



SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS JOINT COMMITTEE

**Thursday, 26 November
2020**

2.00 pm

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Membership:	Councillors Ray Cucksey (North Kesteven District Council), Sally Tarry (North Kesteven District Council), Rosanne Kirk and Ric Metcalfe (City of Lincoln Council)
Substitute members:	Councillors Ian Carrington (North Kesteven District Council) and Donald Nannestad (City of Lincoln Council)
Officers attending:	Democratic Services (City of Lincoln Council), Jaclyn Gibson (City of Lincoln Council), Philip Roberts (North Kesteven District Council), Claire Moses (City of Lincoln Council), Russell Stone (North Kesteven District Council) and Martin Walmsley (City of Lincoln Council)

Virtual Meeting

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Present: Councillor Ray Cucksey (*in the Chair*),
Councillor Rosanne Kirk and Councillor Ric Metcalfe

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Nikki Dillon, Councillor Michael Kent,
Councillor David Suiter, Jaclyn Gibson, Philip Roberts
and Claire Moses

42. Confirmation of Minutes - 05 February 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2020 be confirmed.

43. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

44. Covid-19 Impacts on Revenue and Benefits Service

Purpose of Report

To provide the Joint Committee with an update regarding Covid-19 impacts on the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service.

Decision

That the report be noted.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The report provided an update regarding Covid-19 impacts on the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service. This provided key impacts on the shared service, from a working operations perspective through to the financial impacts on the Council as a whole and additional demands on the service.

It was reported that all members of the Revenues and Benefits Teams were mobilised to work from home during a two-week period during March 2020. Around one-quarter of the team already had facilities to be able to work from home, however, the large scale deployment of staff to work from home (not only within the shared service, but across the partner Councils as a whole too) had been unprecedented.

In terms of staff wellbeing, this had been at the heart of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, by partner Councils. In terms of Revenues and Benefits specifically, support for staff from management, and between peers, had been extremely effective, which had helped to highlight and respond to team and individual needs quickly.

In addition, it was noted that March and April were always the busiest months in terms of demands for the shared service, such as, Council Tax billing, Business Rates billing, Benefits upratings and finalisations of Housing Benefit Subsidy Claims, of which had been completed successfully.

Councillor Ray Cucksey commented that tribute was to be paid to all team members for the amount of work that had been done especially for this time of year and during the current pandemic.

45. Performance Update

Purpose of Report

To provide the Joint Committee with an update on performance in the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service.

Decision

That the report be noted and an update would be presented at the next meeting of this committee on 26th November 2020.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The report provided information on revenues performance with regard to Council Tax for the City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council, together with business rates in respect of the City of Lincoln Council, North Kesteven District Council and West Lindsey District Council. This provided figures for the current year 2020/21 up to the end of July 2020, including annual outturn Revenues and Benefits performance for 2019/20.

It was reported that Council Tax, up to the end of July 2020, in-year collection was down for both the City of Lincoln and North Kesteven by 1.30% and 1.11% respectively. The latest figures up to the end of August 2020 indicated that the City of Lincoln was down by 2.9% and North Kesteven was down by 3.6%. however, it was noted that the net collectible debit had increased for both authorities.

In regard to Business Rates, up to the end of August 2020 (compared to the end of August 2019), in-year collection for Lincoln and North Kesteven was up by 6.54% and 2.18% respectively. For Lincoln there was still £19.4m to be collected for 2019/20 – as at the end of July 2019, £9.9m of this figure had been collected. For North Kesteven, there was still £20.3m to be collected for 2019/20 – as at the end of July 2019, £10.4m of this figure had been collected. West Lindsey in-year collection was down by 1.00% at the end of July 2020 - net liability was greatly reduced with regard to reliefs applied – out of the net £11.7m, £4.9m had been collected so far.

Further information relating to outstanding revenues customers and housing benefit overpayments were set out in the report. The latest figures as at the end of July 2020 indicated that outstanding revenues stood at a total of 468 of which 360 were from the City of Lincoln and 108 were from North Kesteven.

There was an amendment to paragraph 4.17 – the Outstanding Housing Benefit Overpayments debt for the City of Lincoln Council should read £3,423,812 and North Kesteven £1,502,103.

In terms of benefits performance, the table at paragraph 5.1 of the report highlighted the number of outstanding benefits customers awaiting assessment at the end of each financial year since the formation of the shared service. Paragraph 5.2 of the report set out the same information in respect of housing benefit average processing times. The latest figures as at the end of July 2020 showed the City of Lincoln performing at 16.16 days and North Kesteven 16.15 days.

46. Revenues and Benefits - Financial Monitoring Quarter 1 2020/21

Purpose of Report

To provide the Joint Committee with the first quarter's performance for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service for 2020/21.

Decision

That the actual position at quarter 1 be noted and the budget adjustments for 2020/21 as per para 3.2 be approved.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The approved budget for 2020/21 was agreed by the Joint Committee on 5 February 2019 and had been set at £2,426,630 for the Shared Service. This had since been increased by the agreed carry forward budget from 2019/20, totalling £51,940. In addition a number of New Burdens grants for NK were still to be reflected which would offset their proportion of the forecast overspend.

Financial Performance for the first quarter of 2020/21 was detailed in Appendix 1 of the report and it was noted that there was an underspend against the approved budget of £2,590.

The forecast outturn for 2020/21 predicted that there would be an overspend against the approved budget of £10,737 as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report.

A summary of the main forecast year-end variations against the approved budget were set out in the report and included IT costs, salaries, car allowances mileage and agency spend.

Councillor Ray Cucksey sought clarification as to why agency staff were not used and whether this was down to the team that was currently in place and whether there were any staff changes anticipated. It was reported that over the last 2/3 years staff turnover had been reduced and was mainly down to the team being happy and having a lot of support from managers. The Council Tax Team

Leader was leaving at the end of the month but this position had been filled internally

47. Business Rates Update

Purpose of Report

To provide the Joint Committee with an update on current issues within non-domestic rates.

Decision

That the report be noted.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The following updates were noted:

Expanded Retail Discount

In response to Covid-19, in the budget on 11 March 2020, Government announced that it would increase the discount for 2020/21 to 100% and extend it to include the leisure and hospitality sectors. On 23 March 2020, further measures were announced which resulted in the relief being applied to occupied retail, leisure and hospitality properties in the year 2020/21, as well as removing the rateable value limit.

Nursery Discount

In response to Covid-19, Government announced a business rates Nursery Discount on 18 March 2020. The relief was to be applied to hereditaments occupied by providers on Ofsted's Early Years Register and wholly or mainly used for the provision of the Early Years Foundation Stage and which are subject to businesses rates in the year 2020/21.

Support for Businesses – Grants

In response to Covid-19, the Government announced there would be support for small businesses and businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. The support will take the form of two grant funding schemes in the financial year of 2020/21 – these being:

- Small Business Grant Fund - £10,000 grant; and
- Retail Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund - £10,000 or £25,000 grant.

Small Business Grant Fund

This fund was available for all businesses in England in receipt of either Small Business Rates (SBRR) or Rural Rates Relief (RRR). The value of the grant was £10,000.

It was reported that each authority set up a grants team, which included officers from various service areas such as Economic Development, Business Support, Finance and Revenues and Benefits. The grants team mobilised quickly and put stages in place as at paragraph 7.4 of the report.

Retail Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund

This fund was available for all businesses in England that would have been in receipt of the Expanded Retail Discount on 11 March 2020 and with a rateable value up to (but not including) £51,000.

The total grants awarded for each LA as at 16 August 2020 was shown in the table at paragraph 8.7 and 8.8 of the report.

Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund

This additional fund was aimed at small and micro businesses who were not eligible for the Small Business Grant Fund or Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Fund.

The total grants awarded for each LA as at 16 August 2020 was shown in the table at paragraph 9.8 of the report.

Discretionary Relief Scheme

The tables at paragraph 10.6 of the report outlined the number of accounts identified and the total cost of relief for all 4 years for each of the partner authorities.

It was reported that there was a typing error at paragraph 8.7. the figure for North Kesteven should read £22.3m.

Councillor Ray Cucksey commented that a lot of support had been given to businesses especially as a lot of them were under enormous pressure. Gratitude should be given to the team especially as they have been working from home and had still managed to achieve a lot and help a lot of businesses.

48. Welfare Reform Update

Purpose of Report

To provide the Joint Committee with an update regarding the national and local position of welfare reform, with a specific focus on the local advice referral process and Covid-19 support.

Decision

That the report be noted and an update would be presented at the next meeting of this committee on 26th November 2020.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The report provided the Joint Committee with national and local changes made to support those financially adversely affected by Covid-19

Appendix 1 of the report showed the areas referrals were received from. Along with details of the point of referral.

As a result of Covid-19, there had been a number of changes made to legacy benefits, Universal Credit and support for those in or retaining employment. These announcements were detailed in Appendix 2 of the report.

Appendix 3 of the report showed the guidance that was provided to staff following the outbreak of Covid-19.

SUBJECT: COVID-19 IMPACTS ON REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICE

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE & TOWN CLERK

LEAD OFFICER: MARTIN WALMSLEY, HEAD OF SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update regarding Covid-19 impacts on the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The international Covid-19 pandemic has clearly had a significant impact on a whole range of Council services – with Revenues and Benefits being no exception. This reports sets out key impacts on the shared service.

3. Background

- 3.1 The first national ‘lockdown’ in the United Kingdom, announced on 23rd March 2020, resulted in the remaining members of the Revenues and Benefits shared service team being mobilised to work from home – with all IT facilities, - i.e. computers and telephones. Further mobilisation of homeworking had already commenced the week prior, as officers identified in the more vulnerable categories were addressed earlier. Some initial ‘teething problems’ were soon dealt with and this critical service has been operating successfully.
- 3.2 Regarding workload and priorities, the impacts have been significant – in terms of collection and recovery of monies due to the Council, levels of benefit and Council Tax Support claims, requests for data extracts from the Revenues and Benefits ICT system, delivery of Test and Trace Support Payments, as well as being central to the assessment and delivery of grants and reliefs to qualifying businesses.

4. Staffing Matters

- 4.1 All members of the Revenues and Benefits were mobilised to work from home during a two-week period during March 2020. Around one-quarter of the team already had working from home IT facilities in place, mainly for ad hoc purposes and specific tasks, so the concept was proven – however, the large scale deployment of staff to work from home (not only within the shared service, but across the partner Councils as a whole too) has been unprecedented.
- 4.2 The rollout of ICT provision for the whole of the shared service has successfully considered and delivered:

- Provision of ICT hardware suitable for secure homeworking, which also meets standards as required through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Memorandum of Understanding with regard to access to sensitive and confidential DWP data;
- Telephone services through transfer of calls to team members' own telephones – this system has since been enhanced with investment in a telephone system which will better enable taking higher volumes of calls – for example, when Council Tax reminders are issued.

4.3 Staff wellbeing continues to be at the heart of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, by partner Councils. In terms of Revenues and Benefits specifically, communications include;

- Twice-weekly catch-up Teams calls between Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, and Revenues and Benefits Manager;
- Regular catch-up calls with Team Leaders;
- Regular catch-up calls with team members;
- Revenues and Benefits Management Team WhatsApp group;
- Individual teams' WhatsApp groups and Teams meetings.

In addition to this, 'all team member' Revenues and Benefits staff briefings were delivered by the Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits on 22nd September (through 4 x 45-minute sessions). The Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits has regularly delivered such sessions since the shared service commenced, however this was the first round of briefings held via Microsoft Teams. 55 team members out of the team of 88 attending a session, meaning Teams is being successfully rolled out across the team and engagement was positive. The briefings set out some key messages around:

- Performance;
- Impacts on workload due to Covid-19;
- Future ways of working;
- Communication and wellbeing.

