



# Revenues & Benefits Service Business Plan 2012-2013

<b><u>INDEX</u></b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 VISION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3 REVIEW .....</b>	<b>3</b>
3.1 THE FUTURE.....	3
3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT .....	6
3.3 CUSTOMER NEEDS ANALYSIS.....	7
3.4 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS .....	7
3.5 PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT.....	8
3.6 KEY PROJECTS.....	9
<b>4 GOVERNANCE.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5 SERVICE OBJECTIVES .....</b>	<b>13</b>
5.1 OBJECTIVE 1 – PREPARE & INTRODUCE WELFARE & COUNCIL TAX REFORMS..	13
5.2 OBJECTIVE 2 – CUSTOMER CONTACT .....	13
5.3 OBJECTIVE 3 – PROCESSING EFFICIENCY .....	15
5.4 OBJECTIVE 4 – CHANGE MANAGEMENT .....	18
5.5 OBJECTIVE 5 – MAXIMUM INCOME / MINIMUM DEBT.....	20
5.6 OBJECTIVE 6 – FRAUD PREVENTION.....	22
5.7 OBJECTIVE 7 – BUDGET CONTROL AND VALUE FOR MONEY .....	24
5.8 OBJECTIVE 8 – TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME.....	24
5.9 OBJECTIVE 9 – STAFF WELLBEING .....	25
<b>6 RESOURCES AND CAPACITY .....</b>	<b>27</b>
6.1 FINANCE .....	27
6.2 VALUE FOR MONEY AND EFFICIENCY .....	27
6.3 HUMAN RESOURCES (WORKFORCE PLANNING) .....	27
6.4 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY .....	28
6.5 ASSET MANAGEMENT .....	29
6.6 SUSTAINABILITY & CARBON MANAGEMENT .....	29
6.7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY .....	29
6.8 SECTION 17 REQUIREMENTS .....	29
6.9 SAFEGUARDING .....	30
<b>7 RISK MANAGEMENT .....</b>	<b>32</b>
7.1 COUNTER FRAUD .....	32
7.2 BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING .....	32
7.3 RISK MANAGEMENT SCORES .....	33
<b>8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND REVIEW .....</b>	<b>35</b>
8.1 APPENDIX A: PERFORMANCE TRENDS .....	36
8.2 APPENDIX B: MTRS SAVINGS.....	37
8.3 APPENDIX C: PERFORMANCE METRICS.....	38
8.4 APPENDIX D: REVENUES & BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION BUDGETS .....	39
8.5 APPENDIX E: REVENUES & BENEFITS “WINDFALL” BUDGETS .....	40
8.6 APPENDIX F: REVENUES & BENEFITS SERVICE STRUCTURE .....	41

## **1 Statement of Purpose**

The Revenues and Benefits service will:

1. Bill and collect Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates
2. Administer Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit
3. Administer Discretionary Housing Payments
4. Administer Discretionary Non-Domestic Rate Relief
5. Assist our customers to access financial advice and support.

## **2 Vision**

To provide a customer focussed & cost effective service for our residents and tenants.

This Service vision is underpinned by the Council's guiding principles for transformation:

- put our customers at the heart of everything we do
- make sure services are always value for money
- be ambitious and continue to improve
- use information and evidence to shape services our customers really need
- simplify and strengthen our processes and share them with each other
- make sure every enquiry that can be resolved first time is resolved first time
- support councillors as the strategic leaders of our organisation
- recognise the importance of our staff and support them as we change
- listen to our customers and our staff, and learn from what we hear

## **3 Review**

The Revenues and Benefits service has reviewed current and potential future influences, including customer needs, staff needs/issues, external conditions environment, performance issues and the various changes associated with improving the service provided. A number of critical changes planned for 2013 onwards will have significant impacts on the residents of Portsmouth, and on the way Portsmouth City Council administrates local taxation and housing benefits.

There is insufficient detail on these changes to enable a full business planning cycle. As a result, this plan will concentrate on 2012/13. The plan will be re-visited as and when more detail is available on the changes.

### **3.1 The future**

A number of far reaching changes to Housing Benefit, Council Tax & Non-Domestic Rates are in progress. These changes will radically alter the face of

the Revenues & Benefits service from 2013 onwards. The Localism Act 2011, the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and Local Government Finance Bill 2012 provide some indication of what is to come. Whilst there is insufficient detail so far in the welfare reform proposals to identify full details of the potential impact on Portsmouth, the following is a brief summary of the proposals.

- Council Tax reform [April 2013]

This change incorporates changes to discounts & exemptions for empty properties and 2<sup>nd</sup> homes, the replacement of Council Tax Benefit with a local scheme and a reduction in the subsidy/grant for Council Tax Benefit of around 10%.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will work closely together with local government to develop detailed proposals. In doing this, the Government will aim to protect the most vulnerable, particularly pensioners, and should not have any impact on the Universal Credit proposals. Local Authorities will be given scope to take account of the priorities of their own local communities when determining the amount of support for vulnerable and low income households to meet their Council Tax bills.

Primary legislation for this change is split between welfare reform and local government finance. The changes require regulation through secondary legislation. Until this time it won't be clear how the new approach to Council Tax will work. The secondary legislation is likely to be laid in summer of 2012. Local Authorities will be required to have consulted on and have a scheme in place by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013. This is a highly pressured timetable where it is not possible to start work on the scheme as the legislation & regulation are not yet made.

- Single Fraud Investigation Service [April 2013]

The Government's new fraud & error strategy includes plans for a new single fraud investigation service (SFIS), a new integrated risk and intelligence unit and a new regional mobile task force. The single fraud investigation service will investigate welfare fraud across all benefits and Tax Credits administered by DWP, HMRC and Local Authorities. This will include Local Authority Housing Benefit fraud functions. The government's strategy states that the new single fraud investigation service will be in place from April 2013. It is planned that the Department for Work & Pensions and HM Revenue & Customs will work with Local Authority Associations and Local Authority representatives to take this forward. The intention is that Local Authority benefit fraud investigators will become part of a single fraud investigation service, initially still employed by the local authority, under the powers, policies and processes of the SFIS. As there is no detail available on these changes, it is not clear what effect this will have on the Council's counter fraud staff or their work.

- Business Rates retention [April 2013]

The business rate retention scheme is intended to create incentives for local authorities to promote growth but the system will have to cater for a huge diversity of local conditions, whilst DCLG maintains its commitment that moving to this new scheme will not change the way businesses pay business rates, nor increase the level of business rates they pay. The system is designed so that no council is worse off as a result of its business rates base at the outset of the scheme through. This will include a one-off rebalancing of resources through a system of tariffs and top ups.

This change is planned in the Local Government Finance Bill, currently being debated in Parliament. It will be driven by regulations in secondary legislation. As the schedule is for the Bill to pass through Parliament and become enacted by the summer of 2012, this presents a very tight timetable for the regulations to be completed ready to implement the new scheme in April 2013.

- Universal Credit [October 2013 - December 2017]

Universal Credit is intended to provide a streamlined welfare system which makes the financial advantages of taking work or increasing hours clear to claimants. The white paper “Universal Credit: welfare that works”, explained that between October 2013 and the end of 2017, all existing claims to income based Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support, income based Employment Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit would gradually move to Universal Credit. This proposal is for an integrated working-age credit that will provide a basic allowance with additional elements for children, disability, housing and caring.

Universal Credit will not replace any of the following non-means-tested benefits:

- Contributory Jobseeker’s Allowance & contributory Employment and Support Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Child Benefit
- Bereavement benefits, Statutory Sick Pay, Statutory Maternity Pay, Maternity Allowance & Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

It is intended that Local Authorities will take over responsibility for Social Fund discretionary elements such as Community Care grants & Crisis loans.

