

**THREE RIVERS & WATFORD SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE**

**Date of Meeting – 5 March 2012**

**PART A**

**AGENDA ITEM**

**6**

**Title: REVENUES AND BENEFITS - UPDATE**

**Report of: Phil Adlard – Head of Revenues and Benefits**

**1.0 SUMMARY**

1.1 This report gives an update on the revenues and benefits service.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 That the contents of the report are noted.

2.2 That the arrangement to close the South Oxhey office on a Wednesday be continued.

2.3 That phones continue to be closed on a Wednesday afternoon (apart from 14 March – 4 April)

2.4 That the “trigger point” for engaging resilience resource be set at 1000 documents and subject to review in three months

**Contact Officer:**

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**Report approved by:**

David Gardner, Director of Corporate Resources & Governance – Three Rivers D.C.

Tricia Taylor, Executive Director, Resources – Watford B.C.

### 3.0 **DETAILED PROPOSAL**

#### 3.1 **DWP Inspection Visit**

3.1.1 Members were informed on 13 June 2011 (Minute JSS04/11 refers) that the DWP Consultancy Support and Challenge Team would be visiting the Shared Service on 18 July 2011 to undertake a light review of processing of claims in comparison to other Authorities.

3.1.2 Following that meeting a number of recommendations were put forward which we have incorporated into our working practices. Recommendations include:

- a) More resources dedicated at the “front-end” to enable more complete claims to be submitted (triage).
- b) Ring-fence the backlog
- c) Roll-out benefit processes

3.1.3 Since July, we have adapted and adopted these recommendations and are starting to see the expected improvements to the service. This is in addition to addressing underlying issues as identified in the ISCAS report issued in August 2010 and reported 23 January 2012.

3.1.4 Members are advised that a further Inspection visit will be carried out by the DWP Consultancy Support and Challenge Team during the week commencing 5 March 2012 with the intended outcome of confirming the service is on track with improvements and identifying other areas in which we can improve.

3.1.5 Members will be updated further when the report is completed

#### 3.2 **Reception Arrangements**

3.2.1 Again, on 13 June 2011, members agreed that for a trial period, subsequently extended, satellite reception arrangements offered at South Oxhey would be restricted so that no service was offered on a Wednesday.

3.2.2 Prior to this initiative, there were, on average, 104 visits per week to the South Oxhey office.

3.2.3 Following the closure of the office on a Wednesday, there has been no drop in use of the service with the average number of visits per week being 107.

3.2.4 The outcome of this is that customers have not been unduly affected by the closure and have still made full use of the service on the days that it is open. In addition, the service has been able to make use of an additional assessment officer now available as their presence is not required at the South Oxhey office

3.2.5 The recommendation therefore is that the closure of South Oxhey office on a Wednesday continues.

### 3.3 Telephone Arrangements

- 3.3.1 In addition to closing the South Oxhey facility on a Wednesday, no incoming calls were taken from the public on a Wednesday afternoon. This applied to both Benefits and Revenues.
- 3.3.2 The intention of this is that it would enable staff to be free from interruptions and focus on more complex cases or deal with more cases
- 3.3.3 There has been no deterioration in the phone service offered with an average of 510 calls received each week.
- 3.3.4 However, mindful of the fact that the annual Council Tax bills will be issued this month, we propose to suspend the closure of the phones on a Wednesday afternoon until 4 April (inclusive) with close monitoring of the situation during April to establish if further suspension is appropriate.
- 3.3.5 At the same time, we are on track to offer the opportunity for customers to “self-serve” and will take advantage of this to signpost customers in this direction and realising the intended benefits of fewer calls.
- 3.3.6 The recommendation is that aside from a hiatus from 14 March 2012 to 4 April 2012, the practise of closing phone lines to incoming calls be continued.

### 3.4 Resilience Trigger Points

- 3.4.1 Further to the Joint Committee of 23 January 2012, further investigation has been done into the level and rate of work outstanding in order to determine at what stage we should look to engaging assistance from SERCO.
- 3.4.2 To evaluate this, we have measured the rate at which work is currently being completed as a comparison against the rate at which it is received.

	No. Documents	Weekly Equivalent
Position at 01/02	2446	
Documents Recd 01/02 – 22/02	2656	885
Position at 22/02	2465	
Documents Comp.	2637	879

Based on these figures, to set a trigger point at 1000 documents would indicate that an item of work would be cleared in just over one week and would be consistent with members aspirations.

- 3.4.3 The recommendation is that the “trigger” point for engaging resilience resource be set at 1000 documents and be subject to review in three months’ time.

### 3.5 **Current Work Outstanding Situation**

3.5.1 Members will be aware that the service regularly measures the volume of new claims outstanding and the age of these claims.

3.5.2 At the Joint Committee on 23 January, it was reported that the number of new claims outstanding was 239 (Watford) and 121 (Three Rivers). Of these 127 and 64 respectively were awaiting further information from claimants.

3.5.3 As at 23 February these figures had dropped to 193 (102 pending) for Watford and 77 (64 pending) for Three Rivers.

3.5.4 There has been a focus on resolving claims for Three Rivers during the week ending 24 February solely to clear as much work as possible in preparation for the year end billing process which will be undertaken on the weekend of 25/26 February.

3.5.5 Similar focus will be given to Watford claims for the week ending 3 March for the same reason and the year end billing process will be undertaken on 4/5 March.

### 4.1 **Financial**

4.1.1 None specific to this report.

### 4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 None specific.

### Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.