



## SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS JOINT COMMITTEE

**Thursday, 22 February 2024**

**10.00 am**

**Committee Room, North  
Kesteven District Council  
Offices**

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Membership:         | Councillors Sue Burke (City of Lincoln Council), Mary Green (North Kesteven District Council), Ric Metcalfe (City of Lincoln Council) and Sally Tarry (North Kesteven District Council)   |
| Substitute members: | Councillors Donald Nannestad (City of Lincoln Council) and Councillor Mark Smith (North Kesteven District Council)  |
| Officers attending: | Democratic Services (City of Lincoln Council), Jaclyn Gibson (City of Lincoln Council), Tracey Parker (City of Lincoln Council), Philip Roberts (North Kesteven District Council), Julie Schofield (North Kesteven District Council), Russell Stone (North Kesteven District Council) and Martin Walmsley (City of Lincoln Council) |

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### A G E N D A

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**If members are unable to attend the meeting, please advise Cheryl Evans (Democratic Services & Elections Manager) on 01522 873439 as soon as possible. Substitute members will be contacted if they are required to attend the meeting.**

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**Details of Next Meeting:** Thursday, 30 May 2024 (2.00 pm) in Committee Room 1, City Hall

**Present:** Councillor Ric Metcalfe (*in the Chair*),  
Councillor Sue Burke and Councillor Mary Green

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Sally Tarry

**14. Confirmation of Minutes - 7 September 2023**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2023 be confirmed.

**15. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

**16. Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan 2024/25**

Purpose of Report

As set out in the Shared Revenues and Benefits Business Case Delegation and Joint Committee Agreement, an annual Business Plan was due to be presented to this committee by the end of November in advance of each year for consideration.

It was requested that the Business Plan report be moved to the Shared Revenues and Benefits Committee due to be held on 22 February 2024 to allow time to consider the announcements made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Autumn Statement, and also that the wording section 30 of the Shared Revenues and Benefits Business Case Delegation and Joint Committee Agreement be amended to state:

- Prepare and submit to the Joint Committee for its approval on or before 1<sup>st</sup> March in each year an annual business plan, annual budget and annual delivery plan for the next Financial Year.

**Decision**

That the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan 2024/25 be considered by Shared Revenues and Benefits Committee at the meeting due to be held on 22 February 2024 and that section 30 of the Shared Revenues and Benefits Business Case Delegation and Joint Committee Agreement be amended to:

- Prepare and submit to the Joint Committee for its approval on or before 1<sup>st</sup> March in each year an annual business plan, annual budget and annual delivery plan for the next Financial Year.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The Shared Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan must be considered by committee by 1st March 2024. By moving the report to February 2024 it would allow more time to consider the announcements made in the Autumn Statement, and also in each financial year moving forward.

## **17. Performance Update**

### Purpose of Report

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

### **Decision**

That the report be noted, with an update to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee on 22 February 2024.

### Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

### Reason for Decision

The report provided an update on Revenues and Benefits performance in respect of Quarter 2 for the financial year 2023/24.

The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service had now been in operation for twelve years since 1 June 2011, and performance had largely been maintained and improved whilst continuing to provide value for money. Continual improvement and success was being achieved in both statistical and financial performance, as well as positive outcomes for customers of the partner local authorities. However, the Covid-19 global pandemic and then cost of living challenges had understandably impacted on some areas of performance and these impacts were likely to continue for many more months.

In respect of Council Tax, up to the end of Quarter 2 2023/24, in-year collection for Lincoln were down by 1.70% and North Kesteven was down by 1.08% respectively compared to the end of Quarter 2 2022/23. At the end of October 2023, there had been little change for both Lincoln and North Kesteven.

Council Tax Support caseloads had recently been falling following a sharp rise during Covid-19, however, with ongoing cost of living pressures on residents there was potential this fall in caseloads may not continue.

In respect of Business Rates, up to the end of Quarter 2 2023/24 compared to the same point in 2022/23, in-year collection was down for Lincoln by 3.43%, North Kesteven down by 6.48% and West Lindsey down by 8.30%. Therefore, in-year collection for Quarter 2 2022/23 was effectively 'inflated'. It was expected that the level of shortfall in 2023/24 in-year collection rate would reduce over quarter 3 and then into Quarter 4. It should also be noted that collection had been 'skewed' somewhat in recent financial years due to varying criteria/awards of the Expanded Retail Discount (ERD).

The number of outstanding Revenues Customers at the end of Quarter 2 2023/24 was 797 (split Lincoln 402, North Kesteven 362) – this continued the positive

direction of travel and position, achieved through improved processes and recruitment to vacant roles within the team.

As at the end of Quarter 2 2023/24, in period collection of Housing Benefit overpayments stood at for City of Lincoln 108.72%, and North Kesteven 97.02%.

Outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments debt also continued to decrease overall. As at the end of Quarter 2 2023/24: at £2,402,885 for City of Lincoln and £1,258,896 for North Kesteven. Although North Kesteven had fallen below 100%, and outstanding debt had risen (but only by £1,759) – there were no concerns as collection remained high.

As at the end of Quarter 2 2023/24, there were 1,696 Benefits customers outstanding and awaiting assessment (split Lincoln 1,156, North Kesteven 540). This figure compared favourably to the same point last year, Quarter 2 2022/23 (total 2,285 outstanding) and was a significant reduction from Quarter 1 2023/24 (3,682 items outstanding). This was an extremely positive achievement considering the significant ongoing demands on this team, although regular overtime had been in place due to gaps in staffing resources (which was being addressed) as well as to help address additional demands on the service due to cost of living pressures.

Despite the significant demands on the Benefits Team, officers continued to turn around claims and reported changes of circumstance promptly, and accurately.

The latest national data available showed that in Quarter 1 2023/24 New Claims were processed in an average of 22 days by Councils, with Changes of Circumstance being processed in an average of 8 calendar days. Although, these national figures were for a specific quarter only (i.e., Quarter 1 2023/24) and not cumulative over the financial year – which was how officers reported these areas of performance for our shared service.

As at the end of Quarter 2, in terms of processing times for new benefit claims, City of Lincoln took an average of 16.61 days and North Kesteven 18.58 days respectively. As at November, the team is working on incoming items within 9-10 days, which was the best position achieved for sometime.

In terms of the claims checked that were 'correct, first time' (with even £0.01p 'out' being classified as an incorrect assessment), at the end of Quarter 1 2023/24:

- City of Lincoln: 89.87% (639 out of 711 checked),
- North Kesteven: 97.77% (395 out of 404 checked).

City of Lincoln's reduced level of performance in quarter 1 was due to 200 more checks during the quarter than in the same quarter last year, including due to less experienced officers being part of the team. 100% of claims being checked, which could mean more (small) errors being identified- and the corrected. Performance had improved by more than 2% from end of Quarter 1 to Quarter 2, demonstrating a positive direction of travel. As at today, the current claimed checked were 91.35% for Lincoln and 98.05% for North Kesteven respectively.

The table at paragraph 6.1 of the officer's report showed the invaluable support provided by the Welfare Team to the residents of Lincoln and North Kesteven in Quarter 2 2023/24.

There were a number of key reasons why the levels of Welfare/Money advice in Lincoln was higher than in North Kesteven, including:

- Differences in demographics;
- 'Customer journey' different at each Council;
- Significant number of foodbank vouchers issued at Lincoln) compared to North Kesteven)

Demands and processes for the Welfare Team continued to reviewed on an ongoing basis.

## **18. Revenues and Benefits - Financial Monitoring Quarter 2 2023/24**

### Purpose of Report

To provide the Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee with the second quarter's (ending 30 September 2023) performance for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service for 2023/24, as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report.

### **Decision**

That the actual position at Quarter 2 as detailed within the report be noted.

### Alternation Options Considered and Rejected

None.

### Reason for Decision

The forecast overturn for 2023/24 predicted there would be an underspend against the approved budget of £112,170, however after accounting for the newly confirmed 2023/24 pay award, due to be paid in December , there was a minor overspend of £310.

The approved budget for 2023/24 was agreed by the Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee on 23 February 2023, which set a budget of £2,878,930 for the service.

At Quarter 1 the budget was increased to reflect New Burdens grants totalling £61,950, giving a revised budget of £2,940,890, there were no further changes as at Quarter 2.

Financial performance for the second quarter of 2023/24 as detailed at Appendix 1 of the officer's report resulted in an underspend against the approved budget of £112,760.

The forecast outturn for 2023/24 predicted that there would be an underspend against the approved budget of £112,170 a deterioration of £17,930 from Quarter one. This, however, excluded the impact of the recently agreed national pay award which was, again, well in excess of the MTFS assumption of 3%. The impact of this had been calculated at £112,480, split between each authority as follows: City of Lincoln £56,470 and North Kesteven £56,010. The pay award was expected to be implemented in December 2023, and backdated to April 2023 and would therefore be fully reflected within the Quarter 3 report.

The main forecast year-end variations against the approved budget for 2023/24 were noted within the table at paragraph 4.3 of the officer's report.

A Job Evaluation Panel held on 11 July 2023 had evaluated and approved the Benefits Appeal Officer role at Grade 6 (previously Grade 5). This was now reflected in the current forecast outturn position. The impact of this job evaluation totalled £1,485.88, which had been split as follows: City of Lincoln £861.81 and North Kesteven £624.07

Each Council had received a new burdens grant from Central Government to administer the Energy Support Scheme to the value of £14,950 for City of Lincoln Council and £21,790 for North Kesteven. By agreement these grants sat outside of the shared service budget.

## **19. Business Rates Update**

### Purpose of Report

To provide the Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee with an update on current issues within non-domestic rates, related to City of Lincoln Council, North Kesteven District Council and West Lindsey District Council. The report was not intended to include non-domestic rate performance matters, as this was covered within the Performance Update reported to Joint Committee today.

### **Decision**

That the content of the report be noted.

### Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

### Reason for Decision

The report included some of the changes announced as a result of the Governments financial support provided to businesses in the form of business rates relief. The report also focused on the financial impact of recent appeals and reductions to rateable values.

The following updates were noted:

### *NDR Changes and Significant Reliefs/Discounts*

At the Autumn Statement on 17 November 2022, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a continued Government package of business rate measures to support businesses in England:

- Retail, hospitality and leisure relief would increase from 50% to 75% up to £110,000 per business
- A freezing of the multipliers at 49.9p (small business multiplier) and 51.2p (standard multiplier)

- For the Supporting Small Business Scheme increases would be capped at £600 a year for any business losing eligibility for some or all Small Business Rate Relief or Rural Rate Relief at the 2023 revaluation.
- The scope of the discount for 2023/24 would return to pre-Covid-19 eligibility retail properties. Hospitality and leisure properties would continue to remain in scope, and the Rateable Value continued to be uncapped.
- At the beginning of the new Rating List, the transitional scheme for 2023 phased in large increases in liability for Non-Domestic Rates, however, unlike previous years, there was no phasing of decreases resulting in those customers feeling the benefit of any reduction in their rateable value immediately.
- The details of the transitional relief scheme and upward 'capping' were provided shortly after the autumn statement and were detailed in the table at 4.1 of the report.

### *Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief 2023-24*

Eligibility criteria for the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief was set out by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and issued to Local Authorities on 20 December 2021, with no changes to the qualifying criteria for the year 2023/24. The table at paragraph 5.5 of the officer's report reflected the significant reduction in the amounts awarded in the last three years (previously known as the Expanded Retail Discount (ERD) scheme), with an estimate on the award to be granted in 2023/24.

Potential reductions to rateable values were contained within paragraph 6, which included fire stations, hospitals, museums and hotels occupied by asylum seekers.

### *Business Rates Review*

The final report for a Business Rates Review was also published at the Budget. The Budget and the Review committed in the longer term to improvements to the Business Rates system – which included;

- More frequent revaluations, moving to a revaluation every three years starting from the next revaluation which came into force on 1st April 2023, the next being 1st April 2026 and so on.
- The process of revaluation started approximately 2 years before the new valuations came into force. For the revaluation due on 1st April 2023, the rateable value would be assessed based on the rental evidence on 1st April 2021. There would be a new duty on the ratepayer to provide the Valuation Office with the information

For each revaluation, the Government introduced a Transitional Relief scheme. Transitional relief limited how much a bill could change each year. As the NDR system was self-financing, historically these limits had limited both large increases and large decreases. In the Budget, the government announced a change to the Transitional relief scheme so that only increases were limited. For any reduction in the rateable value, a ratepayer would receive the full benefit of the reduction immediately.



### *Heat Network Rate Relief Scheme*

The Government had published the guidance for Local Authorities on the operation of the Heat Network Rate Relief Scheme for 2023/24, substantially unchanged from 2022/23. Local Authorities were to continue to deliver the discretionary relief using their discretionary powers for 2023-24 until the relief was made mandatory through the Non-Domestic Rating Bill. The relief was targeted at hereditaments used wholly or mainly as heat networks with its own rating assessment, to provide relief for those networks generating from a low carbon source to ensure the policy supported decarbonisation.

### *Business Rates Avoidance and Evasion Consultation*

In the Spring budget on 15 March 2023, the Chancellor announced that the government would consult on measures to tackle business rates and avoidance.

A consultation paper was provided in July 2023 with a target date of 27 September 2023 for responses.

The topics that formed part of the consultation were:

1. Measures to reform rates on unoccupied properties
2. Wider business rates avoidance and evasion
3. 'Rogue' agents

The Shared Service partners would be responding to this consultation.

### *Non Domestic Rating Bill – Royal Assent 26 October 2023*

This bill would make a number of changes to Non Domestic Rating .

One of the changes removed the 6 month backdating rule for discretionary rate relief decisions in England.