- Move of Housing Benefit work to DWP [October 2013 - December 2017]

Overall administration of Universal Credit will be managed by one department – the Department for Work and Pensions – as opposed to today’s complex delivery of current benefits through the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Revenue & Customs and Local Authorities. This will take place over a 4 year period, with new claims migrating first, followed by a phased changeover for existing claimants.

The Department for Work and Pensions says that it would be wrong to settle on a precise timing schedule and segmentation for Universal Credit at this

stage and more work will be done over the winter with HMRC and local authorities to understand the detailed options available. Even once agreed in the spring of 2012, the DWP will keep the approach under regular review as it recognises that the approach needs to be flexible enough to respond to national and local circumstances as they change in the 6 years before the migration to Universal Credit is concluded.

### **3.2 Environmental Audit**

A summary of the major influences on our service planning is highlighted below, including key items from our SWOT and STEEP analyses.

The state of the economy and the duration of the current recession are major influences on the performance of the Revenues & Benefits Service. Furthermore, in order to meet the anticipated changes from April 2013 onwards, it will be necessary to carry out a re-structure of the Service. This will be planned & implemented over the coming year, so that the Service is ready to face the challenges of the future. This will be a difficult time for the staff and it is important that regular communication is maintained to explain the “what, when & why” on these inevitable changes. An item will be added into the Forward Plan when it becomes clear what the timing of the changes will be. The service does not employ contract staff or consultants.

As always, accurate financial forecasts are extremely difficult to produce due to the unpredictability of claimant volumes, levels of Housing Benefit expenditure & overpayments that require collection.

Welfare reform will figure very largely during the coming years – a programme of significant change to Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance is underway that will impact on an estimated 6,500 recipient households at an average of about £6 per week. These changes will mainly affect Local Housing Allowance claimants however some private claimants & Local Authority tenants receiving Housing Benefit will also be affected.

This will cause additional pressure on Discretionary Housing Payments, which will probably result in an additional funding requirement on the Council to top up DWP funding. It is unclear if we can absorb this additional cost within our cash limit.

From 2013 onwards, there will be further large scale changes, both to Housing Benefit & Council Tax Benefit as well as to the Benefits system, with the introduction of Universal Credit and starting to move Housing Benefit work to the Department for Work and Pensions.

The most obvious effect of the recession & the state of the economy on Local Taxation is likely to be on future revenue collection rates. In 2011/12, although in year collection rates were slightly below target, ultimate collection rates achieved target. It is unclear if this performance can be maintained through 2012/13. There could be a requirement for higher volumes of recovery related work to reduce the effects.

The deferral of business rate increases, the extension of small business rate relief and discretionary rate relief has helped in part to compensate for the effects of the recession. We will continue to absorb any additional work as far as possible.

With the major benefit subsidy triggers now being achieved and with the associated subsidy recovery rates now factored into our current and future budgets, there is a significant risk of overspending. This would be exacerbated if there were an increase in expenditure, which increases the difference in absolute terms between expenditure and subsidy received. Of course, variations in subsidy performance or increased administrative expenditure would be contributory factors.

In future years, changes are planned that will reform Council Tax, abolish Council Tax Benefit & localise Non Domestic Rates. It is not yet clear how these changes will affect the Council and the City's residents.

Given this environment and the increasingly limited potential for further budget savings, the broad strategy will be to maintain existing service levels over the coming years and our targets will reflect this.

We'll continue with our existing approach to performance, expenditure and budget monitoring whilst enhancing it wherever appropriate to take account of these factors.

### **3.3 Customer Needs Analysis**

The distribution of Benefits customers is annually mapped across the City. This has helped to highlight probable inequalities in access arrangements. The distribution of access arrangements is particularly an issue for the more vulnerable residents in the City. This information has been made available so as to inform the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

We'll continue our investment in improving tenancy support for the private sector and homeless clients managed by our own Housing Service.

The service runs a rolling customer survey, with quarterly surveys of a random sample of Benefits customers. This indicates that our customers are very happy with the service provided – 95% are satisfied with ease of access to the service and with the outcome of their contact. The City Help Desk reports similar levels of satisfaction for our Local Taxation customers.

There is now a continuous improvement process in place to review and improve the tone and clarity of our written correspondence across the service.

### **3.4 Equality Impact Assessments**

No areas for further work were identified in our 2011/12 assessment reviews. We will conduct preliminary Equality Impact Assessments in 2012/13. If full assessments are indicated, these will be performed in the same period.

### **3.5 Performance Assessment**

Overall

The Revenues & Benefits Service has achieved a good level of performance in most operational areas during 2011/12.

Efficiency of the service has improved by 30% since April 2009, as indicated in the following:

- Housing Benefit claimant numbers are running at an all-time high of around 26,500.
- Expenditure has increased considerably and is at a record level of an estimated £121million for 2011/12.
- Workload has increased by approximately 10% since April 2009.
- Total staff complement has reduced by about 17% since April 2009.
- This equates to an efficiency improvement of 30% since April 2009.

The table in Appendix A illustrates the performance trends for a range of indicators during 2011/12 and the previous two years.

Appendix C shows 2010/11 performance compared to the business plan targets.

In recognition of the economic situation, the service has set realistic targets for 2012/13 based on recent trends and our staffing capacity.

Benefits Service

The Benefit Service gave a steady performance in 2010/11, improving on some key indicators, whilst holding performance on most others. Processing cycle times remained at a very acceptable level of 12 days overall.

Benefits subsidy performance remains unpredictable as a windfall income, although performance was a little better than forecast.

Reduced administration costs have reduced the budget and produced an additional saving of £337,000 for this & future years. This saving is included in the cumulative savings chart in Appendix B to this plan.

The work of all Benefits staff is quality assured to a given standard. The quality standard was not met in 2011/12, although it was held at a reasonable 93.6%. Actions are in place to address quality, and it is believed that the service review/restructure will lead to quality improvements through reducing double handling of work.

Benefit debt recovery and from debtors was slightly below forecast, although overall overpayment recovery was up on 2010/11. Total outstanding debt increased to £7.6million, mainly as a result of recessionary effects.

The Fraud team delivered good results that met our business plan objectives in a very difficult environment.

#### Local Taxation Service

The Local Taxation Service achieved 95.04% in-year collection of Council Tax & 97.9% for the NDR collection rate. Whilst these in year rates were a little below target, it still represents a very creditable outcome in the face of the recession and the poor business environment.

The service achieved a satisfactory correspondence processing time of around 7.5 days.

In response to the economic situation it continues to prompt the city's small businesses to take advantage of the NDR relief that might be available to them.

The focus for the service will be to continue to optimise performance in what is likely to continue to be a difficult environment and to effectively manage government initiatives in response to the economic situation such as small business rate holiday and wider council tax reforms.

### **3.6 Key Projects**

The Revenues and Benefits Service has an established Change Management process to identify, prioritise, resource and manage a range of projects including ICT elements.

#### 2012 projects include:

- Various projects to implement the changes introduced by welfare reform and council tax reform (see Section 3.1 for outline proposals).
- Northgate Revenues & Benefits – to ensure our main processing system remains current & fully functional.
- ATLAS – this initiative from the DWP/HMRC will, once fully implemented, provide direct feeds of information from DWP (for other Benefits) & from HMRC (for Tax Credits) into our processing system.
- Revenues reporting – to improve forecasting and our ability to deal effectively with debt management.
- Disaster Recovery 2012 – to ensure key systems can be recovered in the event of a serious failure.



## 4 Governance

The following is a broad summary. For more detailed coverage of our governance and control arrangements, we hold an Internal Control questionnaire completed in February 2012.

