



Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits

Business Plan - 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020



EXCELLENCE IN PARTNERSHIP WORKING

City of Lincoln Council and
North Kesteven District Council

Overview

Services delivered by this Area

The functional services within the area cover:

The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service delivers Revenues and Benefits functions for City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council.

This includes;

- Collection of Council Tax;
- Collection of Business Rates (also collecting for West Lindsey District Council);
- Processing of Housing Benefit / Council Tax Support claims;
- Processing of Discretionary Housing Payment applications;
- Collection of City of Lincoln Business Improvement District levy;
- Welfare/Benefits/Money advice;
- Recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments;
- Recovery of other incomes (currently only for City of Lincoln – former tenant arrears, sundry debtors);
- Benefit appeals;
- Proactive response to welfare reform agenda, including Universal Credit Support;
- Proactive response to anti-poverty and financial inclusion agendas;
- Digital and budgeting support to residents of Lincoln and North Kesteven;
- Key links into and delivery of corporate fraud projects.

The shared service has a Housing Benefit caseload of more than 11,000, a Council Tax Support caseload of almost 14,400, and bills over 97,500 domestic and almost 9,800 commercial properties.

V1 Prepared by: M.Walmsley, 9th November 2018

Agreement date:

1st Review date:

2nd Review date:

3rd Review date:

Director's comments:

Section One: Key achievements in 2018/19

A. Key activities delivered include:

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
Performance	Shared service	<p>High levels of performance in most areas, despite ongoing economic challenges and impacts on household incomes following welfare reforms.</p> <p>Key highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collections; • Reduction in outstanding level of Housing Benefit overpayments, as well as in-period recovery of over 100% ; • Collection of BID levy over 99.96% in-year (year ended 30th June 2018)
<p>Localised Business Rates</p> <p>Tax bases</p>	Shared service	<p>Continuing work with Finance colleagues, preparation for and implementation of mechanisms for monitoring effects of potential localisation of Business Rates, as well tax base analysis for both Business Rates and Council Tax.</p> <p>Implementation and review of reliefs as introduced through the Spring Budget 2017.</p> <p>Business Rates ‘growth’ policies for all local authorities now in place.</p>
Welfare Reform Strategy	Shared service	<p>Ongoing monitoring and management of Welfare Reform Strategy approved in April 2015.</p> <p>Flagship and award-winning partnership model in place between shared service and DWP to deliver high quality, holistic Universal Credit support.</p> <p>Provision of modelled options of Local Council Tax Support 2019/20</p>

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
		schemes, with consultation and scrutiny, with approval to take place prior to 31 st January 2019.
Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)	Shared service	Proactive utilisation of DHP grants to support those most in need of help with their housing costs.
Partnership working	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	<p>Ongoing work through 5-year agreement signed to administer West Lindsey District Council's Business Rates, to 31st March 2021.</p> <p>Provision of Housing Benefit subsidy claim support to West Lindsey District Council – 3- year agreement currently in place to 31st March 2021.</p> <p>Universal Credit support arrangements in contract with DWP</p> <p>Key links with partners in both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven on a range of anti-poverty, financial inclusion and employment/skills – related initiatives.</p> <p>Ongoing successful project working with Lincoln College and Jobcentre Plus – utilising funding through Lincolnshire County Council Health and Wellbeing Fund – to provide free training courses to low income households providing employment/ progression opportunities.</p>
Customer Experience / Channel Shift	Shared service	<p>Completed implementation of outsourced correspondence through Critiqom solution. Reduction in officer time spent writing/checking correspondence/ reduce printing costs/increased use of e-initiatives.</p> <p>Further introduction and embedment of a number of integrated customer self-serve e-forms in Revenues Team.</p> <p>Continued promotion and increased utilisation of Northgate Citizen Access</p>

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
		Benefits product for customers to claim via on an online self-service product.
Anti Poverty	Shared service	<p>Responsibility and progression of a number of projects under City of Lincoln's 'Let's Reduce Inequality' priority.</p> <p>Delivery of initiatives contributing to North Kesteven's priorities relating to Community and Economy.</p> <p>Key involvement in Lincoln Against Poverty Steering Group, particularly around financial inclusion work and digital inclusion initiatives.</p> <p>Proactive utilisation of 2018/19 DHP grants for both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven.</p>

B. Savings initiatives completed or started include:

Key savings initiative	Completed by - service area?	Summary of outcome achieved
Shared Service collaboration – savings mainly from staffing restructure and ICT system change	Shared service	<p>The shared service is delivering savings for both authorities.</p> <p>The cost of the shared service was further reduced from 1st April 2018 in response to a reduction of central government funding, through a 1 FTE in staffing levels.</p>

