

PART A

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting: 6 March 2014
Report of: Interim Head of Revenues and Benefits
Title: Revenues and Benefits Update

1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to give members of the Committee an update on current service levels, and the improvements and changes that have been made during Quarter 3 (Q3).

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Committee notes the report and comments on the contents.

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Report approved by: Joanne Wagstaffe, Director of Finance

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 The committee was previously informed that whilst improvements had been made in the delivery of the service, there were still significant areas that needed examination and understanding. These “structural” reviews were needed to ensure that the service is resilient and that future performance is sustainable in the long term. The areas that have been identified and focused on during Q3 and continue to be managed through Q4.

4.0 BENEFITS PERFORMANCE

4.1 The data below is designed to give the committee increased confidence about the overall performance of the service which the performance indicators by themselves would not necessarily provide.

4.2 New Claims WBC

As at 17/2/14 there were 126 new claims outstanding. Of these, 53 were awaiting information from customers (42%) and 73 were waiting to be processed (58%). The oldest WBC cases were as follows 25/11 (1), 16/12(3) and 23/13(1). These five cases are being tracked by the section managers. The oldest outstanding cases previously dated back to May 2013.

From 13/1/4 a pilot at Watford CSC on processing new claims “on the day” – has resulted in **95% of new claims received in the CSC at Watford being processed within 24 hours**. The overall new claims performance for all new claims processed in February (to 20/2/14) is **13 days**.

4.3 Number of Documents in Pending

As at 31/12/13 there were actually 304 (23.8%) documents in pending (awaiting responses from customers). The amount of work in pending has reduced from an **average** of 660 in September, 529 in October 436 in November, to 309 in December to 274 in January. The number of cases going into pending has reduced as we make more efficient use of the document management system and to ensure that we have all the relevant information before writing to clients. The impact of the new claims pilot has also reduced the number of documents going into pending.

4.4 Number of Claims Suspended

It is important not to suspend payment of benefit cases unnecessarily. An exercise was undertaken to review all the cases fraud had requested to be suspended as well as all other suspended cases.

In addition, we have reviewed the suspense codes so that they provide sufficient information to assist officers in knowing why a case has been suspended. All cases that are over 30 days are now being reviewed daily by managers and it is our aim to reduce the cases suspended over 40 days by two thirds by the end of March 2014.

Since December 2013 the number of cases that have been suspended for over 30 days has reduced from 42% to 18.5%. It is our aim to reduce this further but there will always be some cases that will be in suspense longer as customers may be waiting on third party information.

4.5 “Unauthorised lines” report

This report identifies cases which have been partially assessed on the system but for whatever reason have not been completed. There will have been no work outstanding as the assessor would have believed the case had been correctly completed. This report is important. This report has now been cleared and is being checked daily.

4.6 Work Outstanding

The overall amount of work outstanding has stabilised at about 1200 items. This is an encouraging figure as we have in the last 2 months

- dealt with 2000 more Atlas files than normal due to DWP uprating
- cleared 3300 significant dates going back over 5 years – these “housekeeping” dates will prevent and reduce future overpayments
- ring fenced and managed an appeals backlog that will be cleared by the 31/3/14

5.0 BENEFIT OUTPUTS – WATFORD

The tables shows the benefits performance for Watford

Watford	Target	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4 *	YTD*
New Claims	22 days	21.42	16.32	16.61	18.64	18.69
Changes	15 days	69.84	24.48	15.45	39.65	41.42

Watford	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
New	25.43	19.35	19.49	14.47	22.53	20.15	14.54	16.21	17.09	17.82
Changes	102.71	64.17	45.64	29.28	14.15	20.34	16.55	15.34	16.88	18.64

*as at 20/2/14

The new claims and change in circumstances figures are also encouraging. In clearing the backlog, we cleared some cases that dated back to May 2013 and these cases alone added to the YTD figure.

The change in circumstances figure has also been impacted. We have cleared cases that have been suspended for over 900 days (though there would have been no impact on the customer) as well as cleared significant dates – in one case that added over 3000 days to our cumulative total.

Had we not cleared this work, then at the point that the work would have needed to have been done, the impact would have been significantly greater.

6.0 SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

6.1 We have consulted with a number of our internal and external stakeholders about how we can improve service delivery. These discussions are on-going. In addition we have asked staff what they need to do their jobs better and how we can improve. Some of the changes have been small but have had an impact. Some are listed below:

- Joint weekly team meetings with all staff sharing performance information
- Meetings with CSC about scanning documents
- Focus on processing rather than pending cases
- Providing a printer at Oxhey so customers can be given information rather than it being sent later

- Re-scheduling when post arrives so it is scanned and indexed 3 hours earlier
- Project team established to look at document types used for scanning – changes have now been implemented
- Automation of Atlas files into Academy (went live January 2014)
- Archiving of Academy database (completed by end of January) – not done for 4 years
- Making more effective/efficient use of staff at outstations
- Introduction of a staff performance management system

6.2 **Watford Community Housing Trust & Thrive Housing**

We undertook a piece of work both Trusts to look at their top ten tenants with arrears. We were able to establish none of the cases were due to benefits and there was nothing for us to do. We have invited both Trusts to send us their next batch of ten cases so that we can examine these as well.

We also asked them to review their cases which had arrears and who were on benefits who do not appear to have applied for or received a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). We have provided the Trusts with claim forms and suggested that they assist these tenants to make a claim as the claim could be backdated to 1/4/13, therefore potentially reducing their arrears. We hope to get a small influx of new DHP claims in the next few weeks.

7.0 **Q4 WORK PROGRAMME**

7.1 There is a considerable amount of work still to be done to ensure that the year-end exercise for benefits runs smoothly. We will continue to put in place all the procedures and good practice to ensure that going forward performance is sustainable and improving.

In achieving this aim, performance during Q4 will improve, particularly when the impact of having cleared 300+ significant dates feeds into the PIs.

We are also working to build a “dashboard” which will provide an overview across the whole service as to what constitutes “normal” performance inputs and gives transparency as to where there may be areas of concern.

We have also identified a number of IT problems which IT and Capita are helping us to work through that will reduce the downtime we have had and improve resilience and efficiency of our systems.

8.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 **Financial**

8.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications included in this report.

8.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

8.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that there are no legal implications in this report.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.

File Reference

None