The next round of briefings is scheduled for 9th December.

5. Impacts – Service demands and Financial impacts

5.1 In 2020/21, financial impacts on partner Councils, have been (*information as at 31st October 2020*):

Council Tax:

		Lincoln	North Kesteven
Payments received	Comparison to 2019	8,081 less	6,580 less
Payments value (£)		£743,824 reduction	£699,816 reduction
Deferrals no.	Since 01.04.20	638	1,181
Deferrals value (£)		£135,429	£296,587
Direct debits received	Comparison to 2019	4,244 less	612 more
Direct debit value (£)		£125,363 more	£1,290,363 more
Direct debits cancelled	Since 01.04.20	400	359
Direct debit value (£)		£43,694	£45,833
CTS claims received (increase)	Since 01.04.20	+436	+242
CTS additional cost (£)		+£369,871	+£266,131
Collection rate %	Actual – as at 31.10.20	59.08%	64.54%
Difference %	Comparison to 2019	-2.49%	-2.38%
Collection rate difference £	Comparison to 2019	-£1,145,938	- £1,636,562
CTS hardship to be awarded	As at 31.10.20	£869,650	£320,015
% of CTS against net liability	As at 31.10.20	1.88%	0.45%

Business Rates:

		COL	NKDC	WLDC
Payments received	Comparison to 2019	2,203 less	1,210 less	736 less
Payments value (£)		£7,537,020 reduction	£1,244,019 reduction	£1,897,536 reduction
Deferrals no	Since 01.04.20	9	4	9
Deferrals value (£)		£14,377	£14,233	£29,854
Direct debits received	Comparison to 2019	4,913 less	2,429 less	1,871 less
Direct debit value (£)		£8,206,631 reduction	£3,219,818 reduction	£2,277,961 reduction
Direct debits cancelled	Since 01.04.20	14	16	N/A
Direct debit value (£)		£1,212,557	£748,429	N/A
Collection rate %	Actual as at 31.10.20	71.25%	71.19%	64.39%
Difference %	Comparison to 2019	+3.94%	+1.55%	-2.540%
Collection rate difference £	Comparison to 2019	+£752,981	+£315,211	-£300,700
Net liability (Reduction due to Expanded Retail Discount)	Actual	£19,111,202 (-£26,389,045)	£20,336,187 (-£8,544,237)	£11,838,571 (-£6,590,261)

5.2 In addition to the above, significant increases in demands on the shared service have included:

- Business Rates: 33% increase in telephone calls and 10% in incoming correspondence (comparing October 2020 to October 2019);
- Council Tax: 43% increase in e-forms and 12% increase in incoming e-mails (comparing August-October 2020, to August-October 2019);

- Benefits:
 - o 42% increase in Council Tax Support claims and changes in Quarters 1 and 2 2020/21 (compared to Quarters 1 and 2 2019/20);
 - o 96% increase in Universal Credit related documents in Quarters 1 and 2 2020/21 (compared to Quarters 1 and 2 2019/20).

5.3 Collection and recovery of monies due to the Council has clearly been more challenging in 2020/21, although reminders are now being issued appropriately to taxpayers and ratepayers – this is under continual review due to the ongoing and changing nature of rules relating to the global pandemic.

5.4 Despite all these additional challenges and demands on the shared service, performance has generally continue to hold up relatively well in most areas, so far. Moving forward it is recognised cumulative effects from Covid-19 are likely to impact on performance in the coming months, and potentially even years. Performance data is set out in a separate report to today’s Committee.

6. Strategic Priorities

6.1 Both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven have a number of strategic priorities. Three that have an impact on the Revenues and Benefits Service are:-

- Lincoln: “Let’s reduce all kinds of inequality”.
- North Kesteven: “Our Communities”, “Our Economy”.

6.2 The Benefits Service plays a key role in reducing inequality by ensuring residents receive the benefits they are entitled to and providing money / debt advice. The Revenues Section is also mindful of the strategic priorities when engaging with business ratepayers as they recover business rates – and also promoting and encouraging growth in the districts. Digital Inclusion, Channel Shift / Customer Experience, Financial Inclusion and Partnership Working are all key priorities for the shared service.

7. Organisational Impacts

7.1 Finance: there are no direct financial implications arising as a result of this report.

7.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules: There are no direct Legal or Procurement implications arising from this report.

7.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights: There are no direct implications arising from this report.

8. Risk Implications

8.1 A Risk Register is in place for the Revenues and Benefits shared service.

9. Recommendations

9.1 Note the information as set out in this report.

9.2 Request a further update at the 23rd February 2021 meeting of this Committee.

Lead Martin Walmsley

Officer: Telephone 01522 873597

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SUBJECT:	PERFORMANCE UPDATE
DIRECTORATE:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
REPORT AUTHOR:	MARTIN WALMSLEY, HEAD OF SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide Members with an update on performance in the Revenues and Benefits shared service.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 This report provides an update on Revenues and Benefits performance 2020/21, up to the end of October 2020.

2.2 The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service has now been in operation since 1st June 2011, and performance has been maintained and improved whilst continuing to provide value for money. Continual improvement and success is being achieved in terms of both statistical and financial performance, as well as positive outcomes for customers of the partner local authorities. However, the Covid-19 global pandemic has understandably impacted on some areas of performance.

3. Background

3.1 At the 10th September 2020 meeting of this Committee, a report was presented detailing Revenues and Benefits performance up to the end of July 2020.

3.2 Performance is reported to this Committee on a quarterly basis.

3.3 Performance continues to be impacted by Covid-19 – a separate report on the impacts on Revenues and Benefits is also included on today’s Committee Agenda. Officers have proactively responded to Covid-19, including;

- Reduced levels of recovery action being taken in the first half of 2020/21;
- Deferrals of Council Tax and Business Rates payments being permitted;
- Processing a significant increase in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claims;
- Assessment and award of new government reliefs and grants.

Performance is likely to be impacted for many more months due to the cumulative effects of Covid-19 on household and business incomes.

4. Revenues Performance

4.1 Council Tax

4.2 Up to the end of October 2020, in-year collection for Lincoln and North Kesteven is down by 2.49% and 2.38% respectively, compared to the same point in 2019. Due to the financial impacts of Covid-19 on residents' incomes, officers have been allowing deferrals of payments in relevant circumstances, although this means that these deferred monies will still need to be collected in the coming months. Also, considering payments that have not been made (i.e. aside from deferral requests allowed), these reduced levels of collection are not unexpected. The table below shows how in-year collection is becoming 'further down' month-by-month (compared to the equivalent points in 2019/20). Whilst every effort is being made to collect monies due, in the current climate this is a real challenge – and, with the latest Covid-19 lockdown – is unlikely to improve in the immediate future.

	End Oct 2020	End Sept 2020	End Aug 2020	End Jul 2020	End Jun 2020	End May 2020	End Apr 2020
City of Lincoln	2.49% ↓	2.34% ↓	2.29% ↓	1.30% ↓	0.81% ↓	0.56% ↓	0.22% ↓
North Kesteven	2.38% ↓	1.41% ↓	1.36% ↓	1.11% ↓	0.91% ↓	0.78% ↓	0.42% ↓

4.3 Net collectable debit for 2020/21 (compared to 2019/20) has increased by £1.2m for Lincoln and £2.8m for North Kesteven.

4.4 Business Rates

4.5 Up to the end of October 2020 (compared to the end of October 2019), 2020/21 in-year collection for Lincoln and North Kesteven is up by 3.94% and 1.55% respectively. However, these figures remain somewhat 'skewed' by the new reliefs available this year in light of the new measures announced as part of the government's Covid-19 response. For Lincoln there is still £5.5m to be collected as at the end of October 2020, with the equivalent figure for North Kesteven being £5.9m. West Lindsey in-year collection is down by 2.54% at the end of October 2020 - again, net liability is greatly reduced due to reliefs applied – there remains £1.7m to be collected in respect of 2020/21.

4.6 The table below shows, for Lincoln and North Kesteven, that since the award of Expanded Retail Discount in-year collection is generally 'less up' month-on-month, as a truer picture in-year collection becomes apparent. With the second national lockdown now in place and the subsequent impact on businesses, it is anticipated that the final five months of this financial year will continue to provide some real challenges in this area of collection.

	End Oct 2020	End Sept 2020	End Aug 2020	End Jul 2020	End Jun 2020	End May 2020	End Apr 2020
City of Lincoln	3.94% ↑	5.57% ↑	6.54% ↑	8.50% ↑	6.82% ↑	7.71% ↑	0.47% ↑
North Kesteven	1.55% ↑	1.70% ↑	2.18% ↑	2.61% ↑	3.12% ↑	2.65% ↑	9.97% ↓
West Lindsey	2.54% ↓	2.63% ↓	1.21% ↓	1.00% ↓	0.55% ↓	1.08% ↓	4.30% ↓

4.7 Outstanding Revenues Customers

4.8 As at the end of October 2020, outstanding Revenues customers stood at a total of 845 (split Lincoln 621, North Kesteven 224). Although this figure has increased in recent months, this is as a direct result of the first Covid-19 national lockdown ending and house moves increasing resulting in increased enquiries to the Revenues Team.

4.9 Housing Benefit Overpayments

4.10 As at the end of October 2020, in-year collection rates and outstanding monies are as shown in the table below:

2020/21 – to end October 2020	City of Lincoln	North Kesteven
In-year collection rate	150.78%	119.29%
Outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments debt	£3,360,195	£1,471,887

4.11 Positively, outstanding debt continues to decrease and in-period collection exceeds 100% for both partner Councils.

5. Benefits Performance

5.1 As at the end of October 2020, there are 1,644 Benefits customers outstanding (split Lincoln 1,347 – oldest item dated 14th October, North Kesteven 297 – oldest item dated 26th October). The ongoing impacts of Covid-19 from mid-end March 2020 cannot be underestimated – with a significant increase in benefit claims over the course of the year so far. The number of Universal Credit (UC) documents requiring processing continues to have a real impact.

5.2 Despite the increase in claims, Benefit claims continue to be processed on a timely basis – as shown in the table below.

2020/21 – to end October 2020	City of Lincoln	North Kesteven
New Claims – average time to process	16.61 days <i>(End October 2019 21.35 days)</i>	15.38 days <i>(End October 2019 19.89 days)</i>
Changes of Circumstance – average time to process	4.75 days <i>(End October 2019 5.52 days)</i>	3.41 days <i>(End July 2019 4.70 days)</i>

5.3 Prompt processing of claims remains vital, but of equal importance is accuracy of processing and ‘getting it right, first time’. In 2020/21, up to the end of October 2020, City of Lincoln’s ‘right first time’ assessment of cases checked is 92% (170 out of 184) and for North Kesteven 96% (380/395). These checks are in addition to those carried out through the checks required to be carried out under the requirements of the annual Housing Benefit Subsidy claims.

6. Welfare and Benefits Advice

6.2 Providing benefits and money advice continues to be key, with a team of dedicated and knowledgeable officers providing invaluable support to residents of Lincoln. In the second quarter of 2020/21, the team has achieved the following:

Quarter 2 2020/21	City of Lincoln	North Kesteven
Advice provided enabling weekly value of additional benefits	£3,930	£1,453
Advice provided enabling lump sum award of additional benefits	£68,776	£29,934
No. of customers to whom help provided	1,009	204
No. money advice referrals	28	11

7. Strategic Priorities

7.1 Both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven have a number of strategic priorities. Three that have an impact on the Revenues and Benefits Service are:-

- Lincoln: “Let’s reduce all kinds of inequality”.
- North Kesteven: “Our Communities”, “Our Economy”.