C. All other key achievements

Include in this section any other achievements – for example, independent reviews, awards, nominations etc.
<p>Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation Performance Awards 2018</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Winners: Excellence in Partnership Working ✓ Shortlisted as Finalists: Most Improved Team of the Year ✓ Shortlisted as Finalists: Benefits and Welfare Reform Team of the Year



EXCELLENCE IN PARTNERSHIP WORKING

City of Lincoln Council and
North Kesteven District Council



IRRV Performance Awards 2018

FINALIST

MOST IMPROVED TEAM OF THE YEAR

City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council



IRRV Performance Awards 2018

FINALIST

BENEFITS & WELFARE REFORM TEAM OF THE YEAR

City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council

Audit Lincolnshire assurances:

- Council Tax – Substantial Assurance
- North Kesteven Housing Benefit Subsidy – Substantial Assurance.

Section Two: Key activities in the group's forward plans for 2018/19

Agreed delivery projects

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
Continue implementation of a strategy for the Council's response to Welfare Reform	Provide a clear and proactive response to the challenges presented to the service in relation to the national and local welfare reform agendas.	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2019/20
	Work with DWP and Citizens Advice to ensure robust Universal Credit Support arrangements are in place, taking account of changes in central government funding from April 2019		2019/20
	Continue work with co-located Jobcentre Plus to improve customer experience and maximise opportunities for joint-working where possible and appropriate.		2019/20
	Ensure robust arrangements are in place to support Universal Credit 'managed migration' process		2019/20
Fit for purpose job roles and staffing arrangements	<p>To review job roles and arrangements in the shared service to ensure these meet current and forthcoming internal and external impacts – for example;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Credit – to include further piloting of potential changes to working arrangements – for example; more cross-working/generic working arrangements, digital and financial support. • Potential for increased demands on recovery of debts due to impact of Universal Credit. • Consideration of steep 	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and throughout 2019/20

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
	<p>increase in the number of residential properties being built in the districts and the level of administration required within the shared service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of resources committed to subsidy, quality control and training. 		
Business growth	<p>Increase in Business Rates taxbase – to work with Finance, Planning and Economic Development colleagues to improve business growth in both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven. Consideration of usage of Discretionary Relief effective from April 2019.</p> <p>Proactive preparation for full Business Rates retention scheme by 2020</p> <p>Working with Finance/Revenues internally and across Lincolnshire to continue to improve ability to forecast business rates/understand appeals/make more informed decisions</p>	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits</p> <p>Revenues and Benefits Manager</p>	<p>Prior to and throughout 2019/20</p> <p>Prior to and throughout 2019/20</p> <p>Prior to and throughout 2019/20</p>
Reducing Inequality / Anti-Poverty	To ensure the service helps to reduce poverty in the districts, working with other service areas to provide proactive responses to poverty-related issues	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2019/20
Customer Experience/ Channel Shift:	Identification of further e-form self-serve solutions in Revenues and Benefits	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Throughout 2019/20

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
	Identification of efficiencies (both financial and otherwise) through customer experience initiatives	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2018/19
Fraud and Error reduction	To review fraud and error projects in place in shared service to ensure most effective usage of limited resources	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	Prior to 2019/20 and Quarter 1 2019/20
General Data Protection Regulation	Working with IT Legal Services, to ensure Revenues and Benefits shared service continues to comply with GDPR	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Throughout 2019/20
Delivery of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service between City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council. opportunities to deliver other work areas	Ongoing shared service, further development of operations of the service – looking for potential enhancements and growth for service. Actively maximise opportunities to enhance wider service delivery and grow as a shared service The 2019/20 budget for the Revenues and Benefits shared service will continue to deliver savings for the partner local authorities.	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2019/20 and ongoing
Performance maintenance/improvement – particularly around Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collection, Benefits processing times/outstanding workload/accuracy, and Housing Benefits overpayment collection and tackling outstanding debt.	Maintenance and/or improvement of current in-year collection levels Maximisation of Council Tax and Business Rates taxbases	Revenues and Benefits Manager Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits	2019/20 2019/20 2018/19

