

THREE RIVERS & WATFORD SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting – 23 September 2013

PART A

AGENDA ITEM

8

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.

Contact Officer:

For further information on this report please contact:

Phil Adlard - Head of Revenues & Benefits

telephone: 01923 278023

email: phil.adlard@watford.gov.uk

Report approved by:

Joanne Wagstaffe, Shared Director of Finance Three Rivers D.C. / Watford B.C.

3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

3.1 **Benefits Performance**

3.1.1 The number of new claims outstanding continues to be monitored on a weekly basis. The number outstanding as at 2 September 2013 was 103 for Watford BC and 31 for Three Rivers DC.

It is anticipated that there will be an increase in these numbers over the next weeks due to annual leave.

Changes in Circumstances outstanding have also reduced. At the last meeting, 2572 changes were outstanding. This had reduced as at 2 September to 1603.

Again there will be an expected increase in the number outstanding due to a reduction in resource available.

3.1.2 Data from the SHBE (Department for Work & Pensions) Return showing the speed of processing in quarter 1 is reported separately.

The latest figures as at 31 August are:

Watford	31/07/2013	31/08/2013
New (HB Claims - SHBE)	14.47	14.15
Number of Cases	187	196
New (ALL - Academy Report)	21.45	19.51
Number of Cases	376	386
Changes in Circumstances (ALL)	29.28	25.52
Number of Cases	2684	2139
Three Rivers		
New (HB Claims - SHBE)	17.32	20.31
Number of Cases	84	97
New (ALL - Academy Report)	22.06	22.12
Number of Cases	198	209
Changes in Circumstances (ALL)	22.55	22
Number of Cases	1441	1165

3.2 **Welfare Reforms**

3.2.1 The Benefit Cap was introduced with effect from 15 July 2013.

As at 10 September 2013, we had received notification to cap 45 claims in Watford and 30 in Three Rivers and have reduced the Housing Benefit accordingly. This is significantly less than the predicted numbers based on scans sent to us in May and can be contributed to individuals moving into work or other grounds for exemption being identified by the Department of Work and Pensions.

We continue to work closely with the local Jobcentreplus office to refer individuals to them so that they can be supported into work and therefore exempt from the cap.

3.2.2 Discretionary Housing Payments

The impact of the "Bedroom Tax" and Benefit Cap has resulted in an increase in requests for assistance through Discretionary Housing Payments.

Each request is considered on an individual basis and where there is a need for additional financial assistance, this is being offered. If possible, additional assistance is offered through either the relevant Housing team or through Jobcentreplus if a Benefit Cap is applied.

If there is no need for additional financial assistance, an award is not made and we have declined requests for 22 Watford cases and 21 in Three Rivers.

To ensure the budget is effectively managed, awards are, in the main, short-term in nature and supported by an element of conditionality, i.e. requiring a commitment to engage with the landlord or Jobcentreplus to overcome the need for a DHP.

The latest amounts committed as at 10 September are:

Watford - £57,899 (98 cases) remaining budget £195,684

Three Rivers - £40,106 (74 cases) remaining budget £115,308

3.3 **Revenues Performance**

3.3.1 Collection Rates at the end of quarter 1 / 2013 are reported separately. The monthly collection rates since then are:

	31/07/13 %	31/08/13 %
Watford		
Council Tax	37.4	46.2
Business Rates	42.3	51.4
Three Rivers		
Council Tax	38.8	48.2
Business Rates	43.5	51.8

We have commenced legal action for recovery of debts and have issued 2847 summons (Watford) 1780 (Three Rivers) to date for unpaid Council Tax

4.1 **Financial**

4.1.1 None specific.

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 None specific.

Background Papers;

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.