7.2 The Benefits Service plays a key role in reducing inequality by ensuring residents receive the benefits they are entitled to and providing money / debt advice. The Revenues Section is also mindful of the strategic priorities when engaging with business ratepayers as they recover business rates – and also promoting and encouraging growth in the districts. Digital Inclusion, Channel Shift / Customer Experience, Financial Inclusion and Partnership Working are all key priorities for the shared service.

8. Organisational Impacts

8.1 Finance: There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules: There are no direct Legal or Procurement implications arising from this report.

8.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights: There are no direct implications arising from this report.

9. Risk Implications

9.1 A Risk Register is in place for the Revenues and Benefits shared service.

10. Recommendations

10.1 Note the performance information as set out in this report.

10.2 Note that a performance update will be presented at the next meeting of this committee on 23rd February 2021.

Is this a key decision? Yes/No

Do the exempt information categories apply? Yes/No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? Yes/No

How many appendices does the report contain? Appendix 1: Performance Data 2020/21 to end October 2020

List of Background Papers: None

Lead Officer: Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits
Telephone (01522) 873597

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Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee 26th November 2020
 Performance Update
 Appendix 1: Performance Data –2020/21 to end October 2020

Measure	2020/21 – to end October 2020		2019/20 Annual Outturn	
	NK	COL	NK	COL
Local Authority				
Council Tax collection (cumulative)	65.54%	59.08%	98.89%	96.77%
NNDR collection (cumulative)	71.19%	71.25%	99.43%	99.46%
NNDR collection – WLDC (cumulative)	64.39%		98.63%	
No. Revenues customers awaiting change to be processed	224	621	155	371
Total Net Arrears for Council Tax prior years (i.e. not including current year)	£1,727,917	3,796,016	£1,094,825	£2,602,690
Total Net Arrears for NNDR prior years (i.e. not including current year)	£459,339	£677,997	£96,205	£104,160
Housing Benefit overpayments collection in period	119.29%	150.78%	106.12%	105.52%
Outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments debt	£1,471,887	£3,360,195	£1,530,967	£3,573,112
Housing Benefit New Claims: Average number of days to process (cumulative)	15.38 days	16.61 days	19.60 days	20.60 days
Housing Benefits Changes of Circumstances: Average number of days to process (cumulative)	3.41 days	4.75 days	2.83 days	3.17 days
No. Benefits customers awaiting assessment (cumulative)	297	1,347	456	1,510
% Benefits claims checked financially correct (cumulative)	96%	92%	98%	95%

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**SUBJECT: REVENUES AND BENEFITS - FINANCIAL MONITORING
QUARTER 2 2020/21**

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE & TOWN CLERK

**LEAD OFFICER: MARTIN WALMSLEY, HEAD OF SHARED REVENUES AND
BENEFITS**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present to Members the second quarter's performance for the Revenues and Benefits shared service for 2020/21.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The forecast outturn for 2020/21 predicts that there will be an overspend against the approved budget of £34,462. However, it is anticipated that further New Burdens will be received during the year that will mitigate this overspend.

3. Background

- 3.1 The approved budget for 2020/21 was agreed by Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee on 5th February 2020. The Committee set a budget for 2020/21 of £2,426,630 for the service, which has since been increased by the agreed carry forward budget from 2019/20 totalling £51,940. North Kesteven will be recharged throughout the year for the agreed value of £27,010. At quarter 2 the budget has subsequently been reduced by the sum of £43,500 to reflect the reductions in expenditure arising through a change in operations during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, a number of New Burdens grants have been received which have now been reflected in the budgets.

- 3.2 The budget has been revised as follows: -

	City of Lincoln	North Kesteven	Total
	£	£	£
Original Budget	1,293,220	1,133,410	2,426,630
Carry Forward from 19/20	24,930	27,010	51,940
Budget reductions resulting from revised operating model	(21,620)	(21,880)	(43,500)
New Burdens – PSCS Uprating	340	340	681
New Burdens – ESA Changes	688	688	1,375
New Burdens – Capture of IP Addresses	1,135	1,135	2,269
New Burdens – VEP's to 2A	1,876	1,876	3,751
New Burdens – SDP/MSC Trans to UCHP	1,977	1,977	3,954
New Burdens – Extra Postage	681	641	1,322

New Burdens – Northgate Covid19 Changes	328	328	655
New Burdens – HB Award Accuracy Initiative	8,570	4,866	13,437
REVISED BUDGET	1,312,124	1,150,390	2,462,515

4. Quarter Two Financial Performance and Forecast Outturn 2020/21

4.1 Performance Quarter 2

Financial performance for the first quarter of 2020/21 is detailed in Appendix 1 to this report. At quarter 2, there is an overspend against the approved budget of £13,987.

4.2 Forecast Outturn 2020/21

The forecast outturn for 2020/21 predicts that there will be an overspend against the approved budget of £34,462. It is however anticipated that further New Burdens funding will be received during the year which will mitigate this forecast overspend. Further detail is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

4.3 A summary of the main forecast year-end variations against the approved budget for 2020/21 is shown in the table below:

<u>Service Area</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>Reason for variance</u>
Management		
Staffing	5,891	National pay award of 2.75% above budget of 2% and additional hours required as a result of Covid19 pandemic response.
Benefits		
Staffing	(10,080)	National pay award of 2.75% above budget of 2%, offset by turnover/vacancies.
Overtime	12,040	Additional hours required as a result of increased demand due to the Covid-19 pandemic response.
IT Costs	27,598	New DWP Legislation changes.
New Burdens	(27,445)	New Burdens received to date, details as per para 3.2.
Revenues Local Taxation		
Staffing	6,938	National pay award of 2.75% above budget of 2%, offset by turnover/vacancies.
IT Costs	19,839	New Software requirements & Cloud managed Telephony service to enable remote working.

Benefits/Money Advice	None	
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5. Organisational Impacts

- 5.1 The financial implications are contained throughout the report.
- 5.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report.
- 5.3 There are no equality and diversity implications as a direct result of this report.

6. Risk Implications

- 6.1 A full financial risk assessment is included in the Council’s Medium Financial Strategy.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 Members are recommended to note the actual position at quarter 2.
- 7.2 Members are recommended to approve the budget adjustments for 2020/21 as per para 3.2.

Key Decision No

Do the Exempt Information Categories Apply? No

Call in and Urgency: Is the decision one to which Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply? No

How many appendices does the report contain? Two

List of Background Papers: None

Lead Officer: Martin Walmsley
Telephone 01522 873597

Appendix 1 Actual Position as at Quarter 2 2020/21

	Profiled Budget			Actual			Variance		
	CoLC	NK	Combined	CoLC	NK	Combined	CoLC	NK	Combined
Revenues & Benefits									
Management	101,230	101,190	202,420	103,516	103,516	207,032	2,286	2,326	4,612
Benefits	313,190	227,060	540,255	320,148	231,831	551,979	6,958	4,771	11,729
Revenues Local Taxation	178,260	185,400	363,655	181,110	188,502	369,612	2,850	3,102	5,952
Money Advice	58,670	58,650	117,325	54,507	54,507	109,014	(4,163)	(4,143)	(8,306)
Total 2020/21	651,350	572,300	1,223,655	659,281	578,356	1,237,637	7,931	6,056	13,987

Appendix 2 Forecast Financial Outturn for 2020/21

	Annual Budget			Forecast Outturn			Variance		
	CoLC	NK	Combined	CoLC	NK	Combined	CoLC	NK	Combined
Revenues & Benefits Management	177,370	177,310	354,680	181,126	181,065	362,191	3,756	3,755	7,511
Benefits	642,294	465,660	1,107,955	641,505	465,088	1,106,593	(789)	(572)	(1,361)
Revenues Local Taxation	374,820	389,830	764,650	388,980	404,557	793,537	14,160	14,727	28,887
Money Advice	117,640	117,590	235,230	117,353	117,303	234,655	(287)	(287)	(575)
Total 2020/21	1,312,124	1,150,390	2,462,515	1,328,964	1,168,013	2,496,977	16,840	17,623	34,462

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SUBJECT: BUSINESS RATES UPDATE

DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT AUTHOR: CLAIRE MOSES, REVENUES AND BENEFITS MANAGER

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide Joint Committee with an update on current issues within non-domestic rate.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 This report provides Joint Committee with an update on non-domestic rate to include reference to City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council. The report is not intended to include non-domestic rate issues (for example, performance matters) covered in another report before the Joint Committee.

3. Background

3.1 The report focuses on the changes announced as a result of Covid-19 and the support provided to businesses in the form of relief and grants. The report also focuses on the financial impact of recent appeals and reductions to rateable values.

3.2 Focus for both Government and billing authorities since the last meeting of Joint Committee has been responding to Covid-19 measures which have been announced since 11 March 2020.

4. Expanded Retail Discount

4.1 The Government announced in the Budget on 29 October 2018 that it would provide Business Rates Retail Discount, to apply in the years 2019/20 (33% discount) and 2020/21 (50%) discount. This would be for businesses with a rateable value up to (but not including) 51,000.

4.2 In response to Covid-19, in the Budget on 11 March 2020, Government announced that it would increase the discount for 2020/21 to 100% and extend it to include the leisure and hospitality sectors. On 23 March 2020, further measures were announced which resulted in the relief being applied to occupied retail, leisure and hospitality properties in the year 2020/21, as well as removing the rateable value limit.

4.3 Eligibility criteria was set out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and issued to Local Authorities on 2 April 2020. This can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-rates-retail-discount-guidance>.

- 4.4 Properties that will benefit from the relief will be occupied hereditaments that are wholly or mainly being used:
- a) as shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas and live music venues;
 - b) for assembly and leisure; or
 - c) as hotels, guest & boarding premises and self-catering accommodation.
- 4.5 MHCLG guidance provided further detailed lists of properties which fell into the above categories but made it clear that the list is not intended to be exhaustive. The list was intended to be a guide for Local Authorities (LA's) as to the types of uses that the Government considers for the purpose to be eligible for relief. LA's were required to determine for themselves whether particular properties not listed are broadly similar in nature to those above, and if so, to consider them eligible for the relief.
- 4.6 Government will reimburse LA's that use their discretionary relief powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (amended). LA's had already completed their NDR1 for 2020/21 and as a result, were asked to provide further and separate estimates of their likely total cost for providing the relief. These costs are provided to Government on a weekly basis.
- 4.7 The total awarded under this relief, is shown in the table below, and details the number and value as at the last meeting of this committee and as at 9 November 2020: -

City of Lincoln	Total awards	Value of awards
10.09.20	1,018	£26,899,415
09.11.20	1,029	£26,976,268

North Kesteven	Total awards	Value of awards
10.09.20	527	£9,163,133
09.11.20	542	£9,276,621

West Lindsey	Total awards	Value of awards
10.09.20	357	£6,749,196
09.11.20	366	£6,770,734

5. Nursery Discount

- 5.1 In response to Covid-19, Government announced a business rates Nursery Discount on 18 March 2020.
- 5.2 Eligibility criteria was set out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and issued to Local Authorities on 2 April 2020. This can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-rates-nursery-childcare-discount-2020-to-2021-coronavirus-response-local-authority-guidance>
- 5.3 The relief was to be applied to hereditaments occupied by providers on Ofsted's Early Years Register and wholly or mainly used for the provision of the Early Years Foundation Stage and which are subject to businesses rates in the year 2020/21.