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
Utilise Discretionary Housing Payment grants in the most appropriate and effective manner.	Improvement in Benefits claim processing times and first-time accurate assessments.	Manager Benefits Team Leaders	
	Continue to reduce outstanding Housing Benefit debt	Revenues and Benefits Manager	
	Monthly monitoring of DHP spend and issues through internal DHP working group	Revenues and Benefits Manager	
Optimising Housing Benefit subsidy	To achieve 100% subsidy on local authority error overpayments, and optimisation of subsidy in other areas such as exempt accommodation.	Subsidy and Quality Control Lead Officer	2019/20
	Analyse impacts on subsidy claim from continued rollout of Universal Credit.	Subsidy and Quality Control Lead Officer	2019/20
Review and secure arrangement for new Revenues and Benefits ICT contract	Seek best possible ICT solution going forward, with regard to system performance and potential financial savings	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	2019/20
Reacting to funding challenges 2019/20 and in preparation for 2020/21 – e.g. in respect of Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy, Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government Council Tax Support grant, New Burdens grant/s, Universal Credit delivery.	To ensure that the budget is managed throughout 2019/20 and responses made accordingly, as well as preparation of a budget for 2020/21.	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2018/19

D. Strategic priority schemes and any additional Leadership priorities

Service	Key activity/ project	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale
Revenues and Benefits shared service	Vision 2020/Reducing Inequality	Identify projects for 2019/20 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2019/20
Revenues and Benefits shared service	NK Plan 2018-21	Identify projects for 2019/20 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2019/20

E. Towards Financial Sustainability projects

* **Strands:** Withdrawal of services (**W**); cost cutting/reviewing services (**R**); collaborative working (**C**); fair & appropriate charging (**FC**); procurement & commissioning (**P**); asset rationalisation (**A**)

Service	Key activity	Strand (*)	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Identification of efficiencies for potential contribution to customer experience/ channel shift savings target	R	To ensure efficiencies are realised into tangible financial savings, wherever possible and appropriate and in consideration of other competing factors and demands	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and during 2019/20
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Active consideration of other shared service options – e.g. other areas of work, potential opportunities	R	Efficiencies/savings through shared service opportunities	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and 2019/20

F. Other agreed delivery projects

N/A

Service	Activity	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale

Section Three: Other Service Planning considerations in 2019/20

G. Key risks for the area

Risks from Service Managers and those allocated from CMT strategic risk register	Action we will take to mitigate the risk	Who and by When?
<p>Failure to maintain Council Tax and Business Rates Collection Levels on behalf of the Shared Service.</p>	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance is monitored and managed on a regular basis • Regular reporting into Revenues and Benefits Management Team, Revenue and Benefits Operational Board, Joint Committee • Effective management of daily workflow • Northgate auto-recovery module now implemented • Additional x2 permanent Council Tax Admin Officers established to as part of Management of Change effective from 1.4.18 • Reviewed and launched new online procedure manual <p>Further action required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing challenge of lean processes and procedures • Range of channel shift initiatives ongoing such as e-billing, further integrated Council Tax e-forms and other related e-forms. • Review Council Tax 	<p>Revenues and Benefits Manager – 2019/20</p>

Risks from Service Managers and those allocated from CMT strategic risk register	Action we will take to mitigate the risk	Who and by When?
	<p>Support Scheme 2019/20 and options for 2020/21</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Exceptional Hardship Fund 2019/20 and options for 2020/21 	
<p>Failure to provide timely and accurate assessment of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support and Discretionary Housing payment applications on behalf of the Shared Service</p>	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily management of workload through Document Management System • Processes in place to deal with claims 'on demand' wherever possible • Quality control rolling programme • Rolling review of subsidy data from Northgate System • Management of incoming work and processes to minimise value of overpayments raised • Training and mentoring of staff • Action plan carried out to reduce backlog in Housing Benefits • Review of structure of the shared service to ensure services are targeted correctly from 1.4.18 • 2017/18 HB subsidy claim review with external audit, and PIR of any issues raised to take place • Performance and quality assurance framework has been introduced and the subsidy lead will be has set a timetable for targeted accuracy checks from April 2017. 	<p>Revenues and Benefits Manager – throughout 2019/20</p>

Risks from Service Managers and those allocated from CMT strategic risk register	Action we will take to mitigate the risk	Who and by When?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidy and Quality Control Officer in post <p>Further action required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of new targeted accuracy checks regime 	<p>Quarters 1 and 2 2019/20</p>
<p>Ensure compliance with data protection governance arrangements within revenues and benefits shared service.</p>	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, detailed and up to date Information Governance policies and procedures are in place at City of Lincoln Council • From the data collection forms reviewed both electronically and manually, privacy notices were present • Data Protection briefing sessions rolled out across the teams • Personal data is securely disposed of through the Council's confidential waste provider • Implementation of agreed actions from recent audit • Transfer of bulk postage to Critiqom has significantly reduced manual input and risk of human error. • Significantly reduced number of data protection breaches in that area • Substantial work carried out to comply with the GDPR which came into force in May 2018 	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Ongoing through 2019/20</p>

