

SUBJECT:	REVENUES AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE BUSINESS PLAN 2018/19
DIRECTORATE:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK
REPORT AUTHOR:	MARTIN WALMSLEY, HEAD OF SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS

1. Purpose of Report

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

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report sets out the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan for 2018/19.

3. Business Plan

- 3.1 The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan for the financial year 2018/19 is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

- 3.2 Key features of the plan, are:

- Key achievements in 2017/18;
- Savings in 2017/18;
- Key activities for 2018/19;
- Strategic priority schemes 2018/19;
- Towards financial sustainability projects 2017/18
- Key risks;
- Safeguarding;
- Equality actions;
- Working in neighbourhoods;
- Workforce development;
- Social value;
- Data Protection and Information Governance.

4. Summary of Plan

- 4.1 The year 2017/18 has been a year where a number of key channel shift projects in Revenues and Benefits have been progressed/implemented, despite ongoing demands on the service in terms of national changes (such as welfare reforms) as well as continuing high volumes of Benefit claims and Revenues correspondence.

- 4.2 Most areas are showing improved performance – with in-year collections of Council Tax and Business Rates performing well as at the end of Quarter 2 2017/18. There has been a significant reduction in the outstanding Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support workload, with officers working hard to sustain this improvement whilst mindful of other areas in Benefits administration which require attention – such as overpayments collection and Universal Credit support.
- 4.3 Ongoing budget pressures including a combined reduction in funding through Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for 2017/18 meant that a review of the service took place – including staffing arrangements – which was then implemented from 1st April 2017 – to meet an agreed level of 50% saving being required of the amount by which these aforementioned grants had reduced.
- 4.4 The plan for 2018/19 continues to look at initiatives to meet challenges from the welfare reform agenda – in particular Universal Credit (UC) with ‘full service’ rollout starting in Lincoln in March 2018 and North Kesteven in July 2018. UC transition is currently anticipated to take place over a number of years until 2022, effecting the working age Housing Benefit caseload. It is vital that the shared service continues to respond to these changes positively, with an understanding of service needs, new demands and duties, and associated job roles required going forward. Business Rates will also continue to be a significant issue for the shared service – with full retention of rates key with local authorities in coming years. Each item is detailed in the Business Plan at Appendix 1.
- 4.5 Maintaining and improving levels of performance in 2018/19 will continue to be remain of paramount importance – the impact of not providing high standards of service to our customers cannot be underestimated – the shared service deals with every domestic household and every business in Lincoln and North Kesteven (also West Lindsey for businesses) – which is currently a combined live Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support caseload of over 17,000, and billing almost 96,000 domestic and more than 9,600 commercial properties. Also