The Act created section 47(6A) which would say that a decision, by a billing authority in England, with regards a day was invalid if the day falls before 31 March 2023 and the decision was made more than 6 months after the end of the financial year to which it related, i.e. the backdating rule would not apply to decisions in respect of 2023-24 onwards.

This was likely to mean that with effect from 1 April 2024 decisions would be made on discretionary reliefs fully retrospectively (in respect of the financial year 2024/25 onwards...." )

The other significant change was the decoupling of the multipliers and, in effect, the abolition of the small business supplement from 1 April 2024.

This meant that Government could choose to raise the two multipliers by different amounts.

This was going to require extensive discussions between the government and the software suppliers as to how this required data can be extracted before the Local Authorities had to issue the return for the NDR1 (assessment for the rating income for 2024) which was due on 31 December 2023.

The bill also paved the way for data sharing between the VOA, HMRC and billing authorities. The authorities already had a sharing agreement with the VOA but due to the changes with what they could now share, it was expected that a new sharing agreement and protocol would be announced by the VOA.

## **20. Cost of Living Support**

### Purpose of Report

To provide Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee with an update regarding various areas relating to the national welfare reform agenda, as well as current cost of living initiatives to support residents.

### **Decision**

That the content of the report be noted, and a further update be presented at the next meeting of this Committee.

### Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

### Reason for Decision

The report provided Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee with an update with regard to the national and local position of welfare reform/other initiatives, with a specific focus on Universal Credit, Discretionary Housing Payments, Household Support Fund, Energy Bill Support Schemes, Council Tax Support Fund and Financial Inclusion matters.

The national Welfare Reform agenda had a significant impact on residents of Lincoln and North Kesteven since 2013 when certain changes were introduced – such as Removal of Spare Room Subsidy, and Benefit Cap – and had continued as further changes had been introduced, such as the ongoing rollout of Universal Credit. These changes had resulted in major changes to the operating of our shared service, to ensure a proactive and positive response to welfare reform and the impacts on residents.

The Covid-19 pandemic and now the rising cost of living, had caused major challenges to households locally and nationally. The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service played a lead and key role in developing deliverable schemes to help mitigate some of the impacts of cost-of-living challenges. Some of these schemes were directly delivered by this Service, some in partnership with other teams within the Councils, also with organisations such as those in the voluntary sector.

### *Universal Credit*

The latest national figures published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were released on 17 October 2023, with statistics relevant to the period up to August 2023:

- 6,043,162 households receiving UC (this was an increase from 5,965,178 as reported at the last meeting of this Committee).

Local authority statistics:

- City of Lincoln – 11,478 (11,343 as at the last report).
- North Kesteven – 6,946 (6,789 as at the last report).

#### Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

In June 2023, a letter was issued to City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council setting out commencement of Tax Credit cases managed migration to Universal Credit starting September 2023. Officers understood all Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland local authorities received the same letter, as had all areas of the country. Officers were working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions locally and nationally to fully understand the impacts moving forward.

DWP had recently announced that in December 2023 they would further expand the 'Move to UC' into Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire, and that expansion for October through to December included a smaller number of Jobcentre Districts than previous months, as DWP brought in Couple Tax Credit claims and would be issuing migration notices to areas already within Move to UC activity. For migration notices that would have had a deadline date that fell between 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023 and 5<sup>th</sup> January 2024, 30 days had been automatically added to the claimant's deadline date.

City of Lincoln's DHP initial government grant for 2023/24 was £132,330 and North Kesteven's £86,931.

Overall DHP funding for 2022/23 was reduced nationally from £140m to £100m. Consequently, grants for City of Lincoln and North Kesteven were also reduced by more than 29% each.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023, DWP announced DHP government grants for 2023/24. For City of Lincoln and North Kesteven, these were exactly the same amounts as for 2022/23; and the announcement also stated that the national DHP allocation for 2024/25 would be the same as for 2023/24 – so individual local authorities may well receive the same figures for 2024/25 – although this would be confirmed later this year.

As was usual, in advance of the new financial year a review of DHP internal guidance had been carried out – with two key changes implemented for 2023/24:

- Certain disability-related incomes previously disregarded when assessing DHP applications, to not be disregarded;
- Awards to those in private sector rented properties to be increased, to help reflect the challenges of frozen Local Housing Allowance rates.

The impacts of these changes were being closely monitored.

#### *Household Support Fund Wave 4 (HSF4)*

In his Autumn statement the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced an extension to the Household Support Fund, running from 1st April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. Guidance was issued to local authorities on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023, with allocations for this round of funding. For Lincolnshire, Household Support Fund 2023/24 funding was £10,929,370 – to cover the whole financial year.

In Quarter 1 2023/24, Lincolnshire County Council confirmed plans in respect of Household Support Fund Wave 4 2023/24 with main details contained at paragraph 6.1 of the officer's report.

For Housing Benefit recipients in Lincolnshire who were not entitled to the national Cost of Living Payment 2023/24, the intention was that this payment would be replicated in three phases, the first payment of (£301) was issued in August through Post Office vouchers with a total of £184,212 awarded to 612 eligible households within the City of Lincoln and £181,804 awarded to 604 eligible households within North Kesteven.

In terms of District Councils' separate allocations of HSF4 to be utilised to work with partners to provide payments, including through an application-based process in part (a requirement of the national HSF4 guidance), these had now been communicated to District Councils' HSF4 lead officers, - for City of Lincoln £202,676 had been allocated, and for North Kesteven £139,340.

Officers were working in partnership with an established range of referral partners and application processes – as well as some new partners/routes – to ensure these HSF4 monies (through vouchers, food parcels, energy top-ups, etc.) were delivered to those identified as in need. A key focus would again be on reducing foodbank dependency wherever possible, working with partners to help signpost residents to other means of support (e.g., money advice), - as well as supporting a drive to further increase usage of community groceries. A strategic aim of HSF4, was also to try and leave a 'legacy' of impact – as there was no guarantee of HSF5 (or of another form of local welfare provision) from 2024/25 onwards.

#### *Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24*

On 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2022, Central Government provided guidance to local authorities regarding a £100 million Council Tax Support Fund for 2023/24, whereby awards of up to £25 were to be made to Council Taxpayers in receipt of Council Tax Support, - with an element of funding also to be made for discretionary local funds in 2023/24. Funding allocations for City of Lincoln and North Kesteven were £222,303 and £142,500, respectively.

Payments of up to £50.00 (the prescribed maximum was £25.00) were made to City of Lincoln and North Kesteven taxpayers as part of the 2023/24 Council Tax annual billing process. Remaining funding would be considered for local schemes in 2023/24. These figures were £101,705 for City of Lincoln, and £38,628 for North Kesteven.

The remaining funding was to be allocated in a detailed breakdown explained at paragraph 7 of the officer's report

#### *Financial Inclusion*

Financial inclusion continued to be a key objective and factor in many areas of LiNK's work. The Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership (LFIP) was currently chaired by the Assistant Director Shared Revenues and Benefits for North Kesteven District Council and City of Lincoln Council, - which brought together organisations and partners to promote and raise the profile of financial inclusion across the county.

Two key areas of high-profile engagement by LFIP in 2023/24, are:

- Co-ordination of 'Talk Money Week' activities in Lincolnshire during the week-commencing 6<sup>th</sup> November 2023
- A conference to be held on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024 (likely to be in Grantham), to follow-up from the highly successful conference held at the Jakemans Community Stadium in Boston, in February 2023.

Officers also set out some of the key Revenues and Benefits related items in yesterday's Autumn Statement, and further detail will be provided as appropriate moving forward.

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**SUBJECT: PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

**DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK**

**REPORT AUTHOR: MARTIN WALMSLEY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR – 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 Revenues and Benefits performance information in respect of Quarter 3 2023/24.
- 2.2 The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service has now been in operation for over twelve years, forming on 1 June 2011. Levels of performance have largely 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 and then cost of living challenges have understandably impacted on some areas of performance, - these impacts are likely to continue for many more months.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 At the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023 meeting of this Committee, a report was presented detailing Revenues and Benefits annual outturn performance for Quarter 2 2023/24.
- 3.2 Performance is reported to this Committee on a quarterly basis.

## **4. Revenues Performance**

### **4.1 Council Tax**

- 4.2 Up to the end of Quarter 3 2023/24, in-year collection for Lincoln and North Kesteven was down by 1.47% and up by 1.05%, respectively. Officers continue to undertake benchmarking locally and more widely, and it does appear there is an emerging and ongoing trend of Council Tax collection being reduced compared to previous financial years. The Covid-19 pandemic had already impacted, and signs are now that cumulative impacts of cost of living pressures are resulting in residents struggling to pay bills. Officers will continue to strike a balance of collecting vital monies due to the Councils, whilst aiming to help residents avoid undue exceptional hardship. Officers continue to undertake careful monitoring and management of Council Tax in-year collection.

| Description               |                 | End Quarter 3<br>2023/24 | Compared to End<br>Quarter 3 2022/23 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Council Tax Collection    | City of Lincoln | 76.11%                   | Down by 1.47%                        |
| Council Tax Collection    | North Kesteven  | 83.94%                   | Down by 1.05%                        |
| Council Tax Net liability | City of Lincoln | £53,552,761              | Up by £2,398,823                     |
| Council Tax Net Liability | North Kesteven  | £80,959,236              | Up by £4,650,497                     |

In terms of direction of travel, both in-year Council Tax collections are 'less down' compared to the end of Quarter 2 2023/24 – i.e. at end of Quarter 2 Lincoln was 1.70% down, North Kesteven 1.08% down.

- 4.3 The table below demonstrates the trend in Council Tax Support (CTS) caseloads. It can be seen that caseloads rose sharply in 2020 as an outcome of the impact of Covid-19 on the economy and residents' incomes. The caseload then plateaued somewhat and has been falling, - however, with the ongoing cost of living pressures on residents there is the potential that these reductions in caseloads may not continue. Officers are also looking into CTS take-up activity, as it is felt this is possibly being underclaimed by residents.

|                | City of Lincoln | North Kesteven |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| December 2023  | 8,352           | 5,397          |
| September 2023 | 8,432           | 5,393          |
| June 2023      | 8,458           | 5,419          |
| June 2022      | 8,518           | 5,443          |
| June 2021      | 8,940           | 5,701          |
| June 2020      | 8,991           | 5,834          |
| June 2019      | 8,235           | 5,570          |

#### 4.4 Business Rates

- 4.5 Up to the end of Quarter 3 2023/24, compared to the same point in 2022/23 in-year collection is as follows:

- Lincoln – up by 0.09%;
- North Kesteven – down by 2.92%;
- West Lindsey – down by 0.24%.

Direction of travel is positive, as at the end of Quarter 2 2023/24 all three local authorities' in-year collection was down: Lincoln by 3.43%, North Kesteven by 6.48%, West Lindsey by 8.30%.

Comparing in-year collection year-on-year is almost impossible the last few years, due to varying criteria/awards of Expanded Retail Relief (ERD), as well as Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF) being allocated to accounts in 2022/23.



| Description                  |                 | End Quarter 3<br>2023/24 | Compared to<br>End Quarter 3<br>2021/22 |
|------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---|
| Business Rates collection    | City of Lincoln | 85.60%                   | Up by 0.09%                             |
| Business Rates collection    | North Kesteven  | 85.90%                   | Down by 2.92%                           |
| Business Rates collection    | West Lindsey    | 86.07%                   | Down by 0.24%                           |
| Business Rates Net Liability | Lincoln         | £38,494,227              | Down by<br>£3,658,486                   |
| Business Rates Net Liability | North Kesteven  | £30,901,914              | Up by £1,777,227                        |
| Business Rates Net Liability | West Lindsey    | £18,065,109              | Up by £353,124                          |

#### 4.6 Outstanding Revenues Customers

4.7 The number of outstanding Revenues Customers at the end of Quarter 3 2023/24 is 849 (split Lincoln 550, North Kesteven 299). This is a slight increase from the figure at the end of Quarter 2 2023/24 (total 782), however with significant demands on the team plus recruitment taking place in respect of vacant positions – the team has performed well to maintain (relatively) this position. It is expected that Quarter 4 2023/24 (as is always the case in the final quarter of the financial year) will bring extremely high levels of customer contact – mainly due to issuing annual Council Tax and Business Rates bills.

#### 4.8 Housing Benefit Overpayments

4.9 As at the end of Quarter 3 2023/24, in period collection of Housing Benefit overpayments stands at:

- City of Lincoln: 107.42%,
- North Kesteven: 103.78%.

4.10 Outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments debt also continues to decrease. As at the end of Quarter 3 2023/24:

- City of Lincoln: £2,324,486,
- North Kesteven: £1,233,565.

### 5. Benefits Performance

5.1 As at the end of Quarter 3 2023/24, there are 2,099 Benefits customers outstanding and awaiting assessment (split Lincoln 1,481, North Kesteven 618). This is an increase from the total outstanding (1,696) at the end of Quarter 2 2023/24. However, the team is working hard to further improve the position – which is generally positive, with significant demands on the Benefits Team not just in terms of ‘core’ processing work (i.e. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support) but also in terms of cost of living support (including Household Support Fund),

## Universal Credit documents and Discretionary Housing Payments.

- 5.2 Despite the significant demands on the Benefits Team, officers continue to assess claims and reported changes of circumstance promptly. As at the end of Quarter 3 2023/24:

| End Quarter 3 2023/24   | City of Lincoln                                     | North Kesteven                                      |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| New Claims              | 15.24 days<br>(End Quarter 3 2022/23<br>15.97 days) | 18.81 days<br>(End Quarter 3 2022/23<br>19.93 days) |
| Changes of Circumstance | 5.52 days<br>(End Quarter 3 2022/23<br>5.76 days)   | 3.99 days<br>(End Quarter 3 2022/23<br>4.10 days)   |

Performance levels in respect of all four average positions as above is positive, however it is recognised that New Claims performance for North Kesteven needs to further improve going forward.