The Local Code holds the organisation to six core principles of governance:

### 1. We focus on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community

The Revenue & Benefits Service makes a direct contribution to the Council's corporate priorities:

Increase availability, affordability and quality of housing

- by administering housing benefit to enable tenants to afford their rent
- by providing tenancy support and safeguarding processes to prevent tenancy breakdown and prevent homelessness

Protect and support our most vulnerable residents

- by working with individual residents to maximise the benefits, discounts & exemptions that they receive
- by improving our customer access arrangements and supporting benefit take-up & money advice
- by joint working with other agencies to target benefit take-up, encourage the use of discounts and exemptions

Improve efficiency and encourage involvement

- by making year on year value for money and efficiency savings
- by involving staff in key change projects

The Revenues & Benefits Service contributes to Priority 6 and Priority 10 of the Local Strategic Partnership by ensuring that our more vulnerable residents have access to financial support in the form of Council Tax discounts and exemptions and through ensuring access to Housing and Council Tax Benefits. We also play a key role in encouraging the take up of these services and for promoting other PCC, government and voluntary services that provide related advice and support.

The service objectives are clearly matched with budgets (MTRS). The service manages performance through the indicators shown in the Appendices below, and through DMTs and specific performance meetings.

### 2. Members and officers work together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles

The Head of Service provides regular updates to the responsible Director and meets with the Portfolio holder as required/necessary. Revenues & Benefits' purpose is clearly stated in this business plan.

**3. Values for the authority on good governance are promoted and upheld through high standards of conduct and behaviour**

All staff are aware of policies such as the Codes of Conduct, Health and Safety, whistle-blowing and anti-fraud policies, and all staff have undertaken the necessary training. All staff have undertaken the required e-learning on financial rules.

**4. We take informed and transparent decisions, which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk**

Any key decisions are taken with the full involvement of Members. A risk register is included as part of this business plan, with risk owners assigned to the relevant risks. Risks are regularly reviewed through DMTs, project and other specific meetings.

**5. We develop the capability and capacity of members to be effective**

Our reports to cabinet/executive, council & scrutiny panels informs members and enables them to participate in setting the future direction of the Service. This is done whilst ensuring the members are aware of the constraints of government statute & regulation.

**6. We engage with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust accountability**

We run a rolling survey programme of our Benefits customers in parallel with the customer survey work performed by City Help Desk for our local taxation customers. These customer surveys are performed so as to consult with customers and understand their perceptions of the service we offer. In time, this will provide an analysis of priorities for change and improvement. The Service works closely with Registered Social Landlords, private Landlords, LA Housing, Housing Options, Fairer Charging team, the Local Pension service, EC Roberts, the Debt & Benefit Forum and other voluntary agencies. Where appropriate, this information is used to inform our service planning. We carry out EIAs where necessary, to ensure we take into account all members of the community.

## **5 Service Objectives**

### **5.1 Objective 1 – Prepare & introduce welfare & council tax reforms**

Prepare for welfare reforms that are due to be implemented from January 2013 onwards, whilst maintaining service levels.

Section 3.1 of this document describes in outline the proposed changes.

This objective will be clearer when more detail of the proposed changes is available.

### **5.2 Objective 2 – Customer contact**

Improve customer contact & access to Local Taxation & Benefits services in response to the needs of our residents, particularly the most vulnerable.

#### **Description:**

We want to ensure that our customer contact is always welcoming, that we communicate clearly, we tell people what to expect and then we meet the commitments that we've made to them.

The Revenues & Benefits Service is committed to providing services that are available to everyone in line with PCC's Equality and Diversity strategy.

We don't want the fact that our services are based on legislation & regulations to unduly influence the quality of service that we provide. We need to be sensitive to our customer's circumstances, in carrying out our duties to protect public money and in explaining what we do and why we do it.

We know from mapping the distribution of our customers across the city that some of our residents have more difficulty accessing our services than others, purely based on where they live. We also know that in addition, many of our most vulnerable residents need help to understand what is available to them and additional support when accessing our services.

The services provided by the Revenues & Benefits Service are such that we are often in a position to identify residents in need of other financial support and advice.

One of the Council's priorities is to "Protect and support our most vulnerable residents" and the Revenues & Benefits Service plays a major role in the work that is carried out in support of this and the anti-poverty strategy.

#### **Objective 2a**

Encourage take up of Benefits & contribute to the Council's anti-poverty strategy & the prevention of homelessness.

**Lead Officer:** Ed Woodhouse & Alan Knight

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

We'll continue to resource tenancy support work to help reduce homelessness, including work with EC Roberts, and we'll maintain our partnership links through the anti-poverty group with other Council, Government and voluntary agencies to ensure we're working together to identify and support the most vulnerable.

We will continue in our partnership work with EC Roberts to resource a Tenancy Support Officer to target those most in need. We will work with the Financial Inclusion team to encourage Benefit customers to open bank accounts/to receive payment into a bank account.

We'll monitor and develop our Benefit take-up, BACS payment and Direct Debit take up and our range of methods to maximise residents' take up of Council Tax discounts and exemptions. We'll contribute to the corporate anti-poverty strategy and will increase the range of clinics and outreach work subject to resource availability and core business priorities.

**Measures of success:**

The service's contribution to anti-poverty work is not linked to a specific numerical target but we aim to prioritise the resources available to support activities that provide tangible outcomes. This links directly to Benefits take up and this is documented in the service's Benefits take up plan. Revenues & Benefits Service will document the various activities that contribute to this objective. Measures and targets will be established where and if they are appropriate to the activity.

**Objective 2b**

To perform Customer surveys to test the satisfaction of users for a range of services and provide an analysis of priorities for change and improvement.

**Lead Officer:** Shirley Hudson

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

This work forms part of the process to develop a better understanding of our customers to inform our improvement planning. The approach is to run a rolling survey programme of our Benefits customers (started in 2010), in parallel with the customer survey work performed by City Help Desk for our Local Taxation customers.

**Measures of success:**

Customer satisfaction measured according to the Council's standards.

**Objective 2c**

To maintain a continuous improvement programme of our written communications with customers and implement a range of improvements to clarity, content and tone.

**Lead Officer:** Shirley Hudson

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

We know that some of our documentation appears too “official” and that some Local Taxation and Benefits documents cause confusion, meaning our customers have to contact us more than once on a single topic.

We use customer feedback including complaints data in conjunction with our own analysis to identify and implement changes and improvements. The initial project completed a year ago. Following on from this, we have instituted a continuous improvement approach to these communications.

**Measures of success:**

Improvement updates during 2012, detailing the changes. Customer survey & complaints data, when available, will provide an indication of the impact of changes.

**Objective 2d**

Carry out an annual review of all service Equalities Impact Assessments.

**Lead Officer:** All managers

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

Follow up review meetings will be scheduled during the year and results will be regularly monitored. Support of the corporate Equalities team will be called upon where necessary. A full schedule of assessments was carried out during 2009/10. We will review our EIAs this year.

**Measures of success:**

To complete our EIAs as scheduled during the year 2012/13, with no equalities issues.

**5.3 Objective 3 – Processing efficiency**

Maintain timeliness and improve the quality of our processing so that service standards compare favourably with the best Local Taxation and Benefit Services.

**Description:**

The quality of the work we do is important to our customers and to us as an organisation seeking to improve efficiency and value for money. Sending incorrect Council Tax bills or paying the wrong benefit has a serious and direct effect on our customers. Inaccurate or incomplete processing causes additional work sometime later and it has a negative effect on data quality and

the integrity of our management information. In the case of Benefit processing, errors in processing can result in a loss of subsidy income.

We believe that our processing times are acceptable to our customers and we are not planning for significant further improvement at this time. Our targets therefore reflect the priority to at least maintain our service standards with our existing resources.

**Objective 3a**

Improve Benefit processing quality to 96% during 2012/13.

**Lead Officer:** Alan Knight

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

We'll enhance our approach to detailed error analysis and will speed up the feedback to staff. We'll continue the work we've just started on resolving errors at the front end of the process. Key elements of quality checking will continue to be carried out before Benefit notification letters are sent out. In addition, the service restructure will produce improvements by reducing double handling in the process.

