

THREE RIVERS & WATFORD SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE

Date of meeting: 13 September 2010

PART A

AGENDA ITEM

6

Title: *REVIEW OF REVENUES & BENEFITS SERVICE – ACTION PLAN*

Report of: Head of Revenues & Benefits

1. **SUMMARY**

1.1 The report is to inform members of the Action Plan that has been proposed following a review of the Revenues & Benefits Service.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 That the Committee notes the contents of the Action Plan

2.2 That the Committee agrees to receive further reports at future meetings to update on progress against the Plan

Contact Officer:

For further information on this report please contact:

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Report approved by:

Tricia Taylor – Executive Director Resources – Watford Borough Council

David Gardner – Director of Corporate Resources & Governance – Three Rivers DC

3. **DETAILED PROPOSAL**

- 3.1 For a two week period in July and August, Simon Bailey IRRV (Hons) of ISCAS Ltd carried out a review of the Revenues & Benefits Service at the request of Watford Borough Council. Whilst acknowledging that a lot of hard work had been put into the formation of the shared service, it was commented that improvements were still possible and Mr Bailey produced an Action Plan based on his findings.
- 3.2 The Action Plan has been considered by the Revenues & Benefits Management together with the relevant directors. This will guide the future of the shared service as it moves closer to harmonisation in service delivery.

4. **IMPLICATIONS**

The implications of the recommendations will be considered individually. The plan has highlighted where the recommendation is, in the opinion of the author, a high, medium or low risk. Any decision will consider how the recommendation supports the service plan and future progress.

Any recommendation implemented will have a cost-neutral impact as a minimum condition.

4.1 **Policy**

- 4.1.1 The recommendations in this report are within the policies of the Joint Committee, Three Rivers District Council and Watford Borough Council.

4.2 **Financial**

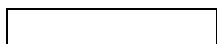
- 4.2.1 There are no changes to the budget or the efficiency gains already agreed by the Joint Committee, Three Rivers District Council or Watford Borough Council as a result of this report.

4.3 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

- 4.3.1 None specific to this report

4.4 **Risk Management and Health & Safety**

- 4.4.1 There are no risks associated with the decision members are being asked to take.



Appendices

Appendix I – Action Plan – Revenues & Benefits Shared Service

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WATFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL & THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Action Plan – Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

Recommendation			Management Response		Implementation	
Report para number	Description	Risk priority	Agreed	Comments/Action	By whom	Date
3.6.1	The authority should liaise with their external auditors regarding the £4,000 discrepancy between Civica, Academy and the finance system, to establish their thoughts on this amount and whether it is material.	High	Yes	External auditors are scheduled to visit w/c 6 Spetember, To raise issue of whether situation is “material” then.	Revenues Manager	
3.6.2	Ongoing processes should be set up to ensure daily reconciliation of payments between Cedar and Academy is maintained and not just reconcile to the posting file.	High	Yes	Situation currently under review and part of discussions between R & B and Finance	Benefits Manager	
3.6.3	Responsibility for Statutory returns such as the NNDR2 should be made clearer	Medium	Yes	Intention to include statutory returns as duties to be performed by “Systems / Control” post	Head of Revenues & Benefits	

Recommendation			Management Response		Implementation	
Report para number	Description	Risk priority	Agreed	Comments/Action	By whom	Date
3.6.4 and 7.1.13	Reconciliation of the Benefits system to all financial systems should be commenced immediately. Processes and procedures must be agreed with Finance.	High	Yes	To be dealt with at the same time as 3.6.2 above	Benefits Manager	
3.6.5	A review of cheque handling and control within the benefits service should be undertaken. This should include the automatic interface of cheque payments.	Medium	Yes	Will be resolved when TRDC Academy migrates to Windows platform	Benefits Manager	
3.6.6	Clarification of the procedure for emergency payments for the service as a whole is needed. A review and documentation of the reconciliation procedure for both Watford and Three Rivers payments should occur.	Medium	Yes	Existing controls are in place but formalised procedure to be drafted.	Benefits Manager	
3.6.7	The benefits overpayments brought forward from the Civica system to the Academy system should be reconciled.	Medium	Yes	Currently being dealt with by Benefits Manager	Benefits Manager	
4.4.1	Ensure subsidy administration is the responsibility of a control section that provides quality checks and training	High	Yes	Item already raised at Joint Shared Services Committee 13/09/10	Head of Revenues & Benefits	