To give this position some context, the latest national data available shows that in Quarter 2 2023/24 New Claims were processed in an average of 20 days by Councils, with Changes of Circumstance being processed in an average of 9 calendar days. It should be noted that these national figures are for a specific quarter only (i.e. Quarter 2 2023/24) and not cumulative over the financial year – which is how officers report these areas of performance for our shared service.

- 5.3 In terms of the claims checked that were 'correct, first time' (with even £0.01p 'out' being classified as an incorrect assessment), at the end of Quarter 3 2023/24:

- City of Lincoln: 92.29% (1,641 out of 1,778 checked),
- North Kesteven: 98.26% (678 out of 690 checked).

City of Lincoln's reduced level of performance in Quarter 1 2023/24 (87.85%) was due to 200 more checks during the quarter than in the same quarter last year, including due to less experienced officers being part of the team, 100% of claims being checked, which can also mean more (small) errors being identified – and then corrected. Performance has improved by 4.44% from the end of Quarter 1 to Quarter 3, demonstrating a positive direction of travel.

These checks are in addition to the significant number of checks also carried out under the audit requirements of the annual Housing Benefit Subsidy claims.

## 6. Welfare and Benefits Advice

- 6.1 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 Quarter 3 2023/24, the team has achieved the following:

| <b>Quarter 3 2023/24</b>                                       | <b>City of Lincoln</b> | <b>North Kesteven</b> |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Advice provided enabling weekly value of additional benefits   | £9,702                 | £5,538                |
| Advice provided enabling lump sum award of additional benefits | £100,029               | £74,080               |
| No. of customers to whom help provided                         | 1,491                  | 528                   |
| No. money advice referrals                                     | 33                     | 24                    |

Outcomes and demands have generally continued to increase throughout the team, for both partner local authorities. There are a number of key reasons why the levels of Welfare/Money advice in Lincoln is higher than in North Kesteven, including:

- Differences in demographics;
- 'Customer journey' different at each Council;
- Significant number of foodbank vouchers issued at Lincoln compared to North Kesteven.

Demands and processes for the Welfare Team continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis, to ensure the team's vital work is promoted and utilised effectively and efficiently.

## **7. Storm Babet and Storm Henk**

7.1 Both City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council residents were affected either directly or indirectly by Storm Babet in October 2023, and/or by Storm Henk in January 2024 .

Three departments of the Government announced 5 separate schemes to help with flood victims:

1. Council Tax relief for a minimum of 3 months
2. Business Rates relief for a minimum of 3 months
3. Council Tax Community Support Grant of £500
4. Business Recovery Grant of £2,500
5. Flood resilience Grants of £5,000 – to future proof flooded properties.

Schemes 1-4 are administered by the Revenues and Benefits Service and scheme 5 is administered by the Lead Flood Authority, Lincolnshire County Council.

**7.2 Statistics for grants awarded by our Revenues and Benefits Service, are shown as below:**

**Storm Babet** at 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024 (when scheme closed):

|                           | Flooded | Affected, not flooded | Grants paid by end of scheme |
|---------------------------|---------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| North Kesteven DOMESTIC   | 182     | 3                     | 95                           |
| North Kesteven COMMERCIAL | 22      | 0                     | 3                            |
| LINCOLN DOMESTIC          | 30      | 3                     | 13                           |
| LINCOLN COMMERCIAL        | 5       | 11                    | 0                            |

**Storm Henk** at 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024 (scheme still open, figures continue to be updated):

|                           | Flooded | Affected, not flooded | Grants paid to date | Affected by Babet |
|---------------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| North Kesteven DOMESTIC   | 21      | 0                     | 3                   | 15                |
| North Kesteven COMMERCIAL | 3       | 0                     | 0                   | 3                 |
| LINCOLN DOMESTIC          | 2       | 0                     | 0                   | 2                 |
| LINCOLN COMMERCIAL        | 1       | 0                     | 0                   | 1                 |

**7.3** The District authorities would be repaid for any of the Grants that they provided and for Council Tax and/or Business rate relief.

The end date for the Council Tax Relief and the Business rate relief is when the customer returns to their property, or 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

The Revenues and Benefits Service is tasked with continuing to monitor these properties until all residents have returned to their properties.

Evidence must be obtained at regular intervals to ensure that the Council Tax relief or business rate relief is still applicable. The evidence must be kept for a period of 7 years and available for audit. The four schemes that the Revenues and Benefits Service are administering are resource-intensive due to the volume of properties affected. Customers who reported flooding online were contacted when they did not make an application for the flood support. Our visiting officer went out to speak to people who struggled to make a claim online, and officers dealt with contact from insurance companies where residents did not take photographs.

No new burdens are to be provided for the administration of either the Storm Babet flood support or the Storm Henk flood support.

**8. Strategic Priorities**

**8.1** 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.”

8.2 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.

## **9. Organisational Impacts**

### **9.1 Finance**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

### **9.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules**

There are no direct Legal or Procurement implications arising from this report.

### **9.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights:**

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

## **10. Risk Implications**

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

## **11. Recommendations**

11.1 To note the performance information as set out in this report.

11.2 To note that a performance update will be presented at the next meeting of this committee on 30 May 2024.

**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?**

Appendix 1:  
Performance Data to end Quarter 3 2023/24

**List of Background Papers:**

None

**Lead Officer:**

Martin Walmsley, Assistant Director – Shared  
Revenues and Benefits  
[Martin.walmsley@lincoln.gov.uk](mailto:Martin.walmsley@lincoln.gov.uk)

Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024  
Performance Update  
Appendix 1: Performance Data Quarter 3 2023/24

| <u>Measure</u>  | <u>Quarter 3 2023/24</u> |                 | <u>Quarter 3 2022/23</u> |            |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Local Authority   | NK                       | COL             | NK                       | COL        |
| Council Tax collection (cumulative)   | 83.94%                   | 76.11%          | 84.99%                   | 77.58%     |
| NNDR collection (cumulative)  | 85.90%                   | 85.60%          | 88.82%                   | 85.51%     |
| NNDR collection – WLDC (cumulative)   | 86.07%                   |                 | 86.31%                   |            |
| No. Revenues customers awaiting change to be processed                                    | 299                      | 550             | 212                      | 444        |
| Total Net Arrears for Council Tax prior years (i.e. not including current year)           | £2,733,647               | £5,391,693      | £1,099,688               | £5,721,467 |
| Total Net Arrears for NNDR prior years (i.e. not including current year)                  | £20,897                  | £80,724 (debit) | £53,152 (debit)          | £119,457   |
| Housing Benefit overpayments collection in period   | 103.78%                  | 107.42%         | 139.43%                  | 137.75%    |
| Outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments debt   | £1,233,565               | £2,324,486      | £1,303,080               | £2,403,988 |
| Housing Benefit New Claims: Average number of days to process (cumulative)                | 18.81 days               | 15.24 days      | 19.93 days               | 15.97 days |
| Housing Benefits Changes of Circumstances: Average number of days to process (cumulative) | 3.99 days                | 5.52 days       | 4.10 days                | 5.76 days  |
| No. Benefits customers awaiting assessment (cumulative)                                   | 618                      | 1,481           | 486                      | 1,373      |
| % Benefits claims checked financially correct (cumulative)                                | 98.26%                   | 92.29%          | 96.41%                   | 95.69%     |

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**SUBJECT: REVENUES AND BENEFITS - FINANCIAL MONITORING  
QUARTER 3 2023/24**

**DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE & TOWN CLERK**

**LEAD OFFICER: MARTIN WALMSLEY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SHARED  
REVENUES AND BENEFITS**

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present to Members the third quarter's (ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023) performance for the Revenues and Benefits shared service for 2023/24.

## 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The forecast outturn for 2023/24 predicts that there will be an underspend against the approved budget of £34,940, which includes the newly confirmed 2023/24 pay award, which was paid in December 2023.

## 3. Background

- 3.1 The approved budget for 2023/24 was agreed by Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023. The Committee set a budget for 2023/24 of £2,878,930 for the service.
- 3.2 At quarter one, the budget was increased to reflect New Burdens grants totalling £61,950, giving a revised budget of £2,940,890.
- 3.3 No further New Burdens were issued in quarter two.
- 3.4 At quarter three, further new burdens totalling £13,300 were received, as follows:

|  | <b>CoLC</b>      | <b>NK</b>        | <b>Total</b>     |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|  | <b>£</b>         | <b>£</b>         | <b>£</b>         |
| <b>Original Budget</b>   | <b>1,524,940</b> | <b>1,353,990</b> | <b>2,878,930</b> |
| New Burdens Q1 – DWP – NEC ICT Costs-HB Stock cases (YE Acc)                                 | 8,220            | 5,190            | 13,410           |
| New Burdens Q1 – DWP – LA-PED IT Costs (IP Address Online Supplier & IP Address IT Supplier) | 1,500            | 1,500            | 3,000            |
| New Burdens Q1 – DWP - Single Housing Benefit Extract Automation (SHBE API)                  | 10,100           | 10,090           | 20,190           |
| New Burdens Q1 – DWP - Housing Benefit Review (HBR)  | 240              | 240              | 480              |
| New Burdens Q1 – DLUHC - Local Council Tax Support Scheme                                    | 14,050           | 11,060           | 25,110           |
|  |                  |                  |                  |

|  |                  |                  |                  |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| New Burdens Q3 – DWP – LA Data Sharing Programme: Payment for IT costs | 5,790            | 5,790            | 11,580           |
| New Burdens Q3 – DWP – LA Data Sharing Programme: Payment for IT costs | 740              | 740              | 1,480            |
|  |                  |                  |                  |
| <b>REVISED BUDGET</b>  | <b>1,565,580</b> | <b>1,388,600</b> | <b>2,954,180</b> |

#### 4. Quarter Three Financial Performance and Forecast Outturn 2023/24

##### 4.1 Performance Quarter 3

Financial performance as at the third quarter of 2023/24 is detailed in Appendix 1 to this report. At quarter three, there is an underspend against the approved budget of £9,000.

##### 4.2 Forecast Outturn 2023/24

The forecast outturn for 2023/24 predicts that there will be an underspend against the approved budget of £34,940, including the impact of the National Pay Award paid in December 2023, which reflects an improvement of £35,250 from quarter two. Further details are attached within Appendix 2 of this report.

##### 4.3 A summary of the main forecast year-end variations against the approved budget for 2023/24 is shown in the table below:

| <u><b>Service Area</b></u> | <u><b>£</b></u> | <u><b>Reason for variance</b></u>   |
|----------------------------|-----------------|---|
| <b>Management Team</b>     |                 |   |
| Pay Award                  | 12,210          | Budgetary impact of the National pay award over and above MTFS assumptions.   |
| Salary costs               | (5,960)         | Vacancy savings pending recruitment.  |
| <b>Benefits</b>            |                 |   |
| Pay Award                  | 42,750          | Budgetary impact of the National pay award over and above MTFS assumptions.   |
| Salary costs               | (78,080)        | Vacancy savings pending recruitment, now not expected until the new financial year, partially offset by overtime costs. |
| Overtime                   | 35,500          | Additional hours required as a result of vacancies.   |
| IT Costs                   | 42,720          | New Software requirements, partially funded through New Burdens funding.  |

|                                |          |   |
|--------------------------------|----------|---|
| New Burdens                    | (36,600) | Additional grant funding to offset new IT cost pressures.   |
| <b>Revenues Local Taxation</b> |          |   |
| Pay Award                      | 38,380   | Budgetary impact of the National pay award over and above MTFS assumptions.   |
| Staffing Costs                 | (57,800) | Vacancy savings pending recruitment, now not expected until the new financial year, partially offset by overtime costs. |
| Overtime                       | 24,530   | Additional hours required as a result of vacancies.   |
| IT Costs                       | 19,760   | New Software requirements, offset by NB funding for the Local Council Tax Support Scheme below.                         |
| New Burdens                    | (25,110) | Additional grant funding for administration of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.                                    |
| <b>Benefits/Money Advice</b>   |          |   |
| Pay Award                      | 10,200   | Budgetary impact of the National pay award over and above MTFS assumptions.   |
| Staffing Costs                 | (40,250) | Vacancy savings pending recruitment.  |

- 4.4 A job evaluation panel held on 11th July 2023 has evaluated, and approved, the Benefits Appeal Officer role at grade S6 (previously S5). This is reflected in the current forecast outturn position. The impact of this job evaluation totals £1,485.88, which has been split as follows: City of Lincoln £861.81 and North Kesteven £624.07.
- 4.5 Each Council has received a new burdens grant from Central Government to administer the Energy Support Scheme, for which City of Lincoln received £14,950 and North Kesteven received £21,790, by agreement these grants sit outside of the shared service budget.
- 4.6 The key factor behind the improved position as at quarter three is the ongoing staffing vacancies which, as at quarter two, were expected to be recruited to during the second half of the year but are now expected to remain vacant until the end of the financial year. These savings are partly offset by the National Pay Award, which was significantly higher than the budgeted pay award estimate of 3% assumed within the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), alongside overtime costs which have been incurred due to the volume vacancies that remain within the teams.

## **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 Term Financial Strategy.

## **7. Recommendations**

- 7.1 Members are recommended to note the actual position at quarter three.