**Measures of success:**

Data integrity has improved to the extent that risks to subsidy are now broadly contained. Processing quality is at 93.6% - this metric is one of the more challenging in this plan.

Monthly quality monitoring will continue throughout 2012/13.

**Objective 3b**

Improve Local Taxation processing quality to 97% during 2012/13.

**Lead Officer:** Pete Middleton

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

This target is part of our "right first time" strategy that includes formal documented processes and procedures and structured staff training provided by the Council's Learning and Development organisation.

**Measures of success:**

Monitoring during 2011/12 suggests that it is possible to achieve 97%, although this is a challenging metric given the increased workload and reduced staffing levels.

Monthly quality monitoring will continue throughout 2012/13.

**Objective 3c**

To achieve an average New Claim processing cycle time of 22 days during 2012/13 (Part of NI 181)

**Lead Officer:** Alan Knight

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

Teams are structured to make best use of our staffing resources, and we are working to increase the throughput of work by process improvements. We'll continue to measure the number of claims in excess of 30 days old and "average age" as work in progress indicators.

**Measures of success:**

Cycle time ran at just over 23 days during 2011/12 and it is likely that the target of 22 days would have been achieved but for the continuing effects of the recession. It is hoped that with improved working methods, we can meet this target in 2012/13. Performance will be measured weekly at service & team level.

**Objective 3d**

Maintain a Change of Circumstance average cycle time of 12 days during 2012/13. (Part of NI 181)

**Lead Officer:** Alan Knight

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

Teams are structured to make best use of our staffing resources, and we are working to increase the throughput of work by process improvements. We'll continue to measure the number of claims in excess of 30 days old and "average age" as work in progress indicators.

**Measures of success:**

It is expected that we will be able to hold our performance to under 12 days during 2012/13. This will meet customer expectations in turnaround time for changes. Performance will be measured weekly at service & team level.

**Objective 3e**

Maintain consistent service standards in processing Revisions, Appeals and other specialist applications during 2012/13:

Revisions	-	28 days	Appeals / revisions	-	28 days
Two homes benefit	-	28 days	Discretionary payments	-	14 days
Backdating requests	-	28 days			

**Lead Officer:** Alan Knight

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

Work can be prioritised as necessary in response to customers' circumstances without impacting the over service level provided. We'll continue to measure the percentage of work in excess of 30 days old and "average age" as work in progress indicators.

**Measures of success:**

These service standards have been set based on the perceived need to deal with requests within the stated times. This reflects what we believe is acceptable to customers, given the resources that we are able to dedicate to this type of processing. They may be difficult to achieve in the coming year, subject to the levels of work received and on our ability to maintain adequate resources in the team.

Performance will continue to be monitored at least monthly.

**Objective 3f**

Maintain Local Taxation correspondence average processing times at around 8 days in 2012/13.

**Lead Officer:** Pete Middleton

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

In providing consistent service standards we give our customers a clear expectation and enable our Helpdesk to assess what priority should be allocated to a customer request.

Different work types have different turnaround cycle times, based on the urgency of the circumstances.

**Measures of success:**

Over the past year, it has been possible to maintain processing cycle time at around 8 days. This would appear to be an acceptable standard for our customers.

Performance will continue to be monitored at least monthly.

**5.4 Objective 4 – Change management**

Maintain and improve systems & processes to ensure that all changes are managed so that the right benefit, tax discount and tax exemption is given to the right person for the right period of time.

**Description:**

Entitlement to benefit or a reduction in local tax is assessed based on circumstances and a change in these circumstances can result in a change in entitlement. Although a high proportion of our customers tell us when their circumstances change, many do not and this results in benefit being over or underpaid and in discounts or exemptions being applied incorrectly.

We can help some of our most vulnerable residents by preventing overpayments that would otherwise add to their financial difficulties with an overpayment debt to repay.

Overpayments increase the value of the Council's benefit expenditure and reduce the value of subsidy income received.

The service is responsible for reminding claimants of the need to keep us informed so as to reduce errors and as part of this we manage programmes of

periodic reviews to ensure that our information accurately represents a resident's circumstances.

Where appropriate, some errors are referred to our Counter Fraud team for investigation.

#### **Objective 4a**

Reported changes will be made complete and assessed in a timely manner, with a target average processing time of 12 days.

Entitlement reviews will be carried out by either visit or by post for cases where there are potential non-reported changes. These will establish the correct benefit level to be paid and remind the customers of the need to report changes. We will identify appropriate cases by existing risk intelligence, based on our experience from previous review campaigns.

**Lead Officer:** Alan Knight

#### **Strategies for achieving objective:**

We will ensure that there is a robust system for identifying known future changes, which is closely managed to prevent overpayments.

We will continue to remind claimants in as many ways as possible of the need to inform the service of any change. Our review programme has drawn on previous experience and will be constantly monitored by outcome to ensure that we are achieving the highest value of work from our available resource.

#### **Measures of success:**

Reviews will be planned to match available resource against highest risk cases, outcomes will be monitored to ensure that the targeting process is accurately identifying relevant non-reported changes. Cases will be managed in age profiles with the understanding that there will be variances due to the availability of the required information and the type of change identified. Change volumes per processing team and increase / decrease success rates will be monitored monthly.

#### **Objective 4b**

Carry out annual reviews of all Local Taxation Exemption and Discount policies and review programmes.

**Lead Officer:** Pete Middleton

#### **Strategies for achieving objective:**

To ensure that the integrity of the council tax database is maintained and consequently that revenue is maximised by carrying out an annual rolling review of all discounts and exemptions.

The work will include an analysis of how discounts and exemptions are reviewed and confirm whether more effective ways of working can be developed.

The policies need to be reviewed by members periodically and particularly when there is a change or when planning the tax base. This activity will include a review of existing policies, their effects on the wider aims of the council and the associated costs / savings. Options for alternative policies will be evaluated for member decision.

**Measures of success:**

This target is achievable.  
Schedule is planned annually.

**5.5 Objective 5 – Maximum income / minimum debt**

Maximise the collection of all income, minimise the age and value of outstanding debts and optimise the cost of bad debt.

**Description:**

The Local Taxation Service exists to bill and collect Council Tax and Non Domestic rates and the targets associated with this objective are therefore key to its success. The revenue collected as a result of the team's activities has a direct effect on the Council's cash flow and the costs of collection.

The Local Taxation Service makes a significant contribution to the Central Debt Recovery team's Key Delivery Target (KDT) for Council Tax and Non Domestic rates debt by maintaining in-year collection rates.

The Benefit Service can reduce Housing Benefit debt by reducing the size and number of overpayments and the Benefit Debt Recovery team can reduce the impact of the overpayments identified by collecting them more quickly. Both can make a direct contribution to the Benefit element of the Council's debt reduction.

These areas influence the Council's use of resources and value for money.

**Objective 5a**

Maintain & improve on the Council Tax in year collection rate at 95.2% for 2012/13

**Lead Officer:** Pete Middleton

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

We'll identify specific areas for improvement & take actions where possible.

We'll maintain our quick correspondence processing cycle times and we'll continue to monitor processing quality.

We'll look for ways to understand the effects of the payment arrangements we agree to and whether it is possible develop recovery processes that take more account of previous payment histories.

**Measures of success:**

This target represents a hard challenge in the current economic climate. It is monitored weekly through performance arrangements.

**Objective 5b**

Maintain & improve on the Non Domestic Rates in year collection rate at 98.5% for 2012/13.

**Lead Officer:** Pete Middleton

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

Maintain existing processes whilst broadening the staff trained to undertake NDR work. Continue to analyse opportunities to help businesses obtain the relief that could be available to them.

Income does not follow a straight line due to payment schedules and confidence in monthly forecasts can vary.

**Measures of success:**

The performance over the last 2 years has been around 98%, however, our steady improvement of the previous years has been stunted by the effects of the recession on the business community. It is difficult to predict how much potential there is for further improvement. The number of businesses in financial difficulty will continue to make this target difficult to achieve.