Recommendation			Management Response		Implementation	
Report para number	Description	Risk priority	Agreed	Comments/Action	By whom	Date
4.4.2	Provide officers with clear procedures for the inputting of data into the Academy system.	High	Yes	“ACS” Procedure Manual already purchased. To be brought up to date and circulated to staff	Revenues Manager & Benefits Manager	
4.4.3	Provide officers with an overview of Benefits subsidy and the impact on subsidy loss when poor data is inputted into the system.	Medium	Yes	Officers have been provided with overview as part of ongoing training programme	Benefits Manager	Aug 2010
4.4.4	Use checking and quality assurance throughout the year to identify recurring errors and amend procedures and processes accordingly.	High	Yes	Academy “QA Module” now in use for both WBC and TRDC claims.	Benefits Manager	Aug 2010
4.4.5	Run subsidy once a month and report to the Head of Service of likely annual subsidy loss or where subsidy gains could be obtained.	Medium	Yes	Practise has been commenced but will be incorporated into duties of “Systems / Control” post subject to approval 13/09/10	Benefits Manager	
5.3.1 And 6.7.1	Move the Academy systems on to one server as soon as possible	High	Yes	Project underway to migrate to one server. ICT resources secured	Benefits Manager / ICT	

Recommendation			Management Response		Implementation	
Report para number	Description	Risk priority	Agreed	Comments/Action	By whom	Date
5.3.2	Review cash reconciliations working practices and bring the control function under one officers responsibility	Medium	Yes	Item already raised at Joint Shared Services Committee 13/09/10 – to be one of tasks undertaken by new post	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
5.3.3	Review the need for a dedicated support team or officer. This should include a review of succession planning for key roles	High	Yes	Item already raised at Joint Shared Services Committee 13/09/10 – to be one of tasks undertaken by new post	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
5.3.4	Review the current structure	Medium	No	Solution lies in formulating procedures, improving communications and training	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
5.3.5	Implement daily, weekly and monthly performance measures of work throughput	Medium	Yes	Underway – will be supported by 5.3.20 & 8.1.7	Revenues Manager & Benefits Manager	
5.3.6	Review levels of Council Tax and NNDR previous year's arrears as well as current year performance.	Medium	Yes	Underway. Summons run 06/09/10 has included previous years arrears	Revenues Manager	
5.3.7	Plan for single persons discount review over quarters 3 and 4	Low	Yes	Will implement in 2011/12	Revenues Manager	
5.3.8	Commence recovery action for Council Tax and NNDR immediately – (Planned)	Medium	Yes	Now underway	Revenues Manager	06/09/10

Recommendation			Management Response		Implementation	
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5.3.9	Harmonise level of costs and recovery polices as soon as possible	Medium	Yes	Costs equalised in first issue of Summonses w/c 06/09/10	Revenues Manager	06/09/10
5.3.10	Harmonise payment dates as soon as possible	Medium	Yes	Will review as part of harmonisation of processes	Revenues Manager	
5.3.11	Harmonise working practices and polices relating to disablement relief	Medium	Yes	Will review as part of harmonisation of processes	Revenues Manager	
5.3.12	Consider reviewing bailiff performance and selecting the highest performing company	Medium	Yes	Currently operate with four bailiffs (two each). To review and only operate with two with a possible third being a "local" bailiff	Revenues Manager	
5.3.13	Either write off debts or reinstate committal proceedings unless it is uneconomic to collect the debt	Low	Yes	Issue to be covered at same time as 5.3.16	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
5.3.14	Harmonise recovery policies relating to bankruptcies.	Low	Yes	Will review as part of harmonisation of processes	Revenues Manager	
5.3.15	Review the structure for recovery and billing purposes and where responsibility for recovery is placed.	Low	Yes	Will review as part of harmonisation of processes	Revenues Manager	