Risks from Service Managers and those allocated from CMT strategic risk register	Action we will take to mitigate the risk	Who and by When?
	<p>Further actions required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the current review of contracts for personal data • Implementing and reviewing process for retaining and disposing of documents in systems • Data protection sessions carried out across the teams and the e-learning package and low risk data protection training rolled out 	
<p>Failure to respond to national Welfare Reform and UC agenda</p>	<p>Controls in place:</p> <p>Permanent Lead Welfare Reform Officer on the establishment Welfare Reform Strategy in place and approved in April 2015 (monitored by Revs and Bens Joint Committee)</p> <p>Effective partnerships with public and third sector bodies</p> <p>Co-location with DWP UC Support team in place</p> <p>Effective comms in all welfare reform changes</p> <p>Further controls required:</p> <p>Consider future arrangements of contractual and funding for UC support</p>	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – prior to 2019/20 and ongoing throughout 2019/20</p>

H. Performance Management

Performance	Planned action	Service
What are the key plans for ensuring reported performance is of good quality		
What service measures do you want to see reviewed this year		
<p>Strong and robust performance reporting arrangements are well embedded in the Revenues and Benefits shared service – a detailed spreadsheet of performance data and management information is completed monthly and reviewed/challenges by the Head of Shared Revenues & Benefits and Revenues & Benefits Manager. Performance is a standing agenda item at Revenues & Benefits Management Team (RBMT) meetings.</p> <p>Service measures are continually reviewed to ensure the most appropriate performance areas are being reported to Members and Corporate Management Teams – a further review is required in 2019/20, to ensure all measures are still appropriate and whether or not any further development of Universal Credit –related measures is required.</p>		

H. Statutory duties – Equality and Diversity; Safeguarding (Children and Adults at risk)

This should include appropriate actions that will be closely monitored in order to meet your equality objectives under the Equality Act 2010, and in particular the Public Sector Equality Duties; as well as safeguarding duties.

Key actions within your services that are being under-taken as part of the Equality Objective Action Plan – progress and plans for the coming year
Profiling of service users profile and development of action plan to address any issues identified.
What key actions are services taking to close significant Equality Information gaps?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of language interpretation telephone line service • Ongoing review of availability of Revenues and Benefits correspondence in other formats – to be included as part of correspondence outsourcing project.
List the policies and strategies to receive an Equality Analysis this year where Head of Service sign off is required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Lincoln Council Business Rates Growth Policy
What actions need to be taken to meet the area’s Safeguarding Duties? How will the delivery of your services take into account the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults?
Ensure appropriate staff in the shared service receive have received (refresher) training on safeguarding requirements and processes.

I. Working in Neighbourhoods

How are you, as Head of Service, going to engage with the neighbourhood agenda? In which specific services will you ensure there is a focus on neighbourhood working?
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The Welfare Team within the shared service has a specific role of working in neighbourhoods via outreach surgeries and in individual customers' homes – providing benefits, money and debt advice. Head of Shared Revenues & Benefits has key links into the Sincil Bank revitalisation project, in particular in relation to Employment and Skills – related initiatives.

J. Workforce Development

Workforce Development	Planned action	Service
What are the key plans for training and developing staff?		
Proactive response to changing climate in relation to Revenues and Benefits	Review job roles, skill sets and staff development/training requirements.	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Improving workforce capability	Appraisals April 2019-July 2019	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
City of Lincoln Council Workforce Development Strategy	Delivery of actions as required within the Strategy action plan / Throughout 2019/20	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

L. Social Value

Social Value	Planned action	Service
What are the key plans for delivering social value through your services?		
Head of Shared Revenues & Benefits has a full understanding of Social Value and will ensure this is considered going forward in any procurement / contracts relating to the shared service.		

M. Data Protection and Information Governance

Data Protection and Information Governance	Planned action	Service
What are the key plans/ considerations in respect of Data Protection and Information Governance in respect of your services?		

Data Protection and Information Governance	Planned action	Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure ongoing compliance from all staff – a high volume of sensitive and confidential data is held within the shared service - Working with Information Governance Lead Officer to ensure ongoing review of data held within the service and that appropriate Information Sharing Agreements are in place - General Data Protection Regulation – Working with IT and Legal Services, to ensure Revenues and Benefits shared service continues to comply with GDPR - Ensure continuing adherence to requirements of Memorandum of Understanding with Department for Work and Pensions - Work with IT to ensure removal of gcsx accounts is smooth and robust secure replacement is in place for sensitive data and as required. 		