Collection rates are monitored monthly as is the analysis of payers / non-payers. Revenue does not follow a month on month straight line due to payment schedules and the confidence in monthly forecasts can vary.

**Objective 5c**

Hold Housing Benefit overpayment debt to £7.75 million at the end of 2012/13.

**Lead Officer:** Damon Shulman

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

Recovery rates are largely dictated by policy and there is some potential to increase the income via this route.

We have already taken actions to minimise the value of new overpayments through more frequent reviews and we are tackling quality improvement to reduce the cost of poor quality processing.

**Measures of success:**

It may not be realistic to expect a reduction in overpayment debt in future years given the current economic situation and the increasing numbers of benefit claimants.

Performance will continue to be monitored at least monthly.

**Objective 5d**

Maximise the recovery of Benefit overpayment debts from debtors in and out of benefit with at least £2,077,000 collected during 2012/13.

**Lead Officer:** Damon Shulman/Alan Knight

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

The Debt Recovery team manage & review debts in order to maximise recovery & act on non-payment of arrangements. In addition, consistent methods of negotiation and recovery will be applied.

There is a rolling schedule of increases in the amount of overpayment that can be collected from Benefits, so as to maximise debt recovery.

**Measures of success:**

We will continue to monitor and forecast all aspects of debt collection in an attempt to establish a realistic picture of our performance. Improvements in debt management reporting through Northgate Systems over the past year have contributed towards a good level of understanding of the data.

**Objective 5e**

Control Subsidy costs to cash limits and manage our financial forecasts.

**Lead Officer:** Alan Knight/Matt Willis

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

We'll continue to integrate financial performance monitoring in our operational Performance Management arrangements.

We'll continue to manage our claim suspension process closely to minimise any risk to our Benefit subsidy.

**Measures of success:**

There is a risk of benefit windfall costs exceeding estimates due to unpredictable growth in claimant numbers and even at maximum subsidy recovery rates this will put pressure on this "windfall" cash limited budget. This is subject to monthly monitoring of financial and operational performance.

**5.6 Objective 6 – Fraud prevention**

Maintain and improve systems for the prevention and detection of Fraud

**Description:**

During 2011/12, the Benefits Service administered Housing Benefits worth in excess of £100 million and Council Tax benefits at approximately £15 million. The prevention and detection of fraud in these areas is therefore a fundamental responsibility of the Revenues & Benefits Service. Indications are that levels of benefit fraud are reducing due to the success of existing preventative measures but the risk of fraud remains and the Benefit Service Counter Fraud Unit continues to have a vital role to play in our prevention system. Key activities are the investigation of potential fraud cases; taking legal action against offenders and publicising results to serve as a warning to others and help maintain levels of awareness.

This objective contributes indirectly to the Council's "Reduce crime and fear of crime" theme but not to the Key Delivery Targets and it forms part of the Council's response to meeting the requirements of Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act.

**Objective 6a**

Sanction and publicise 110 cases of benefit fraud during 2012/13.

**Lead Officer:** Damon Shulman

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

The key strategy is to continue with the activities that have proven to be effective. However we will continue to review and update processes and procedure appropriately. We will particularly aim to improve methods of intelligence gathering by attempting to diminish the use of external agencies, by using the unit's staff to improve efficiency and reduce costs in this area.

The Unit will maintain its existing performance management arrangements in order to monitor referral volumes and quality and investigation quality. The Unit will maintain its links with the DWP whilst continuing to review the value for money offered by a range of referral sources, including NFI.

**Measures of success:**

Evidence suggests this is a reasonable target, based on last year's performance.

This is subject to monthly monitoring.

**Objective 6b**

Maintain a programme of publicity throughout 2012/13 to maintain levels of fraud awareness across the Revenues & Benefits Service related PCC services and the general public.

**Lead Officer:** Damon Shulman

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

The publicity and communications plan will be documented, as part of the Counter Fraud Unit's business plan and implementation will be monitored through performance management meetings.

**Measures of success:**

In general, the publicity programme will be similar to that used in previous years but as past success in preventing fraud and a reduction in fraud awareness can both lead to less fraud referrals it'll be important to assess its effectiveness.

Publicity & Communication plan will be subject to a yearly review.

Implementation monitored monthly.

### **5.7 Objective 7 – Budget control and Value for money**

Establish management systems to ensure that budgets continue to be controlled well and savings opportunities are identified and implemented.

Optimise service levels to the customer at a cost that does not exceed agreed cash limit budgets.

**Description:**

This objective is concerned with driving down the cost of service, while maintaining existing standards - many of the objectives in this business plan contribute to this objective.

The current economic environment & planned budget reductions will make it difficult to keep within budget levels, without some impact on service levels.

We have established detailed data on financial, performance and workload trends from recent years that will continue to demonstrate the reductions in our service costs. This also provides the basis on which to assess the effects of future changes and budget pressures.

**Lead Officer:** Ed Woodhouse

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

Regular monitoring of financial and operational performance to ensure that Benefit Subsidy is maximised & administrative spend is in line with forecasts. Risks of overspend or reductions in service standards will be highlighted to Members as and when necessary to ensure an agreed course of action.

**Measures of success:**

Success in achieving this target will be subject to our ability to contain workload growth due to the economic environment and the Council's need for further budget savings.

Administration budgets are under pressure as we try to maintain service standards with increasing workload and budget reductions.

We'll monitor monthly through our performance management arrangements.

### **5.8 Objective 8 – Transformation Programme**

Contribute to the Council's transformation programme

**Description:**

Contribute to the Council's transformation programme, supporting all work-streams under the programme and working with other services to ensure that the council is able to continue to provide high quality services within a tighter financial remit.

This objective also contributes to the Council's aims in improving efficiency and encouraging involvement.

**Lead Officer:** All Revenues & Benefits Managers

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

This is detailed in the Council's Transformation strategy and workstream plans.

**Measures of success:**

Revenues & Benefits will be involved in this programme specifically through the Customer Management workstream. The content and timing of the changes will be partly governed by the changes that will occur from Localism & Welfare Reform.

Required savings targets are met across the programme.

## **5.9 Objective 9 – Staff wellbeing**

Maintain and improve the morale and wellbeing of our staff

**Description:**

The quality and efficiency of our services relies heavily on the wellbeing and effectiveness of our staff and this objective recognises that the Revenues & Benefits management team has a major role to play in helping to maintain a positive working environment.

This objective also contributes to the Council's aims in improving efficiency and encouraging involvement.

### **Objective 9a**

To maintain and improve levels of staff awareness and involvement

**Lead Officer:** All Revenues & Benefits Managers

**Strategies for achieving objective:**

Although we have some indications that the service is well informed, we want to be confident that everyone in the service continues to be aware of what the Council is doing, how the Revenues & Benefits service is performing and how it contributes to PCC's priorities.

We also want to continue to ensure that every member of staff understands their contribution to the service through one to one feedback and appropriate appraisals.

We would like as many staff as possible to be directly involved in our improvement programmes and for everyone to get regular feedback on how we're doing against our targets.

We'll consider a range of methods of maintaining open communications at all levels in our service.

**Measures of success:**

This target is achievable providing we adopt a systematic and common sense approach.

We'll continue to adapt our approach and assess our own progress through Management team meetings and based on staff feedback.

### **Objective 9b**

Maintain morale and wellbeing.

**Lead Officer:** All Revenues & Benefits Managers

#### **Strategies for achieving objective:**

We'll maintain our commitment to open and honest communications and to tackling the issues that concern or frustrate our staff.

We will make best use of the Learning & Development training programme to ensure we have well trained staff

We will continue to manage health and safety assessments and monitor work related stress absence.

We will use discretion in applying the Council's policies to ensure that they are fair and effective.