Recommendation			Management Response		Implementation	
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5.3.16	Review write-off policies and harmonise over the two authorities	Low	Yes	Will review as part of harmonisation of processes	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
5.3.17	Train 6 of the 9 the recovery officers to attend a magistrate's court	Medium	In part	Will review as part of harmonisation of processes	Revenues Manager	
5.3.18	Ensure refunds are made, this is corrected immediately.	High	Yes	Complete – refunds are issued where required	Revenues Manager	Aug 2010
5.3.19	Notepads from the old Civica system have not been converted into the Academy system Either bring the information into the Academy system or import them into the Anite system using functionality within Anite	Medium	Yes	Will investigate loading to DIP	Revenues Manager	
5.3.20 And 8.1.7	Review the use of Anite to bring efficiencies to the service	High	Yes	Current Interim Revenues Manager to make use of contacts at other authorities	Revenues Manager	
5.3.21	Obtain an independent review of Academy or liaise with other authorities as to functionality available.	High	In part	Will consider once migration to one server has been completed. We have the option to have "health checks" and will take this up.	Benefits Manager	

Recommendation			Management Response		Implementation	
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5.3.22	Review the clerical/administrative support required within the structure	Medium	Yes	Will review as part of harmonisation of processes	Revenues Manager & Benefits Manager	
5.3.23	Review printing of demand notices when Academy has been migrated to one system	Medium	Yes	Project underway to migrate to one server. ICT resources secured	Revenues Manager	
5.3.24	Configure the systems so Watford CSC have access to Academy	Medium	Yes	Project underway to migrate to one server. ICT resources secured	Revenues Manager & Benefits Manager	
5.3.25	Consider additional resources to input information relating to benefit overpayment and issue invoices	High	Yes	Completed	Recovery Team Leader	Aug 2010
5.3.26	Measure performance of benefit overpayment collection and set targets as soon as possible	High	Yes	Performance measurement of benefit overpayments is currently patchy and we are potentially losing out on income	Revenues Manager	
5.3.27	Provide training and interim support to other officers when the Revenues Manager leaves	High	Yes	Interim Revenues Manager in place and currently working with Team Leaders	Revenues Manager	

Recommendation			Management Response		Implementation	
Report para number	Description	Risk priority	Agreed	Comments/Action	By whom	Date
6.6.1	Review benefit working practices to actively manage the workload and prepare an improvement plan to include targets based upon resources available and workload anticipated.	High	Yes	Underway. Benefit Manager has been meeting with all staff to set baseline performance.	Benefits Manager	
6.6.2	Decide upon the target for the "Right Time" indicator for the Benefits Service.	Medium	Yes	Target was set as part of Service Plan. To be reviewed	Benefits Manager	
6.6.3	Measure the actual workload within the Anite system and not just those items entered onto the Academy system.	High	Yes	Review of use of Anite to be undertaken to improve quality of information provided by reports	Revenues Manager	
6.6.4	Provide Customer Care training for all officers.	Medium	Yes	Training to be sourced. Deliver as part of staff meeting	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
6.6.5	Formalise the Complaints process within the service. Use regular reporting to manage the outstanding complaints	Medium	Yes	Clarity to be sought on dealing with complaints through multi channels / sources	Revenues Manager & Benefits Manager	
6.6.6	Undertake customer surveys to measure satisfaction with the service	Medium	Yes	To work in collaboration with both CSC	Head of Revenues & Benefits	

Recommendation			Management Response		Implementation	
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6.6.7	Develop a measurement process of the target for customer care within the whole service.	Medium	Yes	To work in collaboration with both CSC	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
6.7.1 And 5.3.1	Review the project to migrate the Academy system and move the system on to one server as soon as possible	High	Yes	The project is now underway. ICT have devoted a resource to assist.	Benefits Manager / ICT	
6.7.2	Benchmark the service regularly with a benchmarking club	Medium	Yes	Informal approaches have already been made to the "BenX" group of which the HoS has used in the past	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
6.7.3	Based upon current resources create a benefits improvement plan on how the service will improve over the coming months	High	Yes	This plan will provide foundation of plan	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
7.1.1	Remove surname splits and have work allocated by team leaders on a daily and priority basis to officers. Ensure that new claims received are a priority followed by changes in circumstance that will create an overpayment	High	No	Has been considered but alternative approach of dividing benefits into "new" and "changes" to be explored.	Benefits Manager	
7.1.2	Fast track new (clean) claims – consider a fast track service for customers at the CSC	Medium	Yes	As 7.1.1	Benefits Manager	