**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  
[Martin.walmsley@lincoln.gov.uk](mailto:Martin.walmsley@lincoln.gov.uk)

Appendix 1 - Actual Position as at Quarter 3 2023/24

|                         | Profiled Budget |           |           | Actual YTD |         |           | Variance YTD |          |          |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|------------|---------|-----------|--------------|----------|----------|
|                         | CoLC            | NK        | Combined  | CoLC       | NK      | Combined  | CoLC         | NK       | Combined |
| Revenues & Benefits     |                 |           |           |            |         |           |              |          |          |
| Management              | 172,620         | 172,620   | 345,240   | 174,225    | 174,225 | 348,449   | 1,605        | 1,605    | 3,209    |
| Benefits                | 535,320         | 390,860   | 926,178   | 547,517    | 396,478 | 943,995   | 12,197       | 5,618    | 17,815   |
| Revenues Local Taxation | 357,090         | 371,670   | 728,755   | 354,012    | 368,461 | 722,473   | (3,078)      | (3,209)  | (6,287)  |
| Money Advice            | 68,100          | 68,090    | 136,195   | 56,229     | 56,229  | 112,458   | (11,871)     | (11,861) | (23,732) |
|                         |                 |           |           |            |         |           |              |          |          |
| Total 2023/24           | 1,133,130       | 1,003,240 | 2,136,368 | 1,131,982  | 995,393 | 2,127,375 | (1,148)      | (7,847)  | (8,995)  |
|                         |                 |           |           |            |         |           |              |          |          |
| Grand total             |                 |           |           |            |         |           | (1,148)      | (7,847)  | (8,995)  |

Appendix 2 Forecast Financial Outturn for 2023/24

|                                | Annual Budget    |                  |                  | Forecast Outturn |                  |                  | Variance        |                 |                 |
|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                | CoLC             | NK               | Combined         | CoLC             | NK               | Combined         | CoLC            | NK              | Combined        |
| Revenues & Benefits Management | 225,020          | 225,020          | 450,040          | 227,085          | 227,085          | 454,170          | 2,065           | 2,065           | 4,130           |
| Benefits                       | 716,460          | 523,110          | 1,239,570        | 716,102          | 522,848          | 1,238,950        | (358)           | (262)           | (620)           |
| Revenues Local Taxation        | 488,210          | 504,580          | 992,790          | 482,013          | 501,687          | 983,700          | (6,197)         | (2,893)         | (9,090)         |
| Money Advice                   | 135,900          | 135,890          | 271,790          | 121,219          | 121,211          | 242,430          | (14,681)        | (14,679)        | (29,360)        |
| <b>Total 2023/24</b>           | <b>1,565,590</b> | <b>1,388,600</b> | <b>2,954,190</b> | <b>1,546,419</b> | <b>1,372,831</b> | <b>2,919,250</b> | <b>(19,171)</b> | <b>(15,769)</b> | <b>(34,940)</b> |
| <b>Grand total</b>             |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  | <b>(19,171)</b> | <b>(15,769)</b> | <b>(34,940)</b> |

**SUBJECT: REVENUES AND BENEFITS – BASE BUDGET FORECAST  
2024/25**

**DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE & TOWN CLERK**

**LEAD OFFICER: JACLYN GIBSON, CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To present to Members the Base Budget Forecast for the Revenues and Benefits shared service for 2024/25.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service was formed on 1 June 2011, with a budget set to deliver savings for both partner authorities.
- 2.2 The Delegation and Joint Committee Agreement requires the Base Budget Forecast for the shared to be reported to Members. This report is designed to meet this requirement.
- 2.3 The Base Budget Forecast for 2024/25 is included as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 2.4 A full reconciliation to the previous Base Budget Forecast is included as Appendix 2 to this report.

**3. Base Budget Forecast 2024/25**

- 3.1 The Base Budget Forecast for the shared service has been prepared and is included as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 3.2 A full review of each line of the budget has taken place to ensure a fair representation of the activity of the service. This has led to budgets being transferred between different shared service functions. Although each Authority has a different percentage of each service, across the service as a whole this hasn't led to either Authority significantly paying more than the other.
- 3.3 As a result of inflationary pressures there has been a significant increase in the base budget from last year, in the main, due to the significantly higher than anticipated pay award in 2023/24. As agreed nationally, the pay award reflected the higher of either, a flat rate increase of £1,925, or 3.5-3.8% to all employees, equivalent to a 9.4% increase for the lowest paid members of staff and with the majority of officers receiving pay rises above 5% for the second consecutive year, in comparison to the original budgeted estimate of 3%. A full reconciliation to the previous Base Budget Forecast is included as Appendix 2 to this report.

#### **4. Organisational Impacts**

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

#### **5. Risk Implications**

- 5.1 Full financial risk assessments are included within both partner authorities Medium Financial Strategies.

#### **6. Recommendation**

- 6.1 Members are recommended to approve the Base Budget Forecast for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service for 2024/25.

**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  
[Martin.walmsley@lincoln.gov.uk](mailto:Martin.walmsley@lincoln.gov.uk)



## Appendix 1 Base Budget Forecast 2024/25

|                     | 2024/25           |                  |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                     | Shared<br>Service | NKDC             | CoLC             |
|                     | £                 | £                | £                |
| <b>Management</b>   |                   |                  |                  |
| Employees           | 377,270           |                  |                  |
| Supplies & Services | 97,260            |                  |                  |
| <b>Sub Total</b>    | <b>474,530</b>    | <b>237,270</b>   | <b>237,270</b>   |
| <b>Revenues</b>     |                   |                  |                  |
| Employees           | 993,730           |                  |                  |
| Transport           | 4,500             |                  |                  |
| Supplies & Services | 231,720           |                  |                  |
| Recharge to WLDC    | (81,800)          |                  |                  |
| Income              | (15,000)          |                  |                  |
| CoLC only recovery  | (95,990)          |                  |                  |
| <b>Sub Total</b>    | <b>1,037,160</b>  | <b>528,950</b>   | <b>508,210</b>   |
| <b>Benefits</b>     |                   |                  |                  |
| Employees           | 1,230,830         |                  |                  |
| Transport           | 600               |                  |                  |
| Supplies & Services | 48,600            |                  |                  |
| Income              | (8,740)           |                  |                  |
| <b>Sub Total</b>    | <b>1,271,290</b>  | <b>533,940</b>   | <b>737,350</b>   |
| <b>Money Advice</b> |                   |                  |                  |
| Employees           | 281,570           |                  |                  |
| Transport           | 2,750             |                  |                  |
| Supplies & Services | 8,350             |                  |                  |
| <b>Sub Total</b>    | <b>292,670</b>    | <b>146,340</b>   | <b>146,340</b>   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>        | <b>3,075,650</b>  | <b>1,446,500</b> | <b>1,629,170</b> |

## Appendix 2 – Reconciliation to previous Base Budget Forecast (2023-28)

|  | 2024/25                |                  |                  |
|--|------------------------|------------------|------------------|
|  | Shared<br>Service<br>£ | NKDC<br>£        | CoLC<br>£        |
| Original budget - 2023 – 2028              | <b>2,980,420</b>       | <b>1,401,760</b> | <b>1,578,660</b> |
| Increased Salary cost related to Pay Award | 89,260                 | 42,220           | 47,040           |
| Increased costs for IT and Subscriptions   | 5,950                  | 2,500            | 3,450            |
| Other minor variances                      | 20                     | 20               | 20               |
| <b>Revised budget – 2024 – 2029</b>        | <b>3,075,570</b>       | <b>1,446,500</b> | <b>1,629,170</b> |

**SUBJECT: BUSINESS RATES UPDATE**

**DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK**

**REPORT AUTHOR: EMMA-JANE BRODRICK, RECOVERY AND NNDR/BID TEAM LEADER**

## **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, North Kesteven District Council and West Lindsey District Council. The report is not intended to include non-domestic rate performance matters, as this is covered in the 'Performance Update' report before this Joint Committee today.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 The report includes some of the changes that have been announced as a result of the Government's financial support provided to businesses in the form of business rates relief. The report also focuses on the financial impact of recent appeals and reductions to rateable values.

## **4. NDR Charges and Significant Reliefs/Discounts**

- 4.1 At the Autumn Statement on 22 November 2023, the Chancellor announced that the Government would continue to provide a package of business rates measures to support businesses in England.
- The retail, hospitality and leisure relief will continue for 2024/2025 at 75% up to £110,000 per business
  - A freezing of the small multipliers for a further year at 49.9p and an increase in the standard multiplier from 51.2p to 54.6p

## **5. Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief 2023-24**

- 5.1 Eligibility criteria for the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief was set out by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and issued to Local Authorities on 20 December 2021. No changes were made to the qualifying criteria for the year 2023/2024. This can be found here:
- [Business Rates Information Letter 9/2021 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1014442/business-rates-information-letter-9-2021.pdf)

- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 DLUHC 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.
- 5.4 Government will reimburse LA's that use their discretionary relief powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (amended).
- 5.5 In terms of Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief (previously known through the Expanded Retail Discount (ERD) scheme), the figures below reflect the significant reduction in the amounts awarded in the last three years with an estimate on the award to be granted in 2023/24.

| <b>Awarded</b>                           | <b>City of Lincoln</b> | <b>North Kesteven</b> | <b>West Lindsey</b> | <b>Annual reduction</b>       |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>2020/21</b>                           | £28,002,354            | £6,748,970            | £5,048,076          | 100%                          |
| <b>2021/22</b>                           | £9,544,369             | £3,890,932            | £2,288,599          | 66%(Apr-Jun)<br>100%(Jul-Mar) |
| <b>2022/23</b>                           | £2,840,236             | £1,691,974            | £1,032,508          | 50%                           |
| <b>2023/24<br/>Estimated on<br/>NDR1</b> | £3,906,616             | £2,383,359            | £1,486,748          | 75%                           |
| <b>2023/24<br/>End Dec 23</b>            | £4,003,219             | £2,336,514            | £1,509,920          | 75%                           |

Capping applies to all years with exception of 2020/21

## 6. Potential Reductions to Rateable Value

### Fire Stations and Hospitals

- 6.1 On 4 December 2020, the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) contacted all Local Authorities to advise they may start to see changes in the rateable values of hospitals and fire stations. These categories have been in discussion under the

VOA's Group Pre-Challenge Review (GPCR) procedure.

- 6.2 Rating agents requested GPCR discussions in early 2020 and submitted checks against a representative sample of properties within each class. The GPCRs facilitated the provision and exchange of evidence culminating in agreed valuation schemes.
- 6.3 On average reductions will be around 10% on NHS and private hospitals, and 9% on fire stations however this will be subject to wide variation dependant on the age of the properties.

Most reductions are needed to reflect the application of new age and obsolescence scales for non-industrial properties, following guidance given in the Upper Tribunal decision *Hughes v York Museum*. Larger reductions, in the region of 23%, are likely on:

- hospitals built after 2010 (further building costs were produced by the agents to support this); and
- older 1960s/70s built hospitals (particular those of a 'tower block design'; these having greater functional obsolescence).

- 6.4 Whilst the initial reductions will flow from GPCR Challenges, the scheme reductions the VOA have agreed will likely be actioned on any existing and future Check cases; these can be actioned as soon as the VOA have confirmation all physical factors they hold in their surveys are correct.

#### 6.5 **Hotels Occupied by Asylum Seekers**

Under Section 66(1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, a property is domestic if it is used for living accommodation with the only exception being in Section 66(2) which says a property is not domestic if it is being used in the course of a business providing short-stay accommodation to individuals whose sole or main residence is somewhere else.

Where a hotel is used to as accommodation for refugees/asylum seekers, the occupants do not have a sole or main residence elsewhere. Therefore, the hotel should be brought into the Council Tax listings with the maximum charge being a Band H property.

The Valuation Office have recently removed a hotel from the Non Domestic Rating list and brought this into the Council Tax listings as a Band H Council Tax dwelling.(not in our districts) The result of this is a loss of Non Domestic Rating income to the authority which is not offset by the amount of a Council Tax paid for a Band H dwelling.

The Valuation Office are making changes to properties that they know about, but as the Home Office will likely to have a register of the properties being used to house refugees/asylum seekers, this may increase the number of hotels that are removed from Non Domestic Rating listings.

## 6.6 Museums

Following a series of landmark cases regarding the valuation of museums, the Valuation Office confirmed that they would change the assessment of Museums for the purposes of business rates.

They announced that from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023, museums in older buildings would be assessed on income and expenditure receipts, these had previously been assessed by the contractors method which assesses the rateable value according to the cost of a rebuild. Sector bodies have long argued that this unfairly penalises museums for occupying historic properties or large spaces required to house and display collections. The result of this being that the rateable value is calculated at much higher levels of values that most museums could ever afford as rent.

The Valuation Office also announced that newer built museums, built after 2001, would continue to be assessed on the contractor's calculation.

For any of the older buildings that were to have their rateable value reduced to £1 from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023, the Valuation Office informed ratepayers that they must appeal the 2017 listings under the Check, Challenge and Appeal system on their website.

Three museums, one built after 2001, put in appeals regarding the 2017 listings. The appeal in respect of the hereditament built after 2001 has been founded and appears to have been calculated on the receipts and expenditure process and not the contractor's basis as announced by the Valuation Office. Therefore, officers are expecting to receive a schedule from the Valuation Office confirming the reduction of the rateable value to £1 with effect from 1.4.2017 for this property. This has a financial impact on the authority as a large refund will be due to the ratepayer.

## 7. Business Rates Review

- 7.1 The final report for a Business Rates Review was also published at the Budget. The Budget and the Review commits in the longer term, to making improvements to the Business Rates system – these include the following;

More frequent revaluations, moving to a revaluation every three years starting from the next revaluation which comes into force on 1st April 2023, the next being 1st April 2026 and so on.

The process of revaluation starts approximately 2 years before the new valuations come into force. For the revaluation due on 1st April 2023, the rateable value will be assessed based on the rental evidence on 1st April 2021. There will be a new duty on the ratepayer to provide the Valuation Office with the information.