#### **Measures of success:**

Staff wellbeing is a significant issue as a result of the service reviews that are being undertaken across the organisation. The impact of budget reductions and welfare reforms that will affect Local Tax & Benefits will make this a challenging year with staff morale a key area for attention. We will need to maintain the current service standards while introducing change, and we will continue to support staff as far as is possible through these processes. Progress will be monitored through Management team meetings.

### **Objective 9c**

Reduce sickness absence to an average of 9 days per person

**Lead Officer:** All Revenues & Benefits Managers

#### **Strategies for achieving objective:**

We'll continue to apply the Council absence policies fairly and effectively.

We'll ensure as far as possible that when new staff are recruited they have a beneficial effect on the service's absence statistics.

#### **Measures of success:**

Corporate reporting is currently not available but our monitoring indicates that sickness absence for the service has steadied at an average of around 10 days per person. Each case of absence is treated on its own merits and it is not possible to assess whether further improvement is possible.

Performance will be monitored through DMTs at least quarterly.

## **6 Resources and Capacity**

### **6.1 Finance**

The Revenues & Benefits Service is directly responsible for the staffing and administration budgets that are required to operate Local Taxation and Benefits services, for the “windfall” budget that accounts for the income and expenditure associated with Housing Benefit, and for the income and expenditure related to Council Tax benefit. In addition, we administrate the Discretionary Housing Fund & Discretionary Business Rates Relief.

Overall administrative budgets for 2011/12 have reduced from 2010/11 levels, owing to savings achieved. The Administration Grant is no longer ring-fenced but is included as additional funding within the overall cash limit.

The total administrative budget cash limit for 2012/13 is £3,895,800. More detail is provided in Appendix D.

The forecast for benefit expenditure is over £120 million in 2012/13. Despite improvements in subsidy recovery and debt management, the net “windfall” cash limit for 2012/13 of £815,600 is under severe pressure in this financial year.

Close monthly monitoring will be essential throughout the year, as this budget is very sensitive to trends in claimant numbers, subsidy performance and the recoverability of debt. See Appendix E.

### **6.2 Value for Money and Efficiency**

See Objective 7 of this plan and Appendices A, B, C and D.

### **6.3 Human Resources (workforce planning)**

The Revenues & Benefits Service team structure is described in Appendix F. The control number for Revenues & Benefits at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 is 174 staff comprising 160.4 Full Time Equivalent (FTE).

Our approach to workforce planning is to get “the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time”. Through our business planning & regular review programmes, we have developed a clear understanding of the service needs, which we are able to meet by working with the staff & HR to be prepared for the future. In practice, this means that we have to be constantly ready to take a flexible approach, as there is no clear horizon of change in Local Tax & Benefits.

Revenues & Benefits is undergoing continual change, since its inception in 2005. The organisation shape and skills have been continuously analysed and reviewed to identify and deal with any training & staffing requirements. There are currently no apparent skill gaps, however, the future shape of the organisation is not yet clear. When this has been clarified, analysis will be

performed to establish if there are any potential skill gaps, and what the future shape and size of the organisation will need to be.

As it stands staffing numbers and skills are sufficient, provided there are no large unanticipated influxes of work. We currently have a permanent hiring freeze, and we do not generally to flex our staff numbers through temporary / contract staff, although extreme circumstances might require us to do so. Currently, we plan budget savings in advance, and therefore, have to date avoided the need for compulsory redundancies. As far as we are able, and given the unique nature of some of the roles in the service, we work to avoid single points of failure, and to ensure that knowledge is shared. For instance, there are 3 people in Revs & Bens who are project management trained and have been coached through the management of small to medium sized projects.

We work closely with HR Recruitment, Learning & Development to improve on our recruitment & training programme. All staff receive the necessary training, to ensure staff update their knowledge on a regular basis. We meet at least every 6 months to produce a forward plan for recruitment & training. In order to meet the requirements of legislative and system changes, we undertake a continuous cycle of review, leading us to redefine & agree our workforce plans into the future. This ensures that our workforce is able to perform the job role effectively. In the past we have identified the need for development of our management team. A number of Team Leaders in the Service has obtained a relevant management qualification from the Institute of Leadership Management. All managers are working through the LaMP programme and this will be completed by the end of 2012/13.

Objective 9 (in section 4.9) covers our approaches to staff wellbeing and sickness absence.

#### **6.4 Information and Communication Technology**

All Revenues & Benefits services are heavily dependent on two IT systems, Northgate for transaction processing and COMINO W1 for document management. The Service has developed a close working relationship with Information Services and has a co-ordinated approach to change management led by the Policy & Process Manager.

This plan assumes that the Revenues & Benefits services continue to operate using COMINO W1 during 2012/13 and that this version of the system continues to be supported for as long as necessary. It is anticipated that we will need to migrate to COMINO W2 or an alternative system within the next 3 years.

All changes to procedures and IT systems are managed through the Policy & Process team.

## **6.5 Asset Management**

The Revenues & Benefits Service has no property assets.

The Service currently occupies space in the Civic Offices and it rents space for some staff at 4 Area Housing Offices.

## **6.6 Sustainability & carbon management**

The service does not own energy consuming assets such as property and vehicles. Therefore, we are limited in what we can contribute, outside of responding effectively to corporate initiatives.

We introduced flat screen monitors in 2009 in response to staff demand and as a productivity and energy efficiency measure.

We have reduced desktop and network printers (from 48 in 2008) to 1 (used by a homeworker), in favour of MFD printers. We have reduced our mobile phone usage to essential users only, going from 28 in 2008 to 9 handsets.

Average space usage in the Civic Offices is within the required standard of approximately 8 square metres per person.

We continue to increase the use of direct debit and electronic payment methods that reduce the need for paper and mail distribution. We have reviewed our processes and the resulting documents that are sent to customers and as a result we have significantly reduced our need for paper and mail distribution. We also, where possible, avoid travel to meet 3<sup>rd</sup> party suppliers through the use of Internet based webinars.

Revenues & Benefits has 2 Green Champions who work within the broader programme on sustainability & climate change.

## **6.7 Equality and Diversity**

The Revenues & Benefits Service contributes to the Council's Equality and Diversity Strategy by providing Services that are accessible to all, Objective 1 of this Business Plan is directly linked to this strategy. We demonstrate our commitment through our continuous review of the Equalities Impact Assessments for all of our service groups.

## **6.8 Section 17 requirements**

The Revenues & Benefits Service contributes to the requirements of Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act through its anti-fraud systems as set here.

### Fraudulent benefit claims

Benefits claims are verified so as to secure the gateway to Housing Benefit & Council Tax Benefit. Claimants must prove their identity & circumstances

before benefit is paid. We proactively review changes in circumstances, using our review team and visiting officers, who perform risk based checking of claims that are in payment.

The Counter Fraud Unit works to prevent and detect fraudulent claims to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. The Unit assesses allegations from many sources progressing investigations and, when fraudulent activity is identified and detected, we apply the Anti-Fraud Strategy and Fraud Prosecution Policies, using the sanctions available in these policies. This ranges from collecting the overpaid benefit through to prosecution in court. We also publicise the results of our work to act as a deterrent to potential offenders.

#### Fraudulently claimed Local Taxation reductions

All reductions, i.e. discounts exemptions & all forms of relief are subject to an annual rolling review programme. For example, there is a check of student certification once the academic year has started. Site inspections are performed against empty property exemptions.

Credit reference & tracing agencies are used to check information on household membership, e.g. to verify single person claims, identity fraud, absconders.

### **6.9 Safeguarding**

As part of Portsmouth City Council, Revenues & Benefits has a responsibility to ensure that children, young people and vulnerable adults are kept safe from harm, including identifying and responding appropriately to safeguarding issues. Staff who are likely to come into contact with vulnerable residents have completed the relevant training to deal appropriately with such situations. Further, they are checked against the Criminal Records Bureau.