- 5.4 There is no rateable value limit on the relief and where necessary, Ofsted were able to Local Authorities (LA's) with access to the register to help identify eligible hereditaments.
- 5.5 Government will reimburse LA's that use their discretionary relief powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (amended). LA's had already completed their NDR1 for 2020/21 and as a result, were asked to provide further and separate estimates of their likely total cost for providing the relief. These costs are provided to Government on a weekly basis.
- 5.6 The total awarded under this relief, is shown in the table below, and details the number and value as at the last meeting of this committee and as at 9 November 2020: -

City of Lincoln	Total awards	Value of awards
10.09.20	16	£173,915
09.11.20	15	£168,302

North Kesteven	Total awards	Value of awards
10.09.20	16	£168,127
09.11.20	17	£169,729

West Lindsey	Total awards	Value of awards
10.09.20	9	£27,254
09.11.20	9	£27,254

6. Support for businesses – Lockdown grants

- 6.1 On 31 October 2020, the Government announced new national restrictions which require certain businesses and venues to close - or restrict how they provide goods and services - from 5 November to 2 December 2020. These are:
- Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSB); and
 - Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG).
- 6.2 Local Authorities will be issued funding allocations that will be calculated using the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) data, based on the categories of business relevant to the closures imposed by Government.
- This is to provide each eligible Local Authority with an allocation based on a consistent approach that reflects the businesses closed by national restrictions.
- Local Authorities will monitor this on a weekly basis and if the allocation proves insufficient for all eligible businesses top-up funding will be provided.
- 6.3 Local Authorities (LA's) are responsible for delivering the funding to eligible businesses with Government reimbursing the payments made by LA's, in line with set criteria.
- 6.4 Government expected the grant scheme to offer a lifeline to businesses who are struggling to survive during Covid-19 lockdown and requested that LA's make payments as quickly as possible to support them.

6.5 Grants covered by this policy will be issued in accordance with government guidance detailed on 3 November 2020 in respect of the Local Restriction Support Grant (LRSG Closed) and the Additional Restrictions Grant Schemes, along with guidance about the required closures. Any updated guidance or FAQs subsequently published by Government in respect of these schemes will also apply. Guidance can be accessed via the following link.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-restrictions-support-grants-lrsg-and-additional-restrictions-grant-arg-guidance-for-local-authorities>

6.6 The report does not include an update for West Lindsey District Council grants as these are not administered by the shared service.

7. Local Restrictions Support Grant

7.1 The support will take the form of a grant funding scheme in Financial Year 2020-2021 and will be for the period of the current lockdown period only (5 November 2020 to 2 December 2020). Local Authorities will be provided with funding for businesses that were required to close because of the formal publication of local restrictions guidance by central Government.

7.2 Local Authorities will be issued funding allocations that will be calculated using the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) data, based on the categories of business relevant to the closures imposed by Government.

This is to provide each eligible Local Authority with an allocation based on a consistent approach that reflects the businesses closed by national restrictions.

Local Authorities will monitor this on a weekly basis and if the allocation proves insufficient for all eligible businesses top-up funding will be provided.

The level of funding provided for this grant is as follows:

Local Authority	Grant Allocation
City of Lincoln	£2,181,564
North Kesteven	£1,311,462

7.3 Those eligible for this grant are businesses that: -

- Have been open as usual and providing in-person services to customers from their business premises on 4 November 2020 and then instructed to close by Government from 5 November 2020 – a full list of businesses are included here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close/closing-certain-businesses-and-venues-in-england>; and
- still be closed due to national restrictions imposed on 23 March 2020 as a result of regulations made under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 i.e. nightclubs, dance halls, discotheques, sexual entertainment venues and hostess bars.

- 7.4 Where a property (hereditament) has mixed premises and only part of the business is subject to national closures (e.g. locksmith/shoe repairs, restaurant/takeaway), the hereditament will be eligible to receive a LRSG grant if the business is required to close its main service. Local Authorities will be required to exercise their discretion and judge whether this is the case based on their local knowledge.
- 7.5 Businesses that were required to close but then diversify to remain open in part e.g. restaurants/cafes that close but retain a takeaway service, or shops that close but retain a click and collect facility, will still be eligible for a grant
- 7.6 Each local authority is currently designing their own policy and online application process. Currently the details are not known, and as such, a verbal update will be provided at the meeting of this committee on 26 November 2020.

8. Additional Restrictions Grant

- 8.1 The support will take the form of a funding scheme in Financial Year 2020-2021 and can be used across Financial Years 20/21 and 21/22.

Local Authorities will receive a one-off lump sum payment amounting to £20 per head of population. Local Authorities are only eligible to receive funding once.

The level of funding provided for this grant is as follows:

Local Authority	Grant Allocation
City of Lincoln	£1,985,980
North Kesteven	£2,338,300

- 8.2 Local authorities can determine how much funding to provide to businesses and exactly which businesses to target.
- 8.3 Guidance issued by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), encourages Local Authorities to develop a discretionary grant scheme to help those businesses which – while not legally forced to close – are nonetheless severely impacted by the restrictions put in place to control the spread of Covid-19.
- 8.4 Each local authority is currently designing their own policy and online application process. Currently the details are not known, and as such, a verbal update will be provided at the meeting of this committee on 26 November 2020.

9. ATM – appeal threat

- 9.1 On Wednesday 20th May 2020 the Supreme Court gave its decision on whether Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) accessed from inside or outside a host retail property should be separately assessed.

The court dismissed the appeals, stating that internal and external ATMs are to be treated the same and should not be separately assessed.

The decision can be found at <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/uksc-2018-0225.html>.

- 9.2 As a result, a significant number of related appeal cases are now being settled following the Supreme Court decision. ATM's have been included as an appeal threat for some time, and as a result, provision has been made for removal of rateable value and potential refunds. The level of refunds which have been issued so far are: -

City of Lincoln	£587,433
North Kesteven	£350,203
West Lindsey	£185,309

10. Purpose built GP Surgeries – appeal threat

- 10.1 On 15th May 2020, the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) announced that they were planning to review the valuations for purpose-built GP surgeries. GP surgeries have been included as an appeal threat for some time, and as a result, provision has been made for a reduction in rateable value.
- 10.2 The level of reduction in rateable value so far are as follows: -

	Reduction in liability for	
	2020/2021	Previous years
City of Lincoln	£60,215	£86,420
North Kesteven	£72,453	£76,940
West Lindsey	£22,313	£25,255

11. Strategic Priorities

- 11.1 Both authorities look to protect the poorest people. The Non-Domestic Rate Service is mindful of the strategic priorities when engaging with business ratepayers as they look to recover the business rate.

12. Organisational Impacts

12.1 Finance

Local Authorities will be compensated in full for the costs of the new business rates reliefs announced as part of the March 2020 Budget and in response to COVID19.

Central Government are fully funding the cost of the support to businesses grants that have been administered by local authorities.

Each local authority will need to take into consideration the implications arising for ATM's and GP surgeries as part of their provision for appeals calculations when preparing their NNDR3 returns, with a consequent impact on the level of surplus or deficit to be declared. There will also be an ongoing loss of NNDR which will be accounted for during the preparation of future NNDR1 forecasts.

12.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules

No direct financial implications arising from this report.

12.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights

The equality implications have been considered within this report. In bringing forward any change to the existing criteria for awarding discretionary relief, consideration will be given as to whether a full Equality Impact Assessment is required.

13.1 A Risk Register is in place for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service.

14. Recommendation

14.1 Members are requested to note this report.

Is this a key decision?	No
Do the exempt information categories apply?	No
Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?	No
How many appendices does the report contain?	None
List of Background Papers:	None

Lead Officer: Claire Moses, Revenues and Benefits Manager
Telephone: 01522 873764

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SUBJECT:	WELFARE REFORM, COVID SUPPORT AND DHP UPDATE
DIRECTORATE:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
LEAD OFFICER:	CLAIRE MOSES, REVENUES AND BENEFITS MANAGER

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Joint Committee with an update regarding the national and local position of welfare reform, with a specific focus on the local advice referral process, COVID-19 support and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) for this report.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides Joint Committee with an update on national Universal Credit changes; to include reference to the national statistics and national legislation changes.

The report will also provide Joint Committee with an update regarding local advice referral into the Welfare Reform Support team.

The report will also provide Joint Committee with an update regarding the national and local changes made to support those financially adversely affected by COVID-19.

The report will also provide an update on the financial position for Discretionary Housing Payments.

3. Background

- 3.1 Future reports will provide Joint Committee with an up to date position on the following:

- National UC Progress - statistics;
- National legislation changes; and
- Background Papers.

4. National Progress – Statistics

- 4.1 Latest figures published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were released on 13 October 2020, with statistics relevant to the period up to 10 September 2020.

- 5,688,095 households receiving UC (this is an increase from 5,461,352 as reported at the last meeting of this Committee)

Local authority statistics are also available as at 10 August 2020: -

- City of Lincoln – 10,354
- North Kesteven – 6,451.

5. Advice Referrals to Welfare Reform Support team (City of Lincoln)

- 5.1 The referrals come from Councils' service areas, customers and external stakeholders into the Shared Service Welfare Reform Support team (formerly Universal Support Team). **Appendix 1** shows the areas referrals are received from, along with details of the point of referral.
- 5.2 Since 27 January 2020, the Welfare Reform Support team have received 802 referrals. The table below shows the first point of contact and where these referrals have been received from: -

Benefits	110
Citizens Advice	29
Customer	135
Customer Services	116
DWP	46
Hospital	12
Housing	234
Housing Solutions (Council)	3
Housing Solutions (Private)	55
Parking	6
Private Landlord	9
Recovery	1
Support Workers	10
Voids	1
Welfare	32
Blanks	3
TOTAL	802

- 5.3 The advice referral process has resulted in all internal teams and partners working together with the objective of improving the customer journey. Financial outcomes for these customers will be mapped and an update will be provided at the next meeting of this committee.
- 5.4 As a result of COVID-19, the Welfare Reform Support team has been able to provide vital support to new and existing customers – both over the phone and via email. The team are able to explain customers what support is available to them (national and local), undertake assessments for Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support and Discretionary Housing Payments.

The team also provide advice and guidance to the Revenues and Benefits staff regarding changes to legislation.

6. COVID-19 National support for customers affected

- 6.1 As a result of the outbreak of COVID-19, there have been a number of changes made to legacy benefits, Universal Credit and support for those in or retaining employment. These announcements are detailed in **Appendix 2**.

7. COVID-19 Test and Trace Self Isolation Payments

- 7.1 From 28 September 2020, anyone who has been told to self-isolate has a legal obligation to do so. To support those who self-isolate, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) introduced the Test and Trace Self Isolation Payment (TTSIP).
- 7.2 The TTSIP is administered by Local Authorities, with guidance from DHSC. There are two schemes – the mandatory and discretionary. Both schemes are payments of £500 and certain eligibility criteria need to be met.

The mandatory scheme:

- 7.3 This is a national scheme and eligibility criteria has been set by the Department for Health and Social Care. The payment is £500 providing the individual lives in England and meet all the following criteria: -
- have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive; and
 - employed or self-employed; and
 - unable to work from home and will lose income as a result of self-isolating; and
 - currently receiving at least one of the following:
 - Universal Credit
 - Working Tax Credit
 - income-based Employment and Support Allowance
 - income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
 - Income Support
 - Housing Benefit
 - Pension Credit

The discretionary scheme:

- 7.4 There are three national eligibility criteria which has been set by the Department for Health and Social Care, then each Local Authority can include their own discretionary criteria.