- 7.2 For each revaluation, the Government introduces a Transitional Relief scheme. Transitional relief limits how much a bill can change each year. As the Ndr system is self-financing, historically these limits have limited both large increases and large decreases. In the Budget, the government announced a change to the Transitional relief scheme so that only increases were limited. For any reduction in the rateable value, a ratepayer will receive the full benefit of the reduction

immediately.

Rateable values at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 are shown below:

| Total RV                        | City of Lincoln      | North Kesteven   | West Lindsey      |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|--|-------------------|
| 2017 list – RV                  | 111,657,102          | 76,676,924   | 49,669,995        |
| Hereditaments                   | 3589                 | 3458   | 3051              |
|                                 |                      |  |                   |
| 2023 draft list – RV            | 109,146,624          | 84,565,162   | 53,638,108        |
| Hereditaments                   | 3589                 | 3457   | 3051              |
|                                 |                      | Reduction is due to one assessment entering the Central Listings |                   |
| Changes to RV from 2017 to 2023 | -2,510,478<br>-2.25% | 7,888,238<br>10.3%   | 3,968,113<br>8.0% |

### 7.3 Heat Network Rate Relief Scheme

As set out in the business rates information letter the government has published the guidance for Local Authorities on the operation of the Heat Networks relief scheme for 2023/24. The scheme is substantially unchanged from the guidance published for 2022/23. Local Authorities are to continue to deliver the discretionary relief using their discretionary powers for 2023-24 until the relief is made mandatory through the Non Domestic Rating Bill.

This relief is targeted at hereditaments being used wholly or mainly as heat networks and has its own rating assessment. The relief is for those networks generating from a low carbon source to ensure that the policy supports decarbonisation.

Heat networks take heat or cooling from a central source(s) and deliver it to a variety of different customers such as public buildings, shops, offices, hospitals, universities and homes. By supplying multiple buildings, they avoid the need for individual boilers or electric heaters in every building. Heat networks have the potential to reduce bills, support local regeneration and be a cost-effective way of reducing carbon emissions from heating.

For these purposes, a heat network is a facility, such as a district heating scheme, which supplies thermal energy from a central source to consumers via a network of pipes for the purposes of space heating, space cooling or domestic hot water. Hereditaments wholly or mainly providing heat for a different purpose (such as an industrial process) are not eligible. The government will keep under review the incidence of heat networks in any industrial process context and whether they should benefit from the relief.

The test should be applied to the hereditament as a whole and heat network relief is not available on part of a hereditament. Many small and medium scale heat networks, such as common heating systems in multi-occupied buildings or estates, do not give rise to a separate business rates bill. In these cases, the heat

network forms part of the services of the properties which have a wider purpose (e.g. offices) and therefore would not be eligible for Heat Network Relief.

## **8. Business Rates Avoidance and Evasion Consultation**

- 8.1 In the Spring budget on 15 March 2023, the Chancellor announced that the government would consult on measures to tackle business rates avoidance and evasion.

A consultation paper was provided in July 2023, with a target date of 27 September 2023 for responses.

The Ministerial Foreword of this consultation states -

*The vast majority of those who engage with the business rates system do so honestly and transparently. Ratepayers pay the taxes that are due and enjoy the benefits of the reliefs and exemptions to which they are entitled. Rating agents assist their clients competently and adhere to a high professional standard when dealing with billing authorities and the Valuation Office Agency (VOA).*

*But there is also a small minority who seek to exploit the business rates system, either through false reporting, or through contrived means which circumvent the spirit and intention of the law. The former is evasion, the latter, avoidance. These practices unfairly shift the burden of business rates onto the honest majority, and result in loss of revenue which should be used for vital public services.*

The topics that form part of the consultation are –

1. Measures to reform rates on unoccupied properties
2. Wider business rates avoidance and evasion
3. 'Rogue' agents

The Shared Service partners will be responding to this consultation.

## **9. Non Domestic Rating Bill – Royal Assent 26 October 2023**

- 9.1 This bill will make a number of changes to Non Domestic Rating.

One of the changes removes the 6 month backdating rule for discretionary rate relief decisions in England and this was the subject of a question I was asked this week.

The Act creates section 47(6A) which says that a decision, by a billing authority in England, with regards a day is invalid if the day falls before 31 March 2023 and the decision is made more than 6 months after the end of the financial year to which it relates, i.e. the backdating rule does not apply to decisions in respect of 2023-24 onwards.

This is likely to mean that with effect from 1 April 2024 we will be able to make decisions on discretionary reliefs fully retrospectively (in respect of the financial



year 2024/25 onwards...." )

The other significant change is the decoupling of the multipliers and, in effect, the abolition of the small business supplement from 1 April 2024.

This means that Government can choose to raise the two multipliers by different amounts.

9.2 This is going to require extensive discussions between the government and the software suppliers as to how this required data can be extracted before the Local Authorities have to issue the return for the NDR1 (assessment for the rating income for 2024) which is due on 31 December 2023.

9.3 The bill also paves the way for data sharing between the VOA, HMRC and billing authorities. The authorities already have a sharing agreement with the VOA but due to the changes with what they can now share, we expect a new sharing agreement and protocol to be announced by the VOA.

## **10. Strategic Priorities**

10.1 Both authorities look to protect those who may be experiencing financial hardship. The Revenues Team is mindful of the strategic priorities when engaging with business ratepayers as they look to recover the business rate.

## **11. Organisational Impacts**

### **11.1 Finance**

There are no direct financial implications arising as result of this report.

### **11.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules**

There are no legal nor procurement implications as a direct result of this report.

### **11.3 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.

## **12. Risk Implications**

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

## **13. Recommendation**

13.1 Members are requested to note this report.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Is this a key decision?</b>   | No   |
| <b>Do the exempt information categories apply?</b>                               | No   |
| <b>Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?</b> | No   |
| <b>How many appendices does the report contain?</b>                              | None   |
| <b>List of Background Papers:</b>  | None   |
| <b>Lead Officer:</b>   | Emma-Jane Brodrick, Recovery and NNDR/BID Team<br>Leader<br><a href="mailto:Emma-Jane.Brodrick@lincoln.gov.uk">Emma-Jane.Brodrick@lincoln.gov.uk</a> |

**SUBJECT: COST OF LIVING SUPPORT**

**DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK**

**LEAD OFFICER: REBECCA COX, WELFARE REFORM AND PROJECT LEAD**

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To provide Joint Committee with an update regarding various areas relating to the national welfare reform agenda, as well as current cost of living initiatives to support residents.

## **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1 This report provides Joint Committee with an update with regard to the national and local position of welfare reform/ other initiatives, with a specific focus on Universal Credit, Discretionary Housing Payments, Household Support Fund, Council Tax Support Fund and Financial Inclusion matters.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 The national Welfare Reform agenda has had a significant impact on residents of Lincoln and North Kesteven since 2013 when certain changes were introduced – such as Removal of Spare Room Subsidy, and Benefit Cap – and has continued as further changes have been introduced, such as the ongoing rollout of Universal Credit (UC). These changes have resulted in major changes to the operating of our shared service, to ensure a proactive and positive response to welfare reform and the impacts on residents.

The Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living related matters, have caused significant challenges to households locally and nationally. The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service plays a lead and key role in developing and delivering schemes to help mitigate some of the impacts of cost of living challenges. Some of these schemes are directly delivered by this Service, - some in partnership with other teams within the Councils, also with organisations such as those in the voluntary sector.

## **4. Universal Credit (UC)**

- 4.1 The latest national figures published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) w released on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2024, with statistics relevant to the period up to December 2023:

- 6,220,096 households receiving UC (this is an increase from 6,043,162 as reported at last meeting of this Committee).

Local authority statistics are also available:

- City of Lincoln – 11,878 (11,478 as at the last report).
- North Kesteven – 7,289 (6,946 as at the last report).

- 4.2 On 25<sup>th</sup> April 2022, then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Therese Coffey made a statement in the House of Lords ([Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)) regarding managed UC migration for working-age legacy benefits – with the aim of completing this migration by the end of 2024. A 'Discovery Phase'

of migration has been taking place, with a number of areas around the country (not Lincolnshire) with a relatively small number of UC cases.

DWP released information to state those in receipt of Tax Credits would be asked to apply for UC by the end of 2024 ([Tax credits are ending - Understanding Universal Credit](#)). DWP also announced, through the Autumn Statement 2022, that the managed migration of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) cases had been delayed to 2028/29.

A letter was published by DWP and sent to local authorities on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2023, setting out our managed migration plans in 2024/25, and beyond. As at the time of writing this report, further information is awaited from DWP in terms of anticipated numbers of cases anticipated as moving from a legacy benefit (for example, Housing Benefit (HB)) to UC in 2024/25, - as well as a more definitive timescale. Under current plans, our shared service would continue to be responsible for administering and processing HB claims for those of pension age, all Council Tax Support claims, and Exempt/temporary accommodation HB claims, - as well other related work such as Discretionary Housing Payments. Revenues and Benefits management continue to keep the whole LiNK team aware of UC managed migration and the potential impacts moving forward.

## 5. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

- 5.1 Overall DHP funding for 2022/23 was reduced nationally from £140m to £100m. Consequently, grants for City of Lincoln and North Kesteven were also reduced by more than 29% each.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023, DWP announced DHP government grants for 2023/24. For City of Lincoln and North Kesteven, these are exactly the same amounts as for 2022/23, and the announcement also stated that the national DHP allocation for 2024/25 will be the same as for 2023/24 – so individual local authorities may well receive the same figures for 2024/25 – although this is expected to be confirmed shortly. The table below includes the confirmed 2023/24 allocations, also showing previous years' grants.

|                | City of Lincoln Council central government DHP grant | North Kesteven central government DHP grant |
|----------------|--|---|
| <b>2023/24</b> | <b>£132,330</b>                                      | <b>£86,931</b>                              |
| 2022/23        | £132,330   | £86,931                                     |
| 2021/22        | £186,707   | £122,652                                    |
| 2020/21        | £250,113   | £172,612                                    |
| 2019/20        | £178,674   | £113,943                                    |
| 2018/19        | £208,624   | £126,693                                    |
| 2017/18        | £242,505   | £140,972                                    |
| 2016/17        | £173,675   | £107,514                                    |
| 2015/16        | £139,678   | £99,977                                     |
| 2014/15        | £194,308   | £107,365                                    |
| 2013/14        | £199,741   | £98,229                                     |
| 2012/13        | £98,865  | £42,589                                     |

- 5.2 The table below breaks down the number of DHP applications received and determined in Quarter 3 2023/24.

| <b>DHP applications – Quarter 3 2023/24</b> | <b>City of Lincoln</b>                   | <b>North Kesteven</b>                    |
|---|--|--|
| Total number awarded                        | 246<br>(Quarter 3 2022/23 = 281)         | 133<br>(Quarter 3 2022/23 = 179)         |
| No. awarded for Housing Benefit             | 64<br>(Quarter 3 2022/23 = 98)           | 27<br>(Quarter 3 2022/23 = 67)           |
| No. awarded for Universal Credit            | 182<br>(Quarter 3 2022/23 = 183)         | 106<br>(Quarter 3 2022/23 = 112)         |
| Average DHP award                           | £540.26<br>(Quarter 3 2022/23 = £374.31) | £573.83<br>(Quarter 3 2022/23 = £412.83) |

The average award for both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven have increased for 2023/24 compared to 2022/23 due to more applications being turned down this financial year because of officers now including Personal Independence Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance into consideration, meaning more customers have income that exceeds their outgoings. This is allowing officers to award larger DHP payments to those customers living in the private sector where rents have significantly increased, whilst the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) figures have remained the same. However, it should be noted that LHA rates have recently been announced as increasing for 2024/25 [Local Housing Allowance \(LHA\) rates applicable from April 2024 to March 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/local-housing-allowance-lha-rates-applicable-from-april-2024-to-march-2025) .

5.3 The table below shows DHP spend for 2023/24 up to the end of Quarter 3.

|                        | <b>Central Government - DHP Grant 2023/24</b> | <b>DHP net spend as at 31st Dec 2023</b> | <b>DHP committed as at 31st Dec 2023</b> | <b>DHP total spend as at 31st Dec 2023</b> | <b>% Grant spent</b> |
|------------------------|---|--|--|--|----------------------|
| <b>City of Lincoln</b> | £132,330                                      | £98,151                                  | £34,757                                  | £132,908                                   | 100.44 %             |
| <b>North Kesteven</b>  | £86,931                                       | £56,467                                  | £19,851                                  | £76,318                                    | 87.79%               |

As the full government grant for the City of Lincoln has been spent, an extra £10,000 has been provided out of the Homeless Prevention Fund to help support the DHP budget for Lincoln residents until the end of the current financial year.

## 6. Household Support Fund

- 6.1 Previous reports to this Committee updated on Household Support schemes going back as far as October 2021. This report updates on the current position in relation to Household Support Fund wave 4.
- 6.2 In his Autumn statement the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced an extension to the Household Support Fund, running from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. Guidance was issued to local authorities on 20 February 2023, and allocations for this round of funding.

- 6.3 For Lincolnshire, Household Support Fund 2023/24 funding is £10,929,370 – to cover the whole financial year.