In addition, the Benefits service has specific policies & procedures to deal with the most vulnerable residents in the private rented sector. The PCC policy, specifically for Local Housing Allowance (private rented Housing Benefit), is designed to provide a safeguard for the most vulnerable tenants and minimise their risk of falling into rent arrears & so 'keep a roof over their head'. It is underpinned by the Benefit service's processes. In full, the policy aims are:

- Provide a safeguard for the most vulnerable tenants and reassure them that their benefit and rent will be paid
- Prevent rent arrears and tenants being put at risk of eviction
- Help to sustain tenancies for vulnerable tenants
- Reassure landlords that their rent will be paid if they have vulnerable tenants or are approached by vulnerable tenants
- To sign post tenants to other agencies where necessary to give people the opportunity and support to manage their own financial affairs
- To make reasonable, fair and consistent decisions
- Promote a transparent and simple process that is understood widely

- To treat each case individually and not make assumptions about people's situations

For our users of the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) Customer Information System (CIS) we will adopt, as per their requirement, the Government's 'Minimum Requirements for the Verification of the Identity of Individuals'.

## **7 Risk Management**

The risks identified in the following section of this plan have been assessed to be the major risks to the objectives and targets set in this plan.

Specifically in view of the current economic climate, and the Council's planned budget reductions, the service has set performance targets that reflect the risks associated with our likely ability to manage significant increases in workload and to implement change projects during the year with the resources currently available.

Operational risks are continually assessed by way of our weekly and monthly performance management arrangements. Risk scoring is only updated for the purposes of this plan.

### **7.1 Counter Fraud**

The Service reviews its general Counter Fraud risks annually in line with Internal Audit self-assessment questionnaire.

The specific risks of Fraud associated with the administration of Council Tax and Business rate discounts and exemptions and Housing and Council Tax benefits are covered in detail by the objectives contained in this plan.

### **7.2 Business Continuity Planning**

The Service's Business Continuity Plan is reviewed annually and it is also updated as and when necessary as the result of changes within the service. The plan complies with corporate guidance and it complements corporate Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery arrangements. In addition, a Disaster Recovery agreement is in place to protect our critical systems.

## 7.3 Risk Management scores

Risk Number	Risk Description	Outcome(s) of the Risk	Lin to Objective No.	Risk Owner	Probability	Impact	Net Risk Score	Control Measures	Control Owner	Probability	Impact	Controlled Score	Action
								Red-Uncontrolled Amber-Partial Green-Controlled					
1	Welfare reform and Council Tax reform	Serious impact on large numbers of Benefit claimants	1-4	PCC	4	4	16	Red	EW	4	3	12	Provide support to residents wherever possible
2	Welfare reform and Council Tax reform	Potential impact on staff, resulting from plans to move Benefits activity to DWP from Oct 2013	All	EW and service managers	4	4	16	Red	EW	4	3	12	Provide support to staff as reform proposals develop
3	Welfare reform and Council Tax reform	Inability to deliver as cumulative effect of changes exceeds capacity	All	EW and service managers	4	4	16	Red	EW	4	3	12	Performance monitoring to anticipate and reprioritise.
4	Negative effects of the budget reductions	Reduction in capacity and productivity impacts performance	All	PCC	3	4	12	Amber	EW	3	3	9	Continue with work to support staff through the changes
5	Requirement for further significant	Reduction in capacity to	All	PCC	3	4	12	Amber	EW	3	3	9	Prioritise objectives to limit impact

	savings	improve and or maintain performance											
6	Loss of key staff	Loss of skills impacts on performance	All	EW and service Managers	2	3	6	Amber	EW	2	2	4	Work to minimise single points of failure; Maintain 1:1s
7	Major incident interrupts service	Reduced level of service	All	EW and service managers	2	4	8	Amber	EW	2	2	4	Continue to maintain Business Continuity plan
8	IT Systems loss / failure disrupts processing capability	Processing and payment processes impacted	3	EW and service managers	2	4	8	Amber/Green	EW	2	2	4	Continue to maintain and test IT Disaster Recovery procedures
9	Benefit expenditure exceeds plan	Impacts on budget forecast	5	EW	2	3	6	Amber/Green	EW	2	2	4	Performance monitoring to anticipate, report and protect priorities
10	Processing quality reduces	Error rate causes a negative impact on subsidy income	3	EW & AK	2	3	6	Amber/Green	EW	2	2	4	Monitor to anticipate and respond to risks.
11	Benefit claimants numbers growth / change activity exceeds processing capacity	Processing service standards would decline	3	EW & AK	2	3	6	Amber/Green	EW	2	2	4	Performance monitoring to anticipate then protect priorities

## **8 Performance Monitoring and Review**

The Revenues & Benefits Service has well-established performance management arrangements with the Performance team playing a key role in analysis and reporting.

Audit Commission reviews of the Benefits and Local Taxation have commented positively on the availability and use of management information.

This business plan takes a broad view of customers' needs and what we want our services to achieve. As a result, it has a balanced set of objectives and a mix of process and key activity targets.

Our performance management arrangements will continue to ensure that the senior management team reviews all of the objectives and targets in this plan at least monthly, with meetings held as necessary to monitor key projects, changes and areas where performance is a concern.

We'll continue to operate using the following principles:

- We do what we say we will unless we're forced to reprioritise.
- We incorporate customer perceptions and performance indicators to tell us what customers think of the service.
- We monitor the progress and outcomes of our improvement activities and project work.
- We understand the capacity for further improvement of our existing processes, systems and staffing structure.

The Performance team will continue to act as a conscience on behalf of our customers for the Revenues & Benefits Service, ensuring that we maintain a high standard of delivery for our customers.

## 8.1 Appendix A: Performance trends

<b>Benefits Service Indicators</b>	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>
<b>Quality</b>			
Processing quality	94.50%	92.00%	93.60%
<b>New Claims</b>			
Year end work in progress	594	604	497
Received year total	11235	9988	9886
Average cycle time (days)	23.4	22.78	23.28
<b>Changes</b>			
Year end work in progress	1606	2664	2093
Received year total	52646	63838	70201
Average cycle time (days)	7.87	9.29	10.57
<b>Overpayment Debt</b>			
Total debt collected from Benefits	£1,262,661	£1,254,534	£1,306,327
Total debt collected from Debtors	£694,569	£778,558	£740,397
Total outstanding	£6,877,249	£7,344,933	£7,630,423
<b>Reviews</b>			
Review change success rate	N/A	45.09%	36.33%
Data Matches resolved within 2 months	100%	100%	100%
<b>Fraud</b>			
Fraud referrals received	889	936	823
Number of closed investigations	655	597	612
Successful sanctions	106	113	108
<b>Appeals</b>			
Appeals processing speed (days)	16.02	17.10	37.55
Revisions processing speed (days)	17.05	16.93	33.79
Two Homes processing speed (days)	37.25	27.50	39.28
DHP processing speed (days)	18.75	13.79	21.95
Backdating processing speed. (days)	24.95	21.79	29.25
<b>Windfall Budget</b>			
HB/CTB expenditure	£110,167,944	£117,297,950	£121,682,520
HB/CTB subsidy	£106,510,570	£113,493,082	£117,620,890
Subsidy recovery (Inc HRA transfer)	96.68%	96.76%	96.66%
Subsidy loss due to eligible Overpayments	£1,543,299	£1,647,407	£1,708,081
Subsidy loss due to LA error Overpayments	£0	£0	£0
Eligible error Overpayments	£2,572,165	£2,745,679	£2,846,802
Eligible error as % of correct Expenditure	2.45%	2.46%	2.45%
LA error Overpayments	£277,210	£225,092	£180,780
LA error as % of correct Expenditure	0.26%	0.20%	0.16%
<b>National Indicator NI 181</b>			
Benefits processing cycle time average (days)	9.70	10.84	11.98
<b>Local Taxation service Indicators</b>	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>
<b>Combined CT &amp; NDR</b>			
Quality indicator	96%	96.2%	95.4%
Correspondence turnaround time (days)	6.15	6.11	7.56
<b>Council Tax</b>			
Council Tax charge	£67,678,411	£67,880,445	£68,184,109
Percentage of Council Tax collected	94.98%	95.06%	95.04%
Council Tax % of correspondence older than 30 days	4.07%	10.13%	12.05%
Collection - year end work in progress	896	913	928
Properties - year end work in progress	892	973	1080
Recovery - year end work in progress	885	689	998
<b>Non Domestic Rates</b>			
NDR Charge	£72,835,803	£73,006,898	£77,498,049
Percentage of NDR Collected	98.29%	98.11%	97.90%
NDR % of correspondence older than 30 days	6.39%	5.60%	6.53%