7.5 The shared service has approved the same policy for both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven District Council. The eligibility criteria are as follows: -

- have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive; and
- employed or self-employed; and
- unable to work from home and will lose income as a result of self-isolating; and
- have capital of less than £1,000; and
- have income which does not exceed expenditure.

7.6 The Welfare Reform Support Team have received all applications and undertaken assessment decision.

In total, the team have received 248 applications, of which at the time of writing this report, 44 have received a payment. A breakdown of the payments is shown in the table below:

City of Lincoln:

				Paid	
	Received	Pending	Unsuccessful	Total	Value
Mandatory	148	14	14	13	£6,500
Discretionary		58	35	11	£5,500

North Kesteven:

				Paid	
	Received	Pending	Unsuccessful	Total	Value
Mandatory	100	7	14	8	£4,000
Discretionary		30	29	12	£6,000

8. Discretionary Housing Payments

8.1 Demand against 2020/21 DHP grants remains high. City of Lincoln budget is £250,113 and North Kesteven is £172,612. 2020/21 DHP central government grants for both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven have increased from 2019/20

8.2 The impact of UC in Lincoln and North Kesteven is constantly increasing and will continue to do so as UC continues to be rolled out. COVID-19 has had an impact on the number of UC claims being made – seeing an increase in claims, and as a result and increase in UC related DHP awards. The next stage of UC rollout is still due to

be undertaken, with a managed migration process for remaining legacy benefit customers

8.3 The table below updates on DHP spend to the 31 October 2020

LA	Total funding = Central Government DHP Grant 2020/21	DHP net spend as at 31 October 2020	DHP committed for 2020/21	DHP Total spend for 2020/21	% Grant spend	Unallocated DHP Grant
City of Lincoln	£250,113	£86,823	£37,621	£122,444	49%	£127,669
North Kesteven	£172,612	£65,827	£30,041	£95,868	56%	£79,744

8.6 Current spend is below the expected level at this point in the year. Officers are currently reviewing this and will undertake the following actions: -

- Liaise with Revenues & Benefits, Customer Services and Housing Teams to ensure they are aware for increased take-up
- Liaise with corporate Communication team for external comms via social media.

8.5 The table below breaks down the number of DHP applications received and determined up to 31 October 2020

DHP applications – Year 2020/21	City of Lincoln	North Kesteven
Total number awarded	282 (2019/20 = 345)	199 (2019/20 = 218)
No. awarded for Housing Benefit	169 (2019/20 = 204)	105 (2019/20 = 152)
No. awarded for Universal Credit	113 (2019/20 = 141)	94 (2019/20 = 66)
Average DHP award	£434.20 (2019/20 = £466.08)	£481.75 (2019/20 = £472.91)

8.7 An internal DHP working group continues to review DHP procedures with the aim of ensuring that those most in need of additional help with their housing costs receive appropriate support.

Each year, the DHP guidance is reviewed with recommendations made to Section 151 Officers of both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven for approval. Any changes proposed are with the aim to provide a positive impact in meeting local needs in relation to housing costs

9. Strategic Priorities

- 9.1 **City of Lincoln: Let's drive economic growth and North Kesteven: Our economy and Our Community:** An understanding of Universal Credit and its wider impacts on City of Lincoln residents and arrears levels is important when reducing poverty and driving economic growth across the City. The aim of Universal Credit is to provide a simplified means tested benefits system, with the objective of avoiding the 'poverty trap', where there is a disincentive to work longer hours because of the loss of benefits and higher taxes.
- 9.2 **City of Lincoln: Let's drive economic growth and North Kesteven: Our economy and Our Community:** - A key role in reducing inequality by ensuring residents receive the benefits they are entitled to and providing money / debt advice. There are strategic priorities when engaging with those in receipt of Welfare Benefits, Digital Inclusion, Channel Shift/ Customer Experience, Financial Inclusion and Partnership Working are all key priorities as part of this report.

10. Organisational Impacts

- 10.1 **Finance:** There are no direct financial implications arising as a result of this report.
- 10.2 **Legal implications inc Procurement Rules:** There are no direct Legal or Procurement implications arising from this report.

11. Risk Implications

- 11.1 The Councils bear the risk of local authority rent arrears which are not fully recovered.

12. Recommendation

- 12.1 Joint Committee notes this report – and that an update will be presented at the next meeting of this Committee.

Key Decision	No
Do the Exempt Information Categories Apply	No
Call In and Urgency: Is the decision one to which Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?	No
Does the report contain Appendices?	Yes

**If Yes, how many
Appendices?**

Appendix 1: Welfare Support – advice referrals
Appendix 2: COVID-19 National support

**List of Background
Papers:**

No

Lead Officer:

Claire Moses, Revenues and Benefits Manager,
Telephone 01522 873764

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Appendix 1 – Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee 26 November 2020 – Welfare Reform Support Team Advice Referrals

Service area contacted	Point of referral
Allocations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covered by voids and housing solutions
Benefits / Customer Services (DHP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As discussed with a Benefits Team Leader the view is to go paperless and Business Development and IT to create an auto-referral for all DHP's • Should anyone require a paper DHP, it would need to be requested for HB to send and HB inform once returned.
Council Tax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone is advised to claim Council Tax Support (CTS) online, if they cannot do it themselves CTAX will refer to Welfare Reform Support Team to call back to go through the form and pick up any other financial support
Customer Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral to welfare team to be reviewed and if appropriate refer to Welfare Reform Support Team instead • CTS/DHP forms and advice • UC queries / non-payment / award queries
Housing Solutions (private)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All sign ups with private landlords will be referred to us as a conditionality to complete CTS and look at all benefits, food vouchers, furniture referrals, DHP, Exceptional Hardship Payment, etc... • As a result support landlords and Housing Solutions to offer a support service to landlords. • Explore all customers who receive a deposit/rent in advance to receive support
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a household is over 1 month in arrears (taking in to account UC payment delay). Welfare Reform Support Team to send an email to Housing to forward to team advising of support we can offer. • When a UC questionnaire is completed a question asking if needs help applying for CTS. • Housing to run a monthly report of all customers on UC, and share with us. We can then run a report for those customers getting/not getting CTS. Then cross reference those in arrears for both Council Tax and/or rent.
Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where Recovery think the customer may need referring to benefits • Where Recovery think the customer would be better off going insolvent.
UC Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referrals to back to all relevant teams if required for expert advice / welfare team for complex cases
Voids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All voids will come through an online form which is being discussed between Voids management and Business Development and IT.

Appendix 1 – Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee 26 November 2020 – Welfare Reform Support Team Advice Referrals

Welfare Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less complex cases / form completions (to free up Welfare Team for the complex cases)
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Type of Support	
UC	Housing Benefit
HB/CTS/UC calculations	Income & Expenditure
CTS	Gas/electric
Loans	Tax Credits
Child Benefit	Student
Food vouchers	Maternity Allowance
Change of address	Childcare Costs
managed payment to landlord	Habitual Residency Test
Care Leaver	Income Support
Council Tax	Safeguarding
Discretionary Housing Payment	TV
Employment Support Allowance	State Retirement Pension
Severe Disability Premium	Medical assessment
Personal Independence Payment	Water
Self-employed	Sanctions
Overpayments	Reporting changes (partner/income/etc).
Disability Premiums	COVID-19
Furniture	Furlough
Debts	Self-employed Income Support Scheme
Referral to Welfare	Bedroom Tax
Jobseekers Allowance	2 nd property/capital
Carers Allowance	Eviction
Rent Arrears	
Appeals	

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Coronavirus

In March 2020 an outbreak of coronavirus meant that many businesses had to close. This had a big effect on people's incomes, and a range of changes were made.

Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme:

This is a scheme where the government covers 80% of employees' salaries. Individuals can only access this scheme through their employers.

On 20 March, the Government announced a new 'Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme' that aims to support businesses to help pay people's wages.

Employers will be able to contact HMRC for a grant to cover most of the wages of their workforce who remain on payroll but are temporarily not working during the Coronavirus outbreak. Employers will need to:

- Designate affected employees as 'furloughed workers,' and notify each employee of this change.
- Submit information to HMRC about the employees that have been furloughed and their earnings through a new online portal.
- HMRC will reimburse 80% of furloughed workers' wage costs, up to a cap of £2,500 gross per month.

The employer will need to make the wage payment and then apply for a reimbursement. If the employer needs short term cash flow support, they may be eligible for a Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan. No further information is available about who will be able to be classed as a 'furloughed worker', but the dictionary definition of 'furloughed worker' is one who has been granted a leave of absence; it is 'temporary leave of employees due to the special needs of a company or employer, which may be due to economic conditions at the specific employer or in the economy as a whole'.

The information published so far about the Job Retention Scheme suggests it will only apply to those employees who are not working due to the Coronavirus, to help safeguard their job. There appears no system in place – apart from the benefit system – for those workers on reduced hours. This may change in the future.

Will it mean no-one loses their job?

Unfortunately not, The Guardian reported (21 March) that without the Job Retention Scheme unemployment would have doubled to 8%, with more than 1.5 million people losing their job. Instead the unemployment rate is now expected to climb to 6%, with about 700,000 people losing their jobs. The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is currently only available up to June and therefore as it stands if employers are unable to pay their employees beyond this date they would need to look at redundancies.

Zero hour workers

If a zero hour contract employee is on the PAYE system then they should be covered by the scheme, with the amount their employer will receive based on their regular earnings.

Gig economy

The gig economy is where the worker commonly uses an intermediary, such as an app or a website. This acts as a go between, linking workers with customers. Common gig economy platforms include ride hailing company Uber, food delivery company Deliveroo and courier Yodel. The work is flexible, in that the worker can choose the hours they work and there is nothing forcing them to work certain times. At the moment, many people in the gig economy are classed as self-employed and will submit a Self-Assessment tax return so will not be covered by the Job Retention Scheme.

Self Employed Income Support Scheme

This is a scheme to cover 80% of self-employed people's usual profits over March, April and May 2020. Applications open in June 2020.

On 26 March the government announced its proposal for supporting the self-employed during the Coronavirus pandemic. They are introducing a Self-Employed Income Support Scheme.

The government will pay self-employed people - who are eligible for the scheme - a taxable grant worth 80% of their average monthly profits over the last three years, up to £2,500 a month.

Where someone has not been in self-employment that long, a shorter period will be used.

This scheme will be open for at least three months although could be extended if necessary. They expect people to be able to access the scheme no later than the beginning of June and those entitled will receive a taxable lump sum to cover March, April and May.

Who will get this help?

The scheme will be open to those who:

- Are already in self-employment, who have a tax return for 2019, and
- Who have average annual trading profits of less than £50,000 pa, and
- Whose self-employment makes up the majority of their income.

HMRC will contact those eligible directly, ask them to fill out a simple online form, then pay the grant straight into their bank account.

To make sure no one who needs it misses out on support, the government has decided to allow anyone who missed the filing deadline in January, four weeks from 26th March to submit their tax return.

Self-employed can still work and will not impact eligibility to claim for the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme.

Increase to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit

Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit standard allowances were both temporarily increased by £1000 per year.

Universal Credit Standard Allowance increase

	2019	2020
Single Under 25	251.77	342.72

Appendix 2 – Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee 26 November 2020 – COVID-19 National Support

Single Over 25	317.82	409.89
Couple both under 25	395.20	488.59
Couple at least one over 25	498.89	594.04

Working Tax Credit increase by £20 per week, to account for this Housing Benefit earnings disregard has increased by £20 per week (£17.10 to £37.10) to ensure no detrimental impact on Housing Benefit due to the increase in Working Tax Credits.