In Quarter 1 2023/24, Lincolnshire County Council confirmed plans in respect of Household Support Fund wave 4 2023/24 (HSF4), and updated its HSF website page ([Household Support Fund – Lincolnshire County Council](#)), including the following:

- *Approximately 43% of the funding will be delegated to schools and early years providers to support for children eligible for benefit-related free school meals, early years pupil premium and families with a 2-year-old eligible for early years entitlement.*
- *Approximately 44% will be directed through Lincolnshire's district councils to provide financial support to housing benefit only claimants not in receipt of other support provided via the national scheme.*
- *1% of the grant funding will be used to provide financial support to eligible care leavers in supported living accommodation.*
- *The remaining grant funding will be directed towards other vulnerable households via local schemes, with approximately 11% of the local grant made available to district councils on a proportionate basis. District councils and other third sector/voluntary organisations will work to provide an application-based process to ensure this funding is distributed through local channels in line with the grant conditions. Further details on this process will be published on district council websites once agreed.*

- 6.4 For Housing Benefit recipients in Lincolnshire who were not entitled to the national Cost of Living Payment 2023/24 ([Cost of Living Payments 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)), this payment is being replicated in three phases, the first payment of (£301) was issued in August through Post Office vouchers with a total of £184,212 awarded to 612 eligible households within the City of Lincoln and £181,804 awarded to 604 eligible households within North Kesteven. A second wave of the scheme was delivered in December 2023 with a payment of £300 to eligible households. A total of £172,500 was awarded to 575 households within the City of Lincoln and £174,300 awarded to 581 households within North Kesteven. The third wave (£299 per payment) of these payments is being made in February 2024.
- 6.5 In terms of District Councils' separate allocations of HSF4 to be utilised to work with partners to provide payments, including through an application-based process in part (a requirement of the national HSF4 guidance), these were communicated to District Councils' HSF4 lead officers, - for City of Lincoln £202,676 has been allocated, and for North Kesteven £139,340.
- 6.6 The first wave of the open scheme online application process opened for two weeks from the 2 October 2023; applications continued to be paid after that date until a second wave of the online process opened on the 15 January 2024.
- 6.7 Officers are working in partnership with an established range of referral partners and application processes – as well as some new partners/routes – to ensure these HSF4 monies (through vouchers, food parcels, energy top-ups, etc) are delivered to those identified as in need. A key focus is again with regard to reducing foodbank dependency wherever possible, working with partners to help signpost residents to other means of support (e.g. money advice), - as well as supporting a drive to further increase usage of community groceries. A strategic aim of HSF4, is also to try and leave a 'legacy' of impact – as there is no guarantee of HSF5 (or of another form of local welfare provision) from 2024/25 onwards. It should be noted that this matter was discussed in Parliament on 31 January 2024: [Household Support Fund - Hansard - UK Parliament](#) .

- 6.8 Between October 2023 and December 2023, the following awards were made to support with the cost of Food, Energy & Water, Wider Household Essentials & Housing Costs.

### City of Lincoln

| Household Composition       | Households with a Disabled Person | Households with Children | Households with a Pensioner | Other   |                               |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|-------------------------------|
| Number of Households Helped | 121                               | 130                      | 60                          | 85      |                               |
| Amount of Award             | £17,880                           | £24,021                  | £9,500                      | £11,550 | <b>Total Paid<br/>£62,951</b> |

### North Kesteven

| Household Composition       | Households with a Disabled Person | Households with Children | Households with a Pensioner | Other  |                               |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|
| Number of Households Helped | 561                               | 194                      | 40                          | 39     |                               |
| Amount of Award             | £9,400                            | £34,100                  | £6,850                      | £6,050 | <b>Total Paid<br/>£56,350</b> |

## 7. Council Tax Support Fund 2023/24

- 7.1 On 23 December 2022, central government provided guidance to local authorities regarding a £100 million Council Tax Support Fund for 2023/24, whereby awards of up to £25 are to be made to Council Taxpayers in receipt of Council Tax Support (CTS), - with an element of funding also to be made for discretionary local funds in 2023/24. Funding allocations for City of Lincoln and North Kesteven are £222,303 and £142,500, respectively.

Payments of up to £50.00 (the prescribed maximum was £25.00) were made to City of Lincoln and North Kesteven taxpayers as part of the 2023/24 Council Tax annual billing process. Remaining funding will be considered for local schemes in 2023/24. These figures are £101,705 for City of Lincoln, and £38,628 for North Kesteven.

- 7.2 The remaining funding is to be allocated as follows:

- **New CTS Cases (Lincoln and North Kesteven):**
  - Where a taxpayer has become (or becomes during the financial year) in receipt of CTS since annual billing in 2023/24, they are to be awarded up to £50 which will be credited to their Council Tax account. The award cannot be higher than their outstanding 2023/24 Council Tax charge (following the award of CTS). If a taxpayer has already received an award under the prescribed scheme (e.g. they were on CTS at annual billing 2023, their CTS awarded ended – but then they became eligible for a new CTS award during 2023/24) – they will not be able to receive an award under this Discretionary scheme.
- **Discretionary Awards (Lincoln and North Kesteven):**
  - Outstanding funding (once the new CTS cases have been identified and profiled for the remainder of 2023/24) will be retained as a ‘discretionary pot’ for taxpayers who have been identified by a member of LiNK (although referrals can come through other Council teams – for example, Housing, Customer Services), up to

£50 may be awarded to an account – but only if they have not received an award previously under either the prescribed or discretionary scheme.

- **Review of Discretionary Scheme (Lincoln):**

Spend and impacts of the scheme will be monitored by the Revenues and Benefits Management Team (RBMT) on a monthly basis, and where amendments to the scheme need to be considered – or it is deemed a specific cohort needs to be targeted under this scheme – recommendation/s will be made through the Assistant Director Shared Revenues and Benefits, for consideration/approval by the Chief Finance Officer.

- **Review of Discretionary Scheme (North Kesteven):**

Spend and impacts of the scheme will be monitored by the Revenues and Benefits Management Team (RBMT) on a monthly basis, and where amendments to the scheme need to be considered – or it is deemed a specific cohort needs to be targeted under this scheme – recommendation/s will be made through the Assistant Director Shared Revenues and Benefits, for consideration/approval by the Director of Resources.

- 7.3 Officers are working proactively to ensure this fund is allocated to accounts as appropriate, and it is anticipated this fund will be exhausted for both Lincoln and North Kesteven, within 2023/24.

## **8. Financial Inclusion**

- 8.1 Financial inclusion continues to be a key objective and factor in many areas of LiNK's work. The Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership (LFIP) is currently chaired by the Assistant Director Shared Revenues and Benefits for North Kesteven District Council and City of Lincoln Council, - which brings together organisations and partners to promote and raise the profile of financial inclusion across the county.

Two key areas of high-profile engagement by LFIP in 2023/24, are:

- Co-ordination of 'Talk Money Week' activities in Lincolnshire during the week commencing 6<sup>th</sup> November 2023: [Talk Money Week | 6–10 Nov 2023 | The Money and Pensions Service \(maps.org.uk\)](#) ;
- A conference to be held on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024 in Grantham ( [Lincolnshire Financial Wellbeing Conference Tickets, Tue 20 Feb 2024 at 09:30 | Eventbrite](#)), to follow-up from the highly successful conference held at the Jakemans Community Stadium in Boston, in February 2023.

- 8.2 In terms of the well-documented national cost of living pressures, both our partner Councils continue to review and update web pages dedicated to initiatives to try and assist our residents with cost of living support:

- [Cost of Living Support – City of Lincoln Council](#)
- [Cost of Living Support | North Kesteven District Council \(n-kesteven.gov.uk\)](#) .

- 8.3 As at the time of writing this report, it is unclear what cost of living support funding will be made available to local authorities during 2024/25, with Household Support Fund due to end, also no announcement on national Cost of Living Payments beyond 2023/24. The Spring Budget on 6 March 2024 could be a key date in terms of whether any future support of this type is announced, otherwise a potential 'cliff edge' of such support could occur from



April 2024. City of Lincoln Council has approved funding for some cost of living projects through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, for 2024/25. Appendix 1 to this report gives some actual anonymised Lincoln and North Kesteven cases, showing how LiNK has been able to support residents during 2023/24 through the Household Support Fund and other means.

## **9. Strategic Priorities**

9.1 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”.

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, Employment, Skills and Partnership Working are all key priorities for the shared service.

## **9.2 Organisational Impacts**

## **9.3 Finance**

There are no direct financial implications arising as a result of this report.

## **9.4 Legal implications inc Procurement Rules**

There are no direct Legal or Procurement implications arising from this report.

## **10. Risk Implications**

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

10.2 If Central Government does not announce extension of cost of living support schemes, such as Household Support Fund, for 2024/25 – there is a real risk that residents may suffer financial hardship without local or national welfare provision to further support.

## **11. Recommendation**

11.1 That Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee notes this report, also that a further update will be presented at the next meeting of this Committee.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Key Decision</b>   | No   |
| <b>Do the Exempt Information Categories Apply</b>   | No   |
| <b>Call In and Urgency:</b> Is the decision one to which Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply? | No   |
| <b>Does the report contain Appendices?</b>  | One  |
| <b>If Yes, how many Appendices?</b>   | None   |
| <b>List of Background Papers:</b>   | No   |
| <b>Lead Officer:</b>  | Rebecca Cox, Welfare Reform and Project Lead,<br>Welfare.Reform@lincoln.gov.uk |

**SUBJECT: REVENUES AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE BUSINESS PLAN 2024/25**

**DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK**

**REPORT AUTHOR: MARTIN WALMSLEY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR – SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS**

- 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 each year for consideration and approval.

## **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1 This report sets out the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan for 2024/25.

## **3. Business Plan**

- 3.1 The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan for the financial year 2024/25 is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

- 3.2 Key features of the plan are:

- Key Achievements in 2023/24;
- Savings in 2023/24;
- Key Activities for 2024/25;
- Strategic Priority schemes 2024/25;
- Towards Financial Sustainability projects 2024/25
- Key Risks;
- Performance Management;
- Safeguarding;
- Equality actions;
- Working in Neighbourhoods;
- Workforce Development;
- Social Value;
- Data Protection and Information Governance;
- Corporate Social Responsibility.

## **4. Summary of Plan**

- 4.1 The year 2023/24 has been another positive year for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service, albeit very challenging with a whole host of post Covid-19 pandemic and Cost of living support related-initiatives. The impacts from Covid-19 have been significant and cannot be underestimated, as are the ongoing impacts of rising cost of living challenges. The financial impacts on taxpayers and businesses have been substantial, which has understandably impacted on

revenues collection – particularly in relation to Council Tax. The service continues to promote the ‘Get in touch, not in debt’ message – with a real focus on ‘welfare’ and income-maximisation for customers when making payment arrangements. Also, the increase in the overall Benefits workload as cost of living challenges continue to significantly impact, means that staffing resources and priorities need to be regularly ‘juggled.’

- 4.2 Further to the above, the impacts of Covid-19 and cost of living, like in many other service areas, have been significant and are likely to continue for some considerable time going forward – with increased contact from taxpayers and businesses struggling to pay their bills, as well as increased levels of benefit claims and associated support.

A number of additional demands have been placed on our Revenues and Benefits Service over the last twelve months, including;

- Household Support Fund;
- Council Tax Support Fund;
- Business Rates Reliefs;
- Increase in Benefits claims/changes / Universal Credit changes;
- Alternative Energy support funds
- Storm Babet flood support
- Pressures and impacts from temporary accommodation, and reduced Discretionary Housing Payments funding.

These additional demands should not be underestimated and understandably impact on levels of performance in some areas.

However, despite these major challenges, performance in most areas remains positive – officers are wholly committed to achieving the best possible standards of service to our customers.

- 4.3 To give an indication of key outcomes, above the ‘standard’ Key Performance Measures reported, the following figures demonstrate examples of what the shared service has awarded:

- ✓ **Household Support Fund Payments totalling almost £1million delivered in 2022/23, £342,016 allocated to local schemes in 2023/24 + additional funding for Housing Benefit Cost of Living payments;**
- ✓ **Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief (for businesses) of almost £7.7million;**
- ✓ **Discretionary Housing Payments of £232,680 delivered in 2022/23, on target to deliver an equivalent amount in 2023/24;**
- ✓ **Alternative Energy support funds totalling £354,800 paid out in 2023.**

- 4.4 Officers have settled in well to the hybrid working model, with the ‘standard’ in the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service being 40% office/ 60% homeworking. This approach is meeting front-facing customer demands, whilst gaining advantages of homeworking through efficiencies and increased productivity in some areas. A

'one team' and customer-focussed culture has also been maintained, as colleagues do get to see each other in person again through office presence and meetings – as well as through regular communication through Microsoft Teams. The Revenues and Benefits Management Team (RBMT) continually review and implement changes to further improve the 'one team' culture.

- 4.5 Ongoing budget pressures including combined reductions in funding through Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) means that the service has had to continue adapting the shared service budget, accordingly, allocating resources to areas of higher customer demand, operating vacancy management extremely carefully, and 'flexing' job roles to take on additional initiatives.
- 4.6 The plan for 2024/25 continues to look at a range of key initiatives relating to areas including e-services, cost of living, as well as standards of performance.
- 4.7 The shared service will continue to 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 and taking on appropriate new shared projects where these opportunities arise.
- 4.8 It continues to be 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 provide – and a range of new areas of work demands being placed on the service (examples highlighted in paragraph 4.2). The profile of this service has certainly been further elevated over the last 3½ years (from the Covid-19 pandemic) and there is every reason to believe the shared service's remit will become even more prominent with new initiatives over the next few years.
- 4.9 It remains the case that our shared service is not seen as a 'transactional service,' but a key strategic and customer-focussed service that has tangible and real impacts on people's lives – with continuing cost of living pressures, this is more vital than ever. Our service aims to achieve positive impacts for residents and businesses of Lincoln, North Kesteven and West Lindsey wherever possible, aiming to help people become financially and digitally included and helping those who can do find employment. Cost of living has also focused on key 'basic' requirements of life for residents – i.e. food, fuel and clothing – and initiatives have been developed and continue to be developed. 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. 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."
- 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.