## 8.2 Appendix B: MTRS savings

<b>Revenues &amp; Benefits MTRS contributions</b>							
	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
<b>Administration savings</b>							
Business Improvement post	£53,000						
HB Support Manager	£38,700						
Admin grant		£150,000				£146,400	
CFU Investigator posts (2)		£54,500					
Reduced charge from LAH		£71,000	£68,000		£55,000		
Introduction of BACS			£14,000				
CFU Team Leader			£37,000				
CFU Admin post			£21,000				
Visiting Officer post			£21,000				
HB Clerical post			£14,000				
Scanning/Indexing post			£14,000		£18,500		
Reduced Agency budget					£30,000	£24,400	
2 x CFU posts combined					£21,500		
Performance Services Mgr						£61,300	
Combine CFU & DR Mgr						£40,000	
Vacant posts from previous year						£152,000	£201,500
Reduced hours/end acting up						£11,400	£35,500
Print & Post savings						£24,000	
Mini restructure in Local Tax							£33,500
Court fees increase							£25,000
Reduce Area Office presence							£28,500
Reduce overtime							£12,000
Value of savings by year	£91,700	£275,500	£189,000	£0	£125,000	£459,500	£336,000
Effective budget reduction	£91,700	£367,200	£556,200	£556,200	£681,200	£1,140,700	£1,476,700
<b>Cumulative savings</b>	<b>£91,700</b>	<b>£458,900</b>	<b>£1,015,100</b>	<b>£1,571,300</b>	<b>£2,252,500</b>	<b>£3,393,200</b>	<b>£4,869,900</b>
	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
<b>"Windfall" budget savings</b>							
Reduction in overpayments	£175,000						
LA error below 0.54% trigger			£165,000				
LA error below 0.48% trigger				£132,700			
Value of savings by year	£175,000	£0	£165,000	£132,700	£0	£0	£0
Effective budget reduction	£175,000	£175,000	£340,000	£472,700	£472,700	£472,700	£472,700
<b>Cumulative savings</b>	<b>£175,000</b>	<b>£350,000</b>	<b>£690,000</b>	<b>£1,162,700</b>	<b>£1,635,400</b>	<b>£2,108,100</b>	<b>£2,580,800</b>
<b>Total Cumulative savings</b>	<b>£266,700</b>	<b>£808,900</b>	<b>£1,705,100</b>	<b>£2,734,000</b>	<b>£3,887,900</b>	<b>£5,501,300</b>	<b>£7,450,700</b>

## 8.3 Appendix C: Performance metrics

**2011/12 Performance metrics**

<b>Local Taxation</b>			
<b>Description</b>	<b>Measurement</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual</b>
Council Tax Collection	Local	95.2%	95.04%
NDR Collection	Local	98.5%	97.90%
Correspondence processing	Local	6 days	7.56
Processing Quality	Local	97%	95.4%
<b>Benefits</b>			
<b>Description</b>	<b>Measurement</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual</b>
NI181 Processing speed	NI 181	13.5 days	12
New Claim Processing Speed (Average)	Part NI 181	22 days	23.3
Changes Processing Speed (Average)	Part NI 181	12 days	10.6
Accuracy of Assessments	Local	96%	93.60%
HB debt recovery	Local	£800,000	£746,319
Total outstanding overpayment debt	Local	<£7.25m	£7.63m
LA error overpayments	Subsidy %	<0.48%	<0.48%
Subsidy recovery	Subsidy %	98.29%	98.52%
Fraud Sanctions (Year total)	Local	110	110
<b>General</b>			
<b>Description</b>	<b>Measurement</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual</b>
Sickness absence (per head)	Corporate	<9 days	10.1

## 8.4 Appendix D: Revenues &amp; Benefits Administration Budgets

<b>Administration Budgets</b>		2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
<b>Expenditure</b>				
	Employees			
	Local Tax	£685,387	£622,100	£604,150
	CTB	£1,070,893	£1,088,000	£1,088,000
	HB	£2,882,139	£2,616,800	£2,425,084
	Supplies & Services			
	Local Tax	£140,628	£119,000	£148,100
	CTB	£0	£0	£0
	HB	£222,402	£210,500	£250,200
	Premises costs			
	Local Tax	£1,456	£0	£0
	HB	£0	£0	£0
	3rd Party payments			
	Local Tax	£7,141	£19,500	£5,000
	HB	£2,014	£5,000	£1,500
	Transport			
	Local Tax	£1,946	£3,300	£2,350
	HB	£11,969	£12,800	£7,850
	Internal recharges			
	Local Tax	£93,853	£96,400	£96,400
	HB	£143,788	£165,372	£164,566
	Income reserve for bad debt			
	Local Tax	-£110,594	£0	£0
<b>Income</b>				
	HB/CTB Admin Grant			
	CTB	-£934,032	£0	£0
	HB	-£1,191,058	£0	£0
	Local Tax costs			
	Receipts Local Tax	-£288,134	-£300,000	-£288,000
	Misc. Local Tax	-£205,567	-£232,989	-£432,000
	Government Grant - NNDR	-£5,383	£0	£0
<b>CTB "windfall" budget</b>				
	Council Tax Benefit			
	Expenditure	£14,772,725	£15,069,859	£15,043,064
	Subsidy income	-£14,542,554	-£14,848,680	-£14,831,719
	Overpayments due	-£390,829	-£398,587	-£377,643
<b>Total Admin Cash limit</b>		<b>£2,245,141</b>	<b>£4,211,300</b>	<b>£3,895,800</b>

**8.5 Appendix E: Revenues & Benefits “Windfall” Budgets**

<b>HB "Windfall" Budgets</b>		2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
<b>Local Authority Tenants</b>				
Rent rebate expenditure		£36,928,864	£38,432,858	£41,291,865
Subsidy income & HRA contribution		-£36,423,067	-£37,871,443	-£40,688,677
Overpayments due		-£890,256	-£981,953	-£1,045,441
Provision for Overpayments not collected		£108,518	£211,138	£240,575
Prior year subsidy adjustment		-£47,438	£0	£0
<b>Net</b>		<b>-£323,379</b>	<b>-£209,400</b>	<b>-£201,678</b>
<b>Private Sector Tenants</b>				
Rent allowance expenditure		£62,135,814	£63,639,759	£65,586,956
Subsidy income		-£61,148,205	-£62,775,887	-£64,696,198
Overpayments due		-£1,695,737	-£1,691,945	-£1,773,087
Provision for Overpayments not collected		£301,710	£374,725	£433,518
Discretionary Payment Subsidy income		£0	£0	£0
Prior year subsidy adjustment		£6,910	£0	
<b>Net</b>		<b>-£399,508</b>	<b>-£453,348</b>	<b>-£448,811</b>
<b>Total HB Windfall</b>		<b>-£722,887</b>	<b>-£662,748</b>	<b>-£650,489</b>
<b>Total HB Windfall Cashlimit</b>		<b>-£803,500</b>	<b>-£809,300</b>	<b>-£815,600</b>

**8.6 Appendix F: Revenues & Benefits Service structure**  
 (managers & team leaders shown below)