Changes to LHA rates

Local Housing Allowance rates, which affect how much help people in private rented accommodation can get with their rent, were increased to reflect the lower 30% of the rental market in each area in the UK.

	Weekly LHA April 2019 – March 2020				
BRMA	Shared room rate	1 Bedroom	2 Bedrooms	3 Bedrooms	4 Bedrooms
Lincoln	£58.90	£81.58	£100.22	£115.07	£148.01
Grantham & Newark	£60.81	£78.05	£99.06	£110.72	£156.00
Wolds and coast	£64.67	£75.00	£93.23	£110.72	£128.47

	Weekly LHA April 2020 – March 2021				
BRMA	Shared room rate	1 Bedroom	2 Bedrooms	3 Bedrooms	4 Bedrooms
Lincoln	£66.25	£97.81	£117.37	£132.33	£172.62
Grantham & Newark	£85.00	£86.30	£111.62	£132.33	£182.96
Wolds and coast	£69.38	£82.85	£104.14	£121.97	£138.08

Minimum Income Floor (MIF)

Treat a claimant's Minimum Income Floor level as if it was a lower level - including zero

Delay making a decision on whether a claimant is in gainful self-employment

Treat a claimant who is in gainful self-employment as not being

Extend a claimant's start-up period for as long as they consider appropriate, or

Exempt a claimant from any work search requirement or a work availability requirement who would normally fall in the 'all work-related requirements' conditionality group

This measure will be in place until 12th November 2020.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

Where someone is unable to work due to having to self-isolate or shield then they may be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay.

'Waiting days' removed

Normally when an employee is off work sick they can self-certify for the first seven days and receive Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), if entitled, from day four of their sickness.

On 4th March the government announced that those employees who are self-isolating due to the Coronavirus will have SSP paid from day one of their sickness/absence. Note: removing the 'waiting days' is a temporary measure.

NOTE: If someone is off sick for any other reason, standard rules apply and Statutory Sick Pay will kick in from day four, not day one.

Proving self-isolation

Measures have also been put in place for employees to obtain medical evidence from NHS 111 rather than their own GP. "Isolation notes" will provide them with the evidence that their employer needs to be able to pay Statutory Sick Pay

ESA

'New Style' Employment and Support Allowance will be payable - to those who meet the claiming criteria - for people with the COVID-19 virus or self-isolating according to government advice, from the first day of sickness, rather than from the eighth day,

A claimant can get up to £74.35/week – the amount won't be affected by either their or their partner's savings or income, though it will be reduced by any private pension the claimant receives if worth more than £85/week.

Someone in receipt of New-Style ESA (NS-ESA) can also receive Universal Credit, but you cannot get Statutory Sick Pay, Maternity Pay, or New-Style Jobseekers Allowance if you are getting NS-ESA.

It will continue in payment for the period the claimant is having to self-isolate. If they are still unable to work, then they may be able to claim New-Style Jobseekers Allowance instead.

NOTE: If someone is off sick for any other reason, standard rules apply and New-Style ESA will kick in from day four, not day one.

Conditionality

Must not impose a work search requirement on any Universal Credit, New-Style JSA or Old-Style JSA claimant.

Must remove any existing work search requirement from 30th March 2020

The requirement for UC and New Style JSA claimants to be "able and willing immediately to take up paid work" means able and willing to take up paid work, or attend an interview, immediately once this regulation ceases to apply (i.e. after the outbreak).

This regulation applies for a period of 3 months beginning from 30th March 2020 and the Secretary of State may extend that period for all cases or any class of case where it appears expedient as a consequence of the continuation of the outbreak of Coronavirus disease.

Medical Assessments and Jobcentre Appointments

The DWP have postponed all medical assessments for UC, ESA, PIP and IIDB until at least 19th June 2020.

DWP Suspends Recovery of Certain Debts

The DWP have suspended recovery of certain debts for three months. This is a temporary measure due to the Coronavirus outbreak. The announcement was made on 3rd April 2020.

Which debts are being suspended?

Deductions from Universal Credit, DWP legacy benefits (ie IR-ESA, IB-JSA and Income Support), and agreed repayment plans of the following debts are being suspended

- Overpayments of benefits
- Social Fund loans
- Tax Credit debts

NOTE: This does not include debts recovered by a Local Authority from an on-going HB award, or by HMRC from an on-going Tax Credit award.

DWP will still collect repayments for advance payment for UC and 3rd party deductions for LA's.

Free School Meals

Families whose children are eligible for free school meals on the grounds of low income will be offered vouchers, food or meals to make sure they continue receiving this support, even if they are no longer attending school due to the Coronavirus outbreak.

Schools can now provide every eligible child with a weekly shopping voucher worth £15 to spend at supermarkets while schools are closed due to coronavirus.

Prisoners on Temporary Release

Following the government's announcement that they are allowing certain prisoners to be released early, there have been new Regulations made that allow those released not to fall under the definition of 'prisoner' and therefore be able to claim means-tested benefits (or be included in a claim for means-tested benefits)

The measure allows certain prisoners (with two months or less still to serve) to return home on a temporary licence as a way of avoiding the spread of the virus.

They will be electronically tagged and can be recalled at the first sign of concern.

April 2020

Benefit freeze ending

The freeze which has kept most working age benefits at the same level for the past four years, has come to an end in April 2020. Most working age benefits have been increased by 1.3 percent.

National Minimum Wage Increase

The National Living Wage (for workers aged 25 and over) has increased by 6.2% to £8.72 per hour. The National Minimum wage increases to £8.20 per hour for 21-24 year olds, £6.45 per hour for 18-20 year olds and £4.55 for under 18s. The National Minimum Wage rate for apprentices rises to £4.15 per hour

June 2020

The free TV licence will no longer be available to all people 75 or over. From 1 August 2020 you will have to be aged 75 or over and getting Pension Credit in order to qualify for the free licence. You can find out more information from the TV Licensing website.

July 2020

Claimants will receive an additional fortnight's worth of Income-based Jobseekers' Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance or Income Support if they are on one of these benefits when they move over to Universal Credit

August 2020

Freeze on eviction action

28 August 2020 freeze on eviction action ends, this means that from this date the "pause" is ended.

Self-employed Income Support Scheme

From 17 August 2020 Self-employed can apply for a second grant, this time at a reduced rate of 70% of earnings over the last 3 years/or up to £6750.00.

The extension will last for six months, from November 2020 to April 2021. Grants will be paid in two lump sum instalments each covering a three-month period.

The first grant will cover a three-month period from 1 November 2020 until 31 January 2021. The Government will provide a taxable grant covering 55% of average monthly trading profits, paid out in a single instalment covering 3 months' worth of profits, and capped at £5,160 in total.

The grant will be increased from the previously announced level of 40% of trading profits to 80% for November 2020. This therefore increases the total level of the grant from 40% to 55% of trading profits for 1 November 2020 to 31 January 2020.

The Government are providing broadly the same level of support for the self-employed as is being provided for employees through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme in November due to its extension. And then the Job Support scheme in December and January.

The second grant will cover a three-month period from 1 February 2021 until 30 April 2021. The Government will review the level of the second grant and set this in due course.

September 2020

Job Retention Scheme

- This extended Job Retention Scheme will operate as the previous scheme did, with businesses being paid upfront to cover wages costs.
- The CJRS is being extended until December. The level of the grant will mirror levels available under the CJRS in August, so the government will pay 80% of wages up to a cap of £2,500 and employers will pay employer National Insurance Contributions (NICs) and pension contributions only for the hours the employee does not work.
- As under the current CJRS, flexible furloughing will be allowed in addition to full-time furloughing.
- The Job Support Scheme will be introduced following the end of the CJRS.

Test and Trace Support Payments:

From 28 September 2020, eligible individuals are entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment or discretionary support payment of £500. This is to support people on low incomes who are unable to work from home if they are told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and will lose income as a result.

These payments are designed to help ensure people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts self-isolate for the required period to stop the onward spread of the virus. They are also designed to encourage individuals who are eligible for this payment to get tested if they have symptoms. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.

The scheme will last until 31 January 2021.

Test and Trace Support Payment

Eligibility for a £500 Test and Trace Support Payment is restricted to people who:

- have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive;
- are employed or self-employed;
- are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and
- are currently receiving, Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit.

Discretionary is all above as well as do not need to receive relevant benefit, much have less than £1000 in capital/savings and must complete an income and expenditure form.

Test and Trace applications:

COLC:

Applications received:	147
Mandatory	41
Discretionary	106

Paid	20
Mandatory	9
Discretionary	11

Appendix 2 – Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee 26 November 2020 – COVID-19 National Support

Rejected	34
Mandatory	11
Discretionary	23

Main reasons for rejecting: No valid ID code, excess capital (discretionary)

In progress	93
Mandatory	21
Discretionary	72

NKDC:

Applications received:	97
Mandatory	29
Discretionary	68

Paid	20
Mandatory	8
Discretionary	12

Rejected	36
Mandatory	13
Discretionary	23

Main reasons for rejecting: No valid ID code, excess capital (discretionary), failure to provide any information (2 weeks after we asked for it).

In progress	41
Mandatory	8
Discretionary	33

SUBJECT: REVENUES AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE BUSINESS PLAN 2021/22

DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT AUTHOR: MARTIN WALMSLEY, HEAD OF SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 As set out in the Shared Revenues and Benefits Business Case Delegation and Joint Committee Agreement, an annual Business Plan will be presented to this committee in November/December each year for consideration and approval.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report sets out the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan for 2021/22.

3. Business Plan

- 3.1 The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan for the financial year 2021/22 is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

- 3.2 Key features of the plan, are:

- Key Achievements in 2020/21;
- Savings in 2020/21;
- Key Activities for 2021/22;
- Strategic Priority schemes 2021/22;
- Towards Financial Sustainability projects 2021/22
- Key Risks;
- Performance Management;
- Safeguarding;
- Equality actions;
- Working in Neighbourhoods;
- Workforce Development;
- Social Value;
- Data Protection and Information Governance.

4. Summary of Plan

- 4.1 The year 2020/21 has been another very positive year for our shared service with most areas of performance progressing well, continued implementation and embedment of integrated e-forms, as well as a whole host of improvement and partnership projects. However, the impacts of Covid-19 have been significant and cannot be underestimated. The financial impacts on taxpayers and businesses

have been substantial, which has understandably impacted on revenues collection. The service continues to promote the 'Get in touch, not in debt' message – with very much a focus on 'welfare' when making payment arrangements with customers. Also, the increase in the Benefits workload as more people sadly find themselves out of work has provided another challenge which the service has responded to positively.

- 4.2 Delivery of the Test and Trace Support Payments project from September 2020 to January 2021 was a key project to help people cope with changes in financial circumstances due to needing to self-isolate. Working under the Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, a cross-Councils project team came together with members from a range of service areas, to proactively develop processes, an online application form as well as a policy for discretionary scheme cases. This was a great example of a holistic approach to service delivery, taking on board a range of expertise and ideas.
- 4.3 Despite the increased Benefits workload, average processing times have continued to flourish with notable improvements consistently achieved over the past 12 months.
- 4.4 All across the service, officers have adapted to the new way of working since the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. The service had already embraced the shift to e-channels in recent years, as well as homeworking, which put LiNK in a strong position to deal with new workstyles and processes.
- 4.5 Ongoing budget pressures including combined reductions in funding through Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) means that the service has had to adapt the shared service budget accordingly, allocating resources to areas of higher customer demand, and operating vacancy management extremely carefully.
- 4.6 The plan for 2021/22 continues to look at a range of key initiatives, with new workstyles, e-services, welfare reform support and standards of performance being crucial areas for the new financial year.
- 4.7 The shared service has further increased its focus on seeking partnership working opportunities and new areas of work which fit within the service's wider remit, as well as successfully maintaining current arrangements.
- 4.8 This is extremely challenging times for local government in general, not least of which being in respect of Revenues and Benefits – due to the nature of the service whereby each household and business in the districts is impacted in some way by the services we provided. It remains the case that our shared service is not seen as a 'transactional service', but a key strategic service that has tangible and real impacts on people's lives – it is important the impacts we have are positive wherever possible, aiming to help people become financially and digitally included and helping those in a position to find employment. Our shared service is extremely well placed to tackle the challenges, and positive opportunities, ahead.