### **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 2024/25 Business Plan.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Is this a key decision?</b>   | No   |
| <b>Do the exempt information categories apply?</b>                               | No   |
| <b>Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?</b> | No   |
| <b>How many appendices does the report contain?</b>                              | Appendix 1 – Business Plan 2024/25<br>Appendix 2 – Risk Register   |
| <b>List of Background Papers:</b>  | None   |
| <b>Lead Officer:</b>   | Martin Walmsley, Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits<br><a href="mailto:Martin.walmsley@lincoln.gov.uk">Martin.walmsley@lincoln.gov.uk</a> |

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## Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

*Martin Walmsley, Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits*

### Business Plan - 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025



## **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 and Cost of Living 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 nearly 6,500, a Council Tax Support caseload of nearly 14,000, and bills more than 102,000 domestic and almost 10,100 commercial properties.**

V1 Prepared by: M.Walmsley, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024

Agreement date:

1<sup>st</sup> Review date: To be considered by Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee,  
22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024

2<sup>nd</sup> Review date:

3<sup>rd</sup> Review date:

Director's comments:

## **Section One: Key achievements in 2023/24**

### **A. Key activities delivered include:**

| Key activities   | Completed by                                    | Summary of outcome achieved  |
|--|---|--|
| Delivery of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service between City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council - opportunities to deliver other work areas and continue to develop and manage positive relationship with West Lindsey District Council | Shared service                                  | Positive management and ongoing review of existing partnership arrangements with West Lindsey District Council.<br><br>2023/24 budget for the Revenues and Benefits shared service delivering savings for the partner local authorities.   |
| Optimising performance levels with reference to impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living challenges, particularly around Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collection, and increased number of Benefits/ Universal Credit applications     | Shared service                                  | Generally positive levels of in-year collection achieved.<br><br>Benefits claim processing times performing ahead of national averages.<br><br>Reduction in level of outstanding Revenues-related work.<br><br>New DHP guidelines, with reduced government grants, managed and monitored |
| Reacting to funding challenges in 2023/24 – e.g. in respect of Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy, DLUHC Council Tax Support grant, New Burdens grant/s, DHP's etc   | Assistant Director Shared Revenues and Benefits | Effective utilisation of New Burdens funding and careful vacancy management, to ensure Shared Service continued to deliver savings for partner local authorities.  |
| The shared service supported (and led  | Shared service                                  | Ensuring residents and businesses incomes are maximised, wherever possible.  |

| Key activities  | Completed by  | Summary of outcome achieved  |
|---|---|--|
| on many) the authorities' cost-of-living responses, working with other service areas to provide proactive responses to specifically lead on and deliver any further government funded support schemes   |   | <p>Clear communication and delivery of/ signposting to relevant initiatives and responses.</p> <p>Prompt, accurate and effective delivery of numerous government-funded support schemes.</p> <p>Working in partnership with other Lincolnshire Councils and voluntary sector organisations, to deliver Household Support Fund wave 4 2023/24.</p> <p>Delivery Alternate Funds for household energy bills.</p> <p>Delivery of Retail Hospitality &amp; Leisure Relief (@75%) for Business Rates, as well as other Business Rates changes – including national revaluation exercise.</p> <p>Identification and delivery of cost of living initiatives, utilising UK Shared Prosperity Fund monies.</p> |
| Supporting the reducing all types of inequality and Our Economy strategic priorities by actively engaging with employment and skills projects and food poverty organisations, - for example, The Network, Lincoln College, Restart, DWP, LFIP | Shared service  | Demonstrable contribution to creating and signposting training and employment opportunities by working with partner organisations.   |
| Embedment, promotion and enhancement of new NEC self-serve modules  | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager, Revenues and Benefits Support and Systems | Increased usage of self-serve modules by residents and businesses.   |

| Key activities                  | Completed by  | Summary of outcome achieved  |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
|                                 | Team Leader   |  |
| Revenues and Benefits assurance | Revenues and Benefits Manager,<br>Subsidy and Quality Control Lead Officer<br><br>Revenues and Benefits Manager | Achievement of 100% subsidy on local authority error overpayments in respect of 2022/23 claims.<br><br>Reduction of levels of error in Benefits assessments.<br><br>Active participation in National Fraud Initiative (NFI) data match schemes.<br><br>Delivery of Single Person Discount review, - also assessing options for a potential Single Person Discount rolling review initiative. |

## 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              | The shared service is delivering savings for both authorities.<br><br>Income from partnership arrangements with West Lindsey District Council.<br><br>Reduction in Benefits Officer resources to take into account decrease in central government funding. |

## C. All other key achievements

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

### Audit Lincolnshire assurances:

- Housing Benefit Subsidy Testing 2022/23 – Substantial Assurance

## **Section Two: Key activities in the group's forward plans for 2024/25**

### **Agreed delivery projects**

| <b>Key activity</b>   | <b>Outcome/savings sought</b>   | <b>Owner</b>   | <b>Timescale</b>   |
|---|---|--|--------------------|
| Delivery of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service between City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council - opportunities to deliver other work areas and positively nurture relationship with West Lindsey District Council | Ongoing shared service, further development of operations of the service – looking for potential enhancements and growth for service, wherever possible   | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits                                | Throughout 2024/25 |
|   | Positively review current partnership arrangements with other local authorities and organisations   | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits                                | Throughout 2024/25 |
|   | The 2024/25 budget for the Revenues and Benefits shared service will continue to deliver savings for the partner local authorities  | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits                                | Throughout 2024/25 |
| Performance improvement required in terms of Revenues outstanding workloads, developing appropriate action plans where required   | Reduction in outstanding workloads – aiming to work within two weeks/ as close as practicable   | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager | Throughout 2024/25 |
| Maintenance/ improvement of performance levels in Council Tax and Non Domestic Rate collection rates, Housing Benefit processing times/accuracy and outstanding workloads, and Housing Benefits overpayment collection                  | Maintenance and/or improvement of current in-year collection levels and Benefits processing times, however reference will need to be made in relation to reasonably achievable performance levels due to cost of living impacts | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager | Throughout 2024/25 |
| Reacting to funding challenges in 2024/25 –   | To ensure that the budget is managed throughout 2024/25   | Assistant Director –   | Throughout 2023/24 |

| Key activity  | Outcome/savings sought   | Owner   | Timescale  |
|---|--|---|--|
| e.g. in respect of Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy, New Burdens grant/s, Discretionary Housing Payments etc  | and responses made accordingly, as well as preparation of a budget for 2025/26   | Shared Revenues and Benefits  |  |
| To ensure the service helps to support the authorities cost-of-living responses, leading on and working with other service areas to provide proactive responses and working in conjunction with UK Shared Prosperity Fund schemes | Ensuring residents and businesses incomes are maximised, wherever possible   | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits                                   | Throughout 2024/25   |
|   | Clear communication and delivery of/ signposting to relevant initiatives and responses   | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits                                   | Throughout 2024/25   |
|   | Prompt, accurate and effective delivery of government-funded support schemes   | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits                                   | Throughout 2024/25   |
|   | Ownership of customer cases, with a focus on positive and tangible outcomes  | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Welfare Reform & Project Officer | Throughout 2024/25   |
|   | Analysing and delivery of cost of living / local welfare provision and schemes in light of government announcements (potentially with reference to Spring Budget 2024) | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits                                   | Timescales to be confirmed, once information/ guidance available |
| To support the reducing all types of inequality strategic priority and our communities strategic priority by actively   | Demonstrable contribution to creating and signposting training and employment opportunities by working with partner organisations.                                     | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and  | Throughout 2024/25   |



| <b>Key activity</b>  | <b>Outcome/savings sought</b>  | <b>Owner</b>  | <b>Timescale</b>   |
|--|--|---|--|
| engaging with employment and skills projects and food poverty organisations, - for example, The Network, Lincoln College, Restart, DWP, LFIP   |  | Benefits  |  |
| To further embed, promote and enhance NEC self-service modules   | Increased usage of self-serve modules by residents and businesses  | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager, Revenues and Benefits Support and Systems Team Leader | Throughout 2024/25   |
| Delivery of Council Tax Support schemes, and further development of potentially income-banded schemes for 2025/26  | Ensuring Council Tax Support schemes reach those most in need of this support, with clear, efficient and customer-focused schemes in place | Revenues and Benefits Manager, Subsidy and Quality Control Lead Officer<br><br>Revenues and Benefits Manager                            | Throughout 2024/25, with assessment of scheme options for 2025/26 in advance of January 2025 |
| To work alongside Lincolnshire colleagues to bring forward a solution for the delivery of a rolling Single Person Discount process, if possible. Otherwise to propose a solution for the LiNK partnership. | Incorrect Single Person Discounts removed from accounts promptly and accurately  | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager  | In advance of and throughout 2024/25   |

| Key activity  | Outcome/savings sought  | Owner   | Timescale          |
|---|---|---|--------------------|
| Undertake a proactive response to Universal Credit migration, managing impact and communication with teams and other stakeholders | Ensuring internal and external stakeholders are aware of impacts of moving to Universal Credit, and support the transition / mitigate impacts wherever possible and appropriate | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits | Throughout 2024/25 |
| Ensuring all aspects of DWP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) are reviewed and compliance achieved or working towards compliance  | Annual sign-off of DWP MOU  | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits | Throughout 2024/25 |

#### **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 2024/25 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits | In advance of and throughout 2024/25 |
| Revenues and Benefits shared service | NK Plan 2023-26                 | Identify projects for 2024/25 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits | In advance of and throughout 2024/25 |

#### **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 | Continuing active consideration of other shared service options – e.g. other areas of work, potential opportunities | R/C        | Efficiencies/savings through shared service opportunities | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits | Prior to and throughout 2024/25 |
| Revenues and Benefits Shared         | Contribution to corporate savings   | R          | Efficiencies/savings through shared                       | Assistant Director –                              | Prior to and                    |

|         |                                  |  |                       |                              |                     |
|---------|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Service | targets/initiatives, as required |  | service opportunities | Shared Revenues and Benefits | through out 2024/25 |
|---------|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|

## **F. Other agreed delivery projects**

N/A

| Service | Activity | Outcomes sought | Owner | Timescale |
|---------|----------|-----------------|-------|-----------|
|         |          |                 |       |           |
|         |          |                 |       |           |

## **Section Three: Other Service Planning considerations in 2024/25**

### **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? |
|---|--|------------------|
| Failure to maintain performance / current levels of Council Tax and Business Rates Collection on behalf of the Shared Service | <b>Controls in place:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance targets/measures reviewed in advance of 2024/25, to take account of Covid-19 impacts</li> <li>Performance is monitored and managed on a regular basis</li> <li>Impacts of cost of living challenges proactively analysed and responded to accordingly</li> <li>Regular reporting into Revenues and Benefits Management Team, Revenue and Benefits Operational Board, Joint Committee</li> <li>Effective management of daily workflow</li> <li>Range of customer experience initiatives ongoing such as e-billing, online Council Tax DD forms, other integrated e-forms and NEC self-serve modules (implemented in second-</li> </ul> |                  |

| 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>half of 2022/23)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council Tax Support Schemes approved January 2024</li> </ul> <p><b>Further action required:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing challenge of working practices and moving resources to areas of demand.</li> <li>• Continue to review of staffing arrangements and 'pressure points' in advance of and throughout 2024/25</li> <li>• Review Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24 and options for 2024/25, then 2025/26</li> <li>• Review of Exceptional Hardship Fund 2023/24 and options for 2024/25, then 2025/26</li> <li>• Further embedding and enhancement of Citizens Access self-serve functionality in 2024/25</li> </ul> | <p>Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2024/25</p> |
| <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><b>Controls in place:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daily management of workload through Document Management System</li> <li>• Processes in place to deal with claims 'on demand' wherever possible</li> <li>• Rolling review of subsidy data from NEC System</li> <li>• Management of incoming work and processes to minimise value of overpayments raised</li> <li>• Training and mentoring of staff</li> <li>• Review of subsidy-quality assurance</li> </ul>  | <p>Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2024/25</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>processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More targeted and efficient quality control mechanisms, improving accuracy levels and rolling training plan to address any training requirement</li> <li>• Performance and quality assurance framework in place</li> <li>• HB New Claims process review project plan scoped and implemented</li> </ul> <p><b>Further action required:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued monitoring of resource allocation – e.g. HB /CTS, Universal Support and other Benefits-related projects, to also take account of cost of living challenges impacts</li> </ul> |   |
| Failure to respond to government initiatives to mitigate impact of covid/cost of living | <p><b>Controls in place:</b></p> <p>Customers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Get in touch, not in debt’ message promoted</li> <li>• Staffing resources (re)-allocated to areas of demand</li> <li>• Welfare Reform support and Welfare Benefits/Advice functions in place</li> <li>• Channels of customer access regular reviewed and changes implemented – e.g. e-forms, self-serve modules</li> <li>• Lead role in Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion</li> </ul>   | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2024/25 |

| 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>Partnership (FIP), and various Cost of living groups – internal and external</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective partnerships with public and third sector bodies</li> <li>• Effective communications regarding cost of living support matters</li> <li>• Regular liaison with Department for Work and Pensions and Citizens Advice re UC support arrangements</li> <li>• Review of structure of cost of living meetings/resources - AD SRB Q1 2023/24</li> <li>• Embedding cost of living support throughout Councils through effective communications and distribution of support tools and advice</li> <li>• Fixed-term Cost of Living Co-Ordinator role now in post</li> <li>• Household Support Fund 4 2023/24 being delivered in waves</li> <li>• UK Shared Prosperity Fund cost of living initiatives being identified/delivered</li> </ul> <p><b>Further controls required:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UK Shared Prosperity Fund cost of living initiatives to be identified/delivered in 2024/25</li> </ul> |                  |

| 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"> <li>Analysing and delivery of cost of living / local welfare provision and schemes in light of government announcements (potentially with reference to Spring Budget 2024)</li> <li>Ensuring internal and external stakeholders are aware of impacts of moving to Universal Credit, and support the transition / mitigate impacts wherever possible and appropriate</li> <li>Considering cost of living support arrangements for 2024/25, in light of potential reduced funding – e.g. if Household Support Fund ends after 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024</li> </ul> |                  |

