take up and new claims, and ensure their views are taken into account for service aims and objectives		CJ/ME	See Recession group minutes.
16	2.3	3	Determine strategy for involving customers in setting standards and PIs and publicise performance		CJ/ME	
17	2.4	2	Update and implement the consultation strategy and use feedback to improve the service.		AG/PK	See 13 above
18	2.4	3	Develop communication strategy for direct magazine articles		AG/PK	Should include performance figures and promotion of Payment Promise??.
19	2.5	2	Identify local communities and relevant bodies. Determine reasons for hard to reach groups and set up strategic plan to address these issues		CJ/ME	See 2 above - much of the relevant data can be obtained. Also speak to Community Planning and Resources to see what data they have/what actions are currently taking place. Customer Insight data obtained
20	2.5	2	Ensure all staff work in accordance with human rights legislation,		AG/PK	Fraud staff had training and aware of implications.
21	2.5	3	Understand the diversity of our customers and tailor the service accordingly.		FSDT	See 2 and 18
22	2.5	2	Check level of awareness of DHP amongst the front line staff.		CD	Nov 10 - front-line staff reminded of facility to offer DHP.
23	2.5	3	Check with procurement manager whether we meet level 3 on monitoring of diversity in contracts.		AG/PK	
24	2.5	2	Check the legal requirements for benefits to promote good race relations.		AG/PK	
25	2.5	2	Consider how we can improve public access to the service through the use of new technology.		CJ/ME	Nov 10 - put survey facility on website. Looked at on-line claiming but cost is restrictive currently.
26	2.6	2	Check Disability Act access with local links		AG/PK	

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27	2.6	2	Check whether refresher training on Appointees is needed and implement if necessary.		AG/PK	
28	2.6	2	Check circular G24 and change procedure for interim payments if necessary		CD	Nov 10 - making interim payments in line with legislation.
To achieve						
Action No.	KLOE No.	level:	Action	Target date	Responsibility	Update (incl. date)
29	2.7	3	Action needed to show that the benefits service is addressing and having a positive impact on relevant Local Area Agreement themes.		CJ/ME	
30	2.7	3	Check external involvement in NI 180 action plan.			NI180 abolished
31	2.7	2	Check that we comply with DWP action plan on fraud		NS	Complying.
32	2.8	2	Set up customer satisfaction surveys to determine levels of satisfaction with all areas of the service.		FSDT	Nov 10 - put survey facility on website. Paper copies also given out in LL offices.
33	3.1	3	Develop benchmarking information to understand the differences, provide better documentation and make better use of data to improve the service.		FSDT	Nov 10 - benchmarking from various sources being analysed.
34	3.2	3	Consider how we can work with partners to obtain external funds for the benefits service		CJ/ME	Not sure what external funds are now available. There is a team within the council that monitor external funding opportunities - contact Laura Staniforth.
35	3.2	3	Ensure that the scope for improving cost-effectiveness is kept under review and scrutiny and innovative approaches are used where appropriate. There are clear policies and effective processes for reviewing and improving value for money.		CJ/ME	See VFM work done, the CAP efficiency proposals and changes proposed as part of the Assessments action plan.
36	3.2	3	Ensure management arrangements for value for money including subsidy arrangements are regularly monitored and managed, and can show benefits in terms of costs to the service and outcomes for customers.		CJ/ME	
37	4.3	2	Set up charts to measure trends and provide evidence of main PIs for last three years.		FSDT	These are in the CIPFA stats
38	4.4	2	Set up analysis of key costs over last three years compared to performance levels to determine value for money trend		FSDT	These are in the CIPFA stats

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39	4.4	3	Ensure that we can evidence that vfm is embedded in all decision making			Early - but see CAP efficiency proposals.
To achieve						
Action No.	KLOE No.	level:	Action	Target date	Responsibility	Update (incl. date)
40	4.4	3	Introduce performance targets across the service to improve outputs and thus increase vfm			See VFM positioning matrix for benefits, monthly report and CIPFA comparison costings.
41	5.1.1 and 5.1.2	3	Use results from action 2 & 3 to Identify and develop longer term sustainable outcomes for the future of the service for next 5-10 years including outcomes and targets based on the needs of service users. Ensure there are clear visions and aims for short , medium and long term .		CJ/ME	CJ and ME have already done some work on this. However, the future of HB has changed with the recent announcements (i.e. universal credit)
42	5.2.1	2	Work with Human Resources to actively identify and eliminate any discrimination in the workforce and use this information to promote sustainable communities.		CJ/ME	
43	5.2.2	3	Check evidence of scrutiny of performance data		AG/PK	Internal/external Audit reports?
44	5.2.2	3	Obtain and examine place survey results to determine if any actions for benefits needed.		AG/PK	From Adrian Capon?
45	5.2.4	3	Provide opportunities for people who use the organisation's services, staff, partners, contractors and other stakeholders, to influence how performance is measured, monitored and reported, and what standards and targets are set.		AG/PK	
46	6.1	3	Check member protocols etc		AG/PK	
47	6.2	3	Use available benchmarking data to conduct an exercise to determine relative levels of turnover and of staff sickness.		All managers	Nov 10 - e-forms and HR reports reviewed regularly.
48	6.4	2	Look for opportunities for external funds from RIEP and other sources to support benefits in its development areas.		CJ/ME	See 31 above.