5. Strategic Priorities

- 5.1 Both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven have a number of strategic priorities. Two that have an impact on the Revenues and Benefits Service are:-
- Lincoln: “Let’s Reduce all kinds of Inequality”.
 - North Kesteven: “Our Communities”.
- 5.2 The Benefits Service plays a key role in reducing inequality by ensuring residents receive the benefits they are entitled to and providing money / debt advice. The Revenues Section is also mindful of the strategic priorities when engaging with business ratepayers as they recover business rates – and also promoting and encouraging growth in the districts. Digital Inclusion, Channel Shift/ Customer Experience, Financial Inclusion and Partnership Working are all key priorities for the shared service.

6. Organisational Impacts

- 6.1 Finance: Any costs/savings need to have due regard to the Medium Term Financial Strategies of both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven. As at the timing of writing this report details of central government funding for 2021/22 is unavailable (e.g. Housing Benefits Administration Subsidy).
- 6.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules: There are no direct Legal or Procurement implications arising from this report.
- 6.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights: There are no direct implications arising from this report.

7. Risk Implications

- 7.1 A Risk Register is in place for the Revenues and Benefits shared service, and is included at Appendix 2 to this report.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 The Joint Committee is recommended to:
- 1) Comment on the Annual Business Plan for the shared service, and
 - 2) Approve the 2021/22 Business Plan.

Is this a key decision? Yes/No

Do the exempt information categories apply? Yes/No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? Yes/No

How many appendices does the report contain?

Appendix 1 – Business Plan 2021/22
Appendix 2 – Risk Register
Appendix 3 – Business Plan 2021/22 (shortened version)

List of Background Papers:

None

Lead Officer:

Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits
Telephone (01522) 873597

Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits

Business Plan - 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022



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);
- Welfare Reform Support;
- Benefit appeals;
- Proactive and joined-up responses to anti-poverty, financial inclusion and tenancy sustainment matters;
- Partnership working on employment and skills projects;
- Key links into and delivery of corporate fraud projects.

The shared service has a Housing Benefit caseload of almost 8,400, a Council Tax Support caseload of nearly 15,000, and bills 99,000 domestic and 10,000 commercial properties.

V1 Prepared by: M.Walmsley, 11th November 2020

Agreement date:

1st Review date:

2nd Review date:

3rd Review date:

Director's comments:

Section One: Key achievements in 2020/21

A. Key activities delivered include:

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
Response to Covid-19	Shared service	<p>Response to impact on Covid-19, including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rollout of homeworking to all staff members - Management and peer support to all staff due to new ways of working, with a real focus on wellbeing - Deferrals of Council Tax and Business Rates payments - Processing of increased number of benefit claims - Awarding of Expanded Retail Discount to businesses - Partnership approach to community-focussed responses
Performance	Shared service	<p>Continued positive levels of performance in most areas, despite ongoing economic challenges and impacts on household incomes due to factors such as, for example, welfare reforms, Covid-19.</p> <p>Key highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collections 2019/20 achieved - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Only 8 local authorities achieved a higher level of in-year Council Tax collection than North Kesteven, ○ Business Rates - City of Lincoln came 15th highest and North Kesteven 17th, out of 317 local authorities where collection data is available. • Continuing reduction in outstanding level of Housing Benefit overpayments, as well as in-period recovery rates of over 100%; • Housing Benefit New Claims and Changes of Circumstances processed promptly.
Welfare Reform	Shared service	Over 800 referrals to Welfare Reform Support Team, to assist customers in a range of matters in a joined-up and holistic

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
		<p>manner.</p> <p>Provision of modelled options of Local Council Tax Support 2021/22 schemes, with consultation and scrutiny, with approval to take place prior to 31st January 2021.</p> <p>Delivery of Test and Trace Support Payments – mandatory scheme, and development and delivery of discretionary scheme.</p> <p>Proactive utilisation of Discretionary Housing Payments grants.</p>
Partnership working	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	<p>Ongoing work through agreement to administer West Lindsey District Council's Business Rates.</p> <p>Provision of Housing Benefit subsidy claim support to West Lindsey District Council.</p> <p>Senior management support to South Kesteven District Council's Revenues and Benefits service, + advice on a range of matters.</p> <p>Linked arrangements/referral mechanisms in relation to Universal Credit support, with Department for Work and Pensions, Citizens Advice.</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>Further preparation and planning for increased 'marketing' of shared service.</p>
Customer Experience / Channel Shift	Shared service	<p>Embedment of a number of integrated customer self-serve e-forms in Revenues Team, resulting in more efficient, automated and customer-focussed processes. Identification of further areas which would benefit from e-forms.</p> <p>Continued utilisation of Northgate Citizen Access Benefits product for customers to</p>

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
		claim via on an online self-service product.
Anti Poverty	Shared service	<p>Active and key role in activities under the Communities & Volunteer Co-ordination Cell with other Lincolnshire Councils, proactively responding to Covid-19 challenges.</p> <p>Responsibility and progression of a number of initiatives under City of Lincoln's 'Let's reduce all kinds of inequality priority.</p> <p>Delivery of initiatives contributing to North Kesteven's priorities relating to Our Communities.</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits is Chair of Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership (https://www.lincscreditunion.org.uk/financial-inclusion-partnership).</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits sits on the Lincolnshire Food Partnership Board.</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 reviewed with effect from 1st April 2020 to take account of increased resources required in Council Tax, as well as a reduction in Benefits staffing.</p> <p>Income from senior managements support to South Kesteven District Council's Revenues and Benefits service.</p>

C. All other key achievements

Include in this section any other achievements – for example, independent reviews, awards, nominations etc.

Audit Lincolnshire assurances:

- North Kesteven Housing Benefit Subsidy – Substantial Assurance.

Section Two: Key activities in the group's forward plans for 2021/22

Agreed delivery projects

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
Continue response to impacts of Covid-19, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lead and engage in 'new workstyles' - Support for staff in terms of new ways of working, wellbeing and communication - Analyse and proactive respond to revenues collection matters and benefit claims impacts 	Linking into corporate steer from both partner Councils, to provide a clear direction and response to new ways of working, ICT and staffing-related matters.	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2021/22
	Daily, weekly and monthly monitoring of revenues and benefits work demands – to ensure there is a focus on customer welfare, whilst recognising the need to collect monies due.	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	Throughout 2021/22
Continue implementation of a strategy for the Councils' response to Welfare Reform support and advice	Provide a clear and proactive response to the challenges presented to the service in relation to the national and local welfare reform agendas, as well as due to impacts of Covid-19.	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2021/22
	Continue work with co-located Jobcentre Plus to improve customer experience and maximise opportunities for joint-working where possible and appropriate	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2021/22
	Work with City of Lincoln and North Kesteven Housing teams to ensure a joined-up approach to tenancy sustainment	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2021/22
Reducing Inequality / Anti-Poverty	To ensure the service helps to reduce poverty in the districts,	Head of Shared	Throughout 2021/22

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
	working with other internal and external stakeholders to provide proactive responses to poverty-related issues	Revenues and Benefits	
Customer Experience/ Channel Shift:	Identification of further e-form self-serve solutions in Revenues and Benefits, including enhanced telephone services to better accommodate working from home	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Throughout 2021/22
	Identification of efficiencies (both financial and otherwise) through customer experience initiatives	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2021/22
	Embed standards of response (to be agreed) for all customer channels – focus on e-mails to take place	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and throughout 2021/22
Revenues and Benefits assurance	To further develop and embed robust quality-control/subsidy programme for Benefits assessments, reviewing outcomes from audits (internal and external) and implementing resultant actions	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Throughout 2021/22
	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	2021/22
	Analyse impacts on subsidy claim from continued rollout of Universal Credit	Subsidy and Quality Control Lead Officer	2021/22
	To review fraud and error projects in place in shared service (also working with other LAs through Lincolnshire Counter Fraud	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits,	2021/22

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
	Partnership) to ensure most effective usage of limited resources	Revenues and Benefits Manager	
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	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to, throughout 2021/22 and ongoing
	Positively review current partnership arrangements with other local authorities and organisations	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to 2021/22, for implementation from 1 st April 2021
	The 2021/22 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 2021/22
Optimise performance levels with reference to impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly around Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collection, and increased number of Benefits applications	Maintenance and/or improvement of current in-year collection levels, however reference will need to be made in relation to reasonably achievable performance levels due to Covid-19 impacts	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	2021/22
	Maximisation of Council Tax and Business Rates taxbases	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	2021/22
	Maintenance of/ Improvement in Benefits claim processing times and reduction in outstanding workload – aim to	Benefits Team Leaders	2021/22

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
Utilise Discretionary Housing Payment grants in the most appropriate and effective manner	work within a maximum of 2 weeks		
	Review policy/guidelines in advance of 2021/22	Revenues and Benefits Manager	In advance of 2021/22, ready for 1 st April 2021
	Monthly monitoring of DHP spend and issues	Revenues and Benefits Manager	2021/22
Employment and Skills	To actively identify and engage with employment and skills projects with other organisations, - for example, The Network, Lincoln College, Department for Work and Pensions – with the aim of increasing employability skills, reducing dependency on benefits and to increase levels of financial inclusion	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2021/22
Reacting to funding challenges 2021/22 and in preparation for 2022/23 – e.g. in respect of Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy, Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government Council Tax Support grant, New Burdens grant/s	To ensure that the budget is managed throughout 2021/22 and responses made accordingly, as well as preparation of a budget for 2022/23	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2021/22

D. Strategic priority schemes and any additional Leadership priorities

Service	Key activity/project	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale
Revenues and Benefits shared service	Vision 2025/Reducing Inequality	Identify projects for 2021/22 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2021/22
Revenues and	NK Plan 2020-23	Identify projects for	Head of	In advance of

Service	Key activity/ project	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale
Benefits shared service		2021/22 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget	Shared Revenues and Benefits	and throughout 2021/22

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	Review staffing resources and identify/deliver savings to contribute towards corporate savings targets and pressures	R	City of Lincoln – target £29.5k for 2021/22 North Kesteven – no specific target at this stage	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	With effect from 1 st April 2021
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Continuing 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 throughout 2021/22
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Review staffing resources and identify/deliver savings to contribute towards corporate savings targets and pressures	R	City of Lincoln – target £58k for 2022/23 North Kesteven – no specific target at this stage	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Review in 2021/22, to deliver from 1 st April 2022