## H. Performance Management

| Performance   | Planned action | Service |
|---|----------------|---------|
| <p>What are the key plans for ensuring reported performance is of good quality</p> <p>What service measures do you want to see reviewed this year</p> |                |         |

| Performance  | Planned action | Service |
|--|----------------|---------|
| <p>Strong and robust performance reporting arrangements are established and 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 Assistant Director Shared Revenues and Benefits and Revenues &amp; Benefits Manager. Performance is a standing agenda item at Revenues &amp; 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 2024/25, to ensure all measures are still appropriate and whether and also that targets/measures take appropriate account of the ongoing impacts of cost of living challenges.</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  |
|---|
| Ongoing review of equal access to services provided by LiNK – e.g. interpretation, leaflets in other formats/languages, etc.  |
| What key actions are services taking to close significant Equality Information gaps?  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of language interpretation telephone line service</li> <li>• Ongoing review of availability of Revenues and Benefits correspondence in other formats.</li> </ul>   |
| List the policies and strategies to receive an Equality Analysis this year where Assistant Director sign off is required  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council Tax Support Schemes for 2025/26.</li> <li>• Discretionary Housing Payment policy (if required).</li> </ul>   |
| 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?   |
| <p>Ensure appropriate staff in the shared service receive/ have received (refresher) training on safeguarding requirements and processes, as required.</p> <p>In line with corporate training place, ensure any new/ refresher Safetalk/ ASIST training takes place, as required.</p> |

## I. Working in Neighbourhoods

|   |
|---|
| How are you, as Assistant Director, going to engage with the neighbourhood agenda? In which specific services will you ensure there is a focus on |
|---|



|  |
|--|
| <b>neighbourhood working?</b>  |
| The Welfare and Welfare Reform Support/Cost of Living Team within the shared service have specific roles of working with neighbourhoods/communities via a variety of channels, providing benefits, money and debt advice, and cost of living support/solutions. Assistant Director Shared Revenues and Benefits has key links into Sincil Bank revitalisation projects, in particular in relation to Employment and Skills –related initiatives. The service also engages with the communities and the voluntary sector, working with other Lincolnshire Councils as appropriate. Assistant Director Shared Revenues and Benefits is currently Chair of Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership (FIP), looking at neighbourhood-wide, district/s-wide and countywide financial inclusion initiatives. |

## J. Workforce Development

| Workforce Development  | Planned action  | Service                              |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| What are the key plans for training and developing staff?  |   |                                      |
| Proactive response to changing climate in relation to Revenues and Benefits                            | Ongoing review of job roles, skill sets and staff development/training requirements         | Revenues and Benefits Shared Service |
| Proactive support for hybrid working model   | To continue embedding hybrid working model, communicating effectively with all team members | Revenues and Benefits Shared Service |
| Improving workforce capability   | Staff appraisals throughout 2024/25   | 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 2024/25        | Revenues and Benefits Shared Service |
| Delivery of 'Handling Difficult Situations' training through an external provider                      | Training being delivered in Quarter 4 2023/24, potentially further sessions in 2024/25      | 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? |                |         |

| Social Value  | Planned action | Service |
|---|----------------|---------|
| Assistant Director Shared Revenues and 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, and is currently working to help deliver social value in relation to cost of living project/s. |                |         |

## M. Data Protection and Information Governance

| Data Protection and Information Governance  | Planned action | Service |
|---|----------------|---------|
| <b>What are the key plans/ considerations in respect of Data Protection and Information Governance in respect of your services?</b>   |                |         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure ongoing compliance from all staff – a high volume of sensitive and confidential data is held within the shared service</li> <li>- 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</li> <li>- General Data Protection Regulation – Working with IT and Legal Services, to ensure Revenues and Benefits shared service continues to comply with GDPR</li> <li>- 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, - audit taking place in Quarter 1 2024/25 by DWP.</li> </ul> |                |         |

## N. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

| Corporate Social Responsibility  | Planned action | Service |
|--|----------------|---------|
| <b>Can you support the council in its approach to CSR?</b>   |                |         |
| Through the nature of the Revenues and Benefits Service's work, there are significant opportunities to link into CSR activities – including support for The Network, working with foodbanks, and various voluntary sector organisations. |                |         |

**22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024 Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee**  
**Appendix 2: Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan 2024/25 – Risk Register**



## Risk Register Template

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|                   |                     |                 |            |            |               |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| <b>Likelihood</b> | 4<br>Almost Certain |                 |            |            |               |
|                   | 3<br>Probable       |                 | 2, T3      | 1, 3       |               |
|                   | 2<br>Possible       |                 | T2         | T1, T3     |               |
|                   | 1<br>Hardly Ever    |                 |            |            |               |
|                   |                     | 1<br>Negligible | 2<br>Minor | 3<br>Major | 4<br>Critical |
|                   |                     | <b>Impact</b>   |            |            |               |

**RISK REGISTER:** Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

**VERSION:** New Template @ 9<sup>th</sup> November 2018

**REVIEWED:**

Original version produced: 4<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Updated: 26<sup>th</sup> March 2012

Updated: 18<sup>th</sup> June 2012

Updated: 7<sup>th</sup> October 2013

Updated: 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2014

Updated: 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015

Updated: 27<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Updated: 12<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Updated: 28<sup>th</sup> July 2017

Updated 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017

Updated 8<sup>th</sup> November 2018

Updated 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018

Updated 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019

Updated 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019

Updated 12<sup>th</sup> November 2020

Updated 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021

Updated 5<sup>th</sup> November 2021

Updated 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2022

Updated 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024

**OWNER:** Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits

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

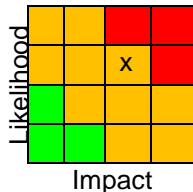
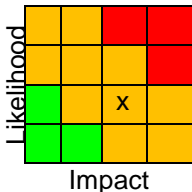
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|    |                   |                             |        |                                       |                                       |                                       |                                  |   |
|----|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 76 | <b>Likelihood</b> | <b>4<br/>Almost certain</b> | Retain | Transfer<br>Modify<br>Retain          | Avoid<br>Transfer<br>Modify           | Avoid<br>Transfer<br>Modify           | <b>Description of occurrence</b> | Occurs several times per year. It will happen.              |
|    |                   | <b>3<br/>Probable</b>       | Retain | Prioritise for<br>Modifying<br>Retain | Transfer<br>Modify<br>Retain          | Avoid<br>Transfer<br>Modify           |                                  | It has happened before and could happen again.              |
|    |                   | <b>2<br/>Possible</b>       | Retain | Prioritise for<br>Modifying<br>Retain | Prioritise for<br>Modifying<br>Retain | Transfer<br>Modify<br>Retain          |                                  | It may happen but it would be unusual.                      |
|    |                   | <b>1<br/>Hardly ever</b>    | Retain | Retain                                | Retain                                | Prioritise for<br>Modifying<br>Retain |                                  | Never heard of it occurring. We can't imagine it occurring. |

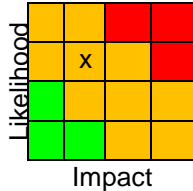
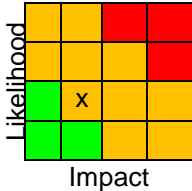
|                         |                    |                    |                       |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>1<br/>Negligible</b> | <b>2<br/>Minor</b> | <b>3<br/>Major</b> | <b>4<br/>Critical</b> |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|

| 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  |

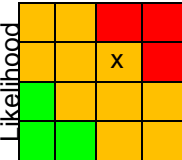
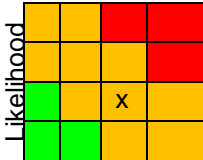
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|   |  | Risk Owner  | Risk Appetite<br><br>(How much risk are we prepared to take and the total impact of the risk we are prepared to accept) | Current Controls/Actions   | Current Risk Score  | Target Risk Score at end of 2024/25   | Assurance -Status<br><br>(Full, Substantial, Limited, No) | Assurance – Direction of Travel<br>(Improving, Static, Declining)   |
|---|--|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | <b>Failure to maintain performance / current levels of Council Tax and Business Rates Collection on behalf of the Shared Service</b> | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits | <b><u>Creative &amp; Aware</u></b><br><br><b>Finance &amp; Money</b>  | <b>Controls in place:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance targets/measures reviewed in advance of 2024/25, to take account of Covid-19 impacts</li> <li>Performance is monitored and managed on a regular basis</li> <li>Impacts of cost of living challenges proactively analysed and responded to accordingly</li> <li>Regular reporting into Revenues and Benefits Management Team, Revenue and Benefits Operational Board, Joint Committee</li> <li>Effective management of daily workflow</li> <li>Range of customer experience initiatives ongoing such as e-billing, online Council Tax DD forms, other integrated e-forms and NEC self-serve modules (implemented in second-half of 2022/23)</li> <li>Council Tax Support Schemes to be approved January 2024</li> </ul> <b>Further action required:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Continuing challenge of working practices and moving resources to areas of demand.</b></li> <li>Continue to review of staffing arrangements and 'pressure points'</li> </ul> |  |  | Substantial   | Range of indicators, but in the main performance is either improving or being maintained, however, Covid-19 and subsequent cost of living pressures are impacting on in-year collection |

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|             |  |  |  |  |   |   |                    |   |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|---|---|--------------------|---|
|             |  |  |  | <p>in advance of and throughout 2024/25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Review Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24 and options for 2024/25, then 2025/26</b></li> <li>• <b>Review of Exceptional Hardship Fund 2024/24 and options for 2024/25, then 2025/26</b></li> <li>• Further embedding and enhancement of Citizens Access self-serve functionality in 2024/25</li> </ul>   |   |   |                    |   |
| 2<br><br>78 | <p><b>Failure to provide timely and accurate assessment of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support and Discretionary Housing payment applications on behalf of the Shared Service</b></p> | <p>Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits</p> | <p><b><u>Creative &amp; Aware</u></b></p> <p><b>Reputation &amp; Public Confidence</b></p> <p><b>Finance &amp; Money</b></p> | <p><b>Controls in place:</b></p> <p><b>Daily management of workload through Document Management System</b></p> <p><b>Processes in place to deal with claims ‘on demand’ wherever possible</b></p> <p><b>Rolling review of subsidy data from NEC System</b></p> <p><b>Management of incoming work and processes to minimise value of overpayments raised</b></p> <p><b>Training and mentoring of staff</b></p> <p><b>Review of subsidy-quality assurance processes</b></p> <p><b>More targeted and efficient quality control mechanisms, improving accuracy levels and rolling training plan to address any training requirement</b></p> <p><b>Performance and quality assurance framework in place</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HB New Claims process review project plan scoped and implemented</li> </ul> <p><b>Further action required:</b></p> |  <p>Likelihood</p> <p>Impact</p> |  <p>Likelihood</p> <p>Impact</p> | <p>Substantial</p> | <p>Range of indicators, but in the main performance is either improving or being maintained</p> |

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|                  |   |   |  |  |   |   |             |           |
|------------------|---|---|--|--|---|---|-------------|-----------|
|                  |   |   |  | <b>Continued monitoring of resource allocation – e.g. HB /CTS, Universal Support and other Benefits-related projects, to also take account of cost of living challenges impacts</b>  |   |   |             |           |
| 3<br>.<br><br>79 | Failure to respond to government initiatives to mitigate impact of covid/cost of living | Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits | <b><u>Opportunity</u></b><br><br><b>People/Finance</b> | <b>Controls in place:</b><br>Customers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Get in touch, not in debt’ message promoted</li> <li>• Staffing resources (re)-allocated to areas of demand</li> <li>• Welfare Reform support and Welfare Benefits/Advice functions in place</li> <li>• Channels of customer access regular reviewed and changes implemented – e.g. e-forms, self-serve modules</li> <li>• Lead role in Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership (FIP), and various Cost of living groups – internal and external</li> <li>• Effective partnerships with public and third sector bodies</li> <li>• Effective communications regarding cost of living support matters</li> <li>• Regular liaison with Department for Work and Pensions and Citizens Advice re UC support arrangements</li> <li>• Review of structure of cost of living meetings/resources - AD SRB Q1 2023/24</li> <li>• Embedding cost of living support throughout Councils through effective communications and</li> </ul> |  |  | Substantial | Improving |

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|    |  |  |  |   |  |  |  |  |
|----|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| 80 |  |  |  | <p>distribution of support tools and advice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fixed-term Cost of Living Co-Ordinator role now in post 4.10.23-3.10.24</li> <li>• Household Support Fund 4 2023/24 being delivered in waves</li> <li>• UK Shared Prosperity Fund cost of living initiatives being identified/delivered</li> </ul> <p><b>Further controls required:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UK Shared Prosperity Fund cost of living initiatives to be identified/delivered in 2024/25</li> <li>• Analysing and delivery of cost of living / local welfare provision and schemes in light of government announcements (potentially with reference to Spring Budget 2024)</li> <li>• Ensuring internal and external stakeholders are aware of impacts of moving to Universal Credit, and support the transition / mitigate impacts wherever possible and appropriate</li> <li>• Further work required on cost of living funding available for 2024/25 - e.g. UK Shared Prosperity Fund, allocated reserve/s</li> <li>• Ascertain impacts/ mitigations if Household Support Fund does not continue for 2024/25</li> </ul> |  |  |  |  |
|----|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|



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