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7.1.3	Empower the team leaders to allocate work and manage performance through their teams	High	Yes	Is being implemented currently	Benefits Manager	
7.1.4	Implement a performance framework that involves all officers. Notify all concerned of performance on a daily basis by email, intranet, whiteboards or one to ones	High	Yes	In place	Revenues Manager & Benefits Manager	
7.1.5	Commence customer feedback surveys. Consider a target for customer satisfaction	Medium	Yes	To work in collaboration with both CSC	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
7.1.6	Review all recent circulars with Benefit Manager, team leaders and the policy and development team immediately	Medium	Yes	In place – Policy Quality & Training Team staff now tasked with responsibility	Benefits Manager	Aug 2010
7.1.7	Commence team meetings immediately. Use as a basis for two way communication and ideas for service improvement	High	Yes	Communications Structure now in place	Head of Revenues & Benefits	Aug 2010
7.1.8	Use quality checking to create training needs for the service and for individual officers. Weight types of errors based upon financial and non financial impact	High	Yes	Academy “QA Module” now in use for both WBC and TRDC claims.	Benefits Manager	Aug 2010

Recommendation			Management Response		Implementation	
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7.1.9	Within the performance framework build in individual performance levels. Agree with officers an average for performance over a period and review at one to ones or whenever appropriate	Medium	Yes	In place	Benefits Manager	Aug 2010
7.1.10	Release the written procedures, review with staff working groups to ensure they are adopted.	High	Yes	ACS Manual has been purchased. Staff to be consulted on procedures	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
7.1.11	Work with the agency contractor currently undertaking appeals to share knowledge amongst key officers such as team leaders or the policy team	High	Yes	Existing vacancy of Assessment Officer to be used to provide permanent resource of Appeals Officer.	Benefits Manager	
7.1.12	Use the policy and development team to create training plans.	Medium	Yes	In place. To use outcome of appraisals.	Revenues Manager & Benefits Manager	
7.1.13 And 3.6.4	Reconcile the benefits system to all other systems such as Council Tax and Finance	High	Yes	Item already raised at Joint Shared Services Committee 13/09/10 – to be one of tasks undertaken by new post	Head of Revenues & Benefits	

Recommendation			Management Response		Implementation	
Report para number	Description	Risk priority	Agreed	Comments/Action	By whom	Date
7.1.14	Ensure there is a responsible officer for the system administration.	High		Item already raised at Joint Shared Services Committee 13/09/10 – to be one of tasks undertaken by new post	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
7.1.15	Review the call handling processes and either allocate officers to telephone duty or uses the CSC resource better	Medium	Yes	To work in collaboration with both CSC	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
8.1.1	Consider giving the partnership an identity	High	No	Has been considered previously but not thought of as high priority. Will be guided by members	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
8.1.2	Improve staff morale by provide training and demonstrate commitment to harmonising working practices	High	Yes	Staff event to be organised	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
8.1.3	Consider professional training such as IRRV Technician	High	Yes	In place. Benefit Manager has received bursary of £1000 towards studies.	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
8.1.4	Ensure scanners are maintained and serviced regularly	Medium	Yes	Maintenance contract under review	Benefits Manager	
8.1.5	Review the time taken by IT to respond when users are locked out of the network	High	Yes	To be discussed by HoS and Head of ICT	Head of Revenues & Benefits	

Recommendation			Management Response		Implementation	
Report para number	Description	Risk priority	Agreed	Comments/Action	By whom	Date
8.1.6	Review the number and types of printers available to ensures they are adequate for the administration and printing requirements	High	Yes	Migration to Windows Platform should increase resource available	Revenues Manager & Benefits Manager	
8.1.7 And 5.3.20	Immediately review the use of the Anite system	High	Yes	Agreed under 6.6.3 above	Revenues Manager	
8.1.8	Provide a PC which can access all systems in the private interview room.	Medium	Yes	Benefit Manager to resolve	Benefits Manager	
8.1.9	Set up Watford income section users on the Three Rivers systems	Medium	Yes	Situation to be investigate further	Revenues Manager	
8.1.10	Review the IT issues list, prioritise and create a well managed project to remove all IT issues	Medium	Yes	HoS & Head of ICT now have regular meetings to discuss progress	Head of Revenues & Benefits	
8.1.11	Harmonise HR policies as soon as possible	High	Yes	Corporate Initiative underway	HR	

<i>Recommendation</i>			<i>Management Response</i>		<i>Implementation</i>	
Report para number	Description	Risk priority	Agreed	Comments/Action	By whom	Date
8.1.12	Review the web site and bring up to date, identify responsibility for maintenance of the site and web pages	Medium	Yes	"Webmasters" to be tasked with responsibility	Revenues Manager & Benefits Manager	