F. Other agreed delivery projects

N/A

Service	Activity	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale

Section Three: Other Service Planning considerations in 2021/22

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 respond to impacts from Covid-19, from both customer and staffing perspectives</p>	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 'Get in touch, not in debt' message promoted ○ Staffing resources (re)-allocated to areas of demand ○ Welfare Reform support and Welfare Benefits/Advice functions in place ○ Channels of customer access regular reviewed and changes implemented – e.g. e-forms - Staffing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ICT facilities for homeworking made available where appropriate – PCs and telephones ○ Overall and individual risk assessments for access to work premises, visits, etc ○ Identification of more vulnerable staff and associated risk assessments made ○ Regular communications through a variety of 	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – prior to and throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – prior to and throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – prior to and throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues</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>channels from management and peer-to-peer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wellbeing arrangements in place – Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits has monthly meeting with HR Associate, ad hoc staffing matters are proactively responded to by management 	<p>and Benefits Manager – prior to and throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – monthly meetings with HR</p> <p>RBMT – throughout 2021/22</p>
<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 targets/measures reviewed in advance of 2021/21, to take account of Covid-19 impacts ● Performance is monitored and managed on a regular basis ● Impacts of Covid-19 proactively analysed and responded to accordingly ● Regular reporting into Revenues and Benefits Management Team, Revenue and Benefits Operational Board, Joint Committee ● Effective management of daily workflow ● Range of customer experience initiatives ongoing such as e-billing, online Council Tax DD forms and other integrated e-forms. ● Council Tax Support Schemes to be approved January 2021 <p>Further action required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continuing challenge of 	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – January-March 2021</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2021/22</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>working practices and moving resources to areas of demand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to review of staffing arrangements and 'pressure points' in advance of and throughout 2021/22 • Review Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22 and options for 2022/23 • Review of Exceptional Hardship Fund 2021/22 and options for 2022/23 	
<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 • Rolling review of subsidy data from Northgate System • Management of incoming work and processes to minimize value of overpayments raised • Training and mentoring of staff • Review of subsidy-quality assurance processes - reviewed • More targeted and efficient quality control mechanisms, improving accuracy levels and rolling training plan to address any training requirement. • Performance and quality assurance framework in place 	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2021/22</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"> • HB New Claims process review project plan scoped and implemented\ <p>Further action required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued monitoring of resource allocation – e.g. HB /CTS, Universal Support and other Benefits-related projects, to also take account of Covid-19 impacts • Maintaining improvements in HB Overpayments processes and collection taking into account resources required • Ongoing weekly/monthly monitoring of New Claims and Change of Circumstances process improvements and positive impacts on KPIs 	
Failure to respond to national Welfare Reform and UC agenda	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent Lead Welfare Reform • Officer on the establishment • Welfare Reform Strategy in place and approved in April 2015 • Effective partnerships with public and third sector bodies • Co-location with DWP • Welfare Reform Support team in place • Effective comms in all welfare reform changes • Regular liaison with Department for Work and Pensions and Citizens Advice re UC support arrangements 	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2021/22

Risks from Service Managers and those allocated from CMT strategic risk register	Action we will take to mitigate the risk	Who and by When?
	Further controls required: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly updates to RB Joint Committee 	

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/challenged 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 advance of 2021/22, to ensure all measures are still appropriate and whether and also that targets/measures take appropriate account of the ongoing impacts of Covid-19.</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.
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"> Council Tax Support Schemes for 2021/22 and 2022/23.
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, as required.
In line with corporate training place, ensure any new/ refresher Safetalk/ ASIST training takes place, as required.

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?
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. The service also engages with the Communities and Voluntary Coordination cell, working with other Lincolnshire Councils.

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	Ongoing review job roles, skill sets and staff development/training requirements.	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Proactive support for new workstyles	To fully engage with new workstyles agenda, communicating effectively with all team members	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Improving workforce capability	Staff appraisals April 2021-July 2021	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
City of Lincoln Council Workforce Development Strategy / One Council Organisational Development Pillar	Delivery of actions as required within the Strategy action plan / Throughout 2021/22	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?		
<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 (MoU) with Department for Work and Pensions, with annual sign-off of MoUs for both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven. 		

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Risk Register Template

Likelihood	4 Almost Certain				
	3 Probable		2, T2, 4, T4		4
	2 Possible		1, T1	3	
	1 Hardly Ever				
		1 Negligible	2 Minor	3 Major	4 Critical
		Impact			

RISK REGISTER: Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

VERSION: New Template @ 9th November 2018

REVIEWED:
 Original version produced: 4th March 2011
 Updated: 26th March 2012
 Updated: 18th June 2012
 Updated: 7th October 2013
 Updated: 2nd December 2014
 Updated: 1st July 2015
 Updated: 27th June 2016
 Updated: 12th October 2016
 Updated: 28th July 2017
 Updated 1st November 2017
 Updated 8th November 2018
 Updated 3rd December 2018
 Updated 2nd May 2019
 Updated 31st October 2019
 Updated 12th November 2020

OWNER: Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits

The matrix below, helps you define where the risk is by scoring it on a basis of ‘Likelihood’ and ‘Impact’

26th November 2020 Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee
Appendix 2: Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan 2021/22 – Risk Register

Likelihood	4 Almost certain	Retain	Transfer Modify Retain	Avoid Transfer Modify	Avoid Transfer Modify	Description of occurrence	Occurs several times per year. It will happen.
	3 Probable	Retain	Prioritise for Modifying Retain	Transfer Modify Retain	Avoid Transfer Modify		It has happened before and could happen again.
	2 Possible	Retain	Prioritise for Modifying Retain	Prioritise for Modifying Retain	Transfer Modify Retain		It may happen but it would be unusual.
	1 Hardly ever	Retain	Retain	Retain	Prioritise for Modifying Retain		Never heard of it occurring. We can't imagine it occurring.

1 Negligible	2 Minor	3 Major	4 Critical
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Impact	Service Delivery	Finance	Reputation	People
Critical (4)	Prolonged interruption to service	Severe costs incurred	Adverse national coverage with significant change in stakeholder confidence	Fatality, disability or serious long term health problem
Major (3)	Key targets missed- some service compromised	Significant costs incurred	Adverse local media coverage with moderate change in stakeholder confidence	Series injuries. Exposure to dangerous conditions
Minor (2)	Management action required to over short – term difficulties	Some costs incurred (handled within management budgets)	Adverse local media for 1-7 days	Minor injuries or discomfort. Feeling unease
Negligible (1)	Handled within day to day routines	Little loss anticipated	No significant comment or media coverage	No injury

26th November 2020 Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee
Appendix 2: Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan 2021/22 – Risk Register

		Risk Owner	Risk Appetite (How much risk are we prepared to take and the total impact of the risk we are prepared to accept)	Current Controls/Actions	Current Risk Score	Target Risk Score at end of 2021/22	Assurance -Status (Full, Substantial, Limited, No)	Assurance – Direction of Travel (Improving, Static, Declining)	
83	1	Failure to maintain performance / current levels of Council Tax and Business Rates Collection on behalf of the Shared Service	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	<p><u>Creative & Aware</u></p> <p>Finance & Money</p>	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance targets/measures reviewed in advance of 2021/21, to take account of Covid-19 impacts Performance is monitored and managed on a regular basis Impacts of Covid-19 proactively analysed and responded to accordingly Regular reporting into Revenues and Benefits Management Team, Revenue and Benefits Operational Board, Joint Committee Effective management of daily workflow Range of customer experience initiatives ongoing such as e-billing, online Council Tax DD forms and other integrated e-forms. Council Tax Support Schemes to be approved January 2021 <p>Further action required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing challenge of working practices and moving resources to areas of demand. Continue to review of staffing arrangements and 'pressure points' in advance of and throughout 2021/22 			Substantial	Range of indicators, but in the main performance is either improving or being maintained

**26th November 2020 Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee
Appendix 2: Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan 2021/22 – Risk Register**

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22 and options for 2022/23 Review of Exceptional Hardship Fund 2021/22 and options for 2022/23 				
2	<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>	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	<p><u>Creative & Aware</u></p> <p>Reputation & Public Confidence</p> <p>Finance & Money</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 Rolling review of subsidy data from Northgate System Management of incoming work and processes to minimize value of overpayments raised Training and mentoring of staff Review of subsidy-quality assurance processes - reviewed More targeted and efficient quality control mechanisms, improving accuracy levels and rolling training plan to address any training requirement. Performance and quality assurance framework in place HB New Claims process review project plan scoped and implemented\ <p>Further action required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued monitoring of resource allocation – e.g. HB /CTS, Universal Support and other Benefits-related projects, to also take account of Covid-19 impacts 			Substantial	Range of indicators, but in the main performance is either improving or being maintained

26th November 2020 Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee
Appendix 2: Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan 2021/22 – Risk Register

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining improvements in HB Overpayments processes and collection taking into account resources required Ongoing weekly/monthly monitoring of New Claims and Change of Circumstances process improvements and positive impacts on KPIs 				
85	3 Failure to respond to national Welfare Reform and Universal Credit agenda	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Opportunity People/Finance	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanent Lead Welfare Reform Officer on the establishment Welfare Reform Strategy in place and approved in April 2015 Effective partnerships with public and third sector bodies Co-location with DWP Welfare Reform Support team in place Effective comms in all welfare reform changes Regular liaison with Department for Work and Pensions and Citizens Advice re UC support arrangements <p>Further controls required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly updates to RB Joint Committee 			Substantial	Improving
	4 Failure to respond to impacts of Covid-19 on Revenues and Benefits Shared Service. - Lead and engage in 'new workstyles'	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Creative & Aware Reputation & Public Confidence Finance & Money	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Get in touch, not in debt' message promoted Staffing resources (re)-allocated to areas of demand Welfare Reform support and Welfare Benefits/Advice functions in place 			Substantial	Improving

**26th November 2020 Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee
Appendix 2: Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan 2021/22 – Risk Register**

86	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support for staff in terms of new ways of working, wellbeing and communication - Analyse and proactive respond to revenues collection matters and benefit claims impacts 		People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Channels of customer access regular reviewed and changes implemented – e.g. e-forms - Staffing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ICT facilities for homeworking made available where appropriate – PCs and telephones ○ Overall and individual risk assessments for access to work premises, visits, etc. ○ Identification of more vulnerable staff and associated risk assessments made ○ Regular communications through a variety of channels from management and peer-to-peer ○ Wellbeing arrangements in place – Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits has monthly meeting with HR Associate, ad hoc staffing matters are proactively responded to by management 				
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Providing Revenues & Benefits for City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council

Business Plan 2021/22 – Summary

Key activities delivered in 2020/21:

- ❖ **Response to Covid-19**
- ❖ **Positive levels of performance**
- ❖ **Welfare Reform support and advice**
- ❖ **Expansion of partnership working**
- ❖ **Further enhancement of customer experience / shift to e-channels**
- ❖ **Key role in anti-poverty initiatives**



Key activities in 2021/22:

- ❖ **Continue response to impacts of Covid-19 – support to residents, businesses, staff**
 - ❖ **Continue implementation of a strategy for the Councils' response to Welfare Reform support and advice**
 - ❖ **Key role in projects relating to reducing inequality**
 - ❖ **Identifying and delivering new ways of improving customer experience, including new e-forms**
 - ❖ **Revenues and Benefits assurance – optimising Housing Benefit subsidy, and combatting fraud**
 - ❖ **With LiNK as the lead, to further expand partnership working with other organisations**
 - ❖ **Optimise performance levels with reference to impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly around Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collection, and increased number of Benefits applications**
 - ❖ **Utilise Discretionary Housing Payment grants in the most appropriate and effective manner**
 - ❖ **Increase opportunities for customers through a range of Employment and Skills related initiatives**
 - ❖ **Delivery of strategic projects through:**
 - **City of Lincoln Council Vision 2025;**
 - **NK Plan 2020-23.**
 - ❖ **Contribute towards corporate savings targets and pressures**
 - ❖ **Provision of Welfare Reform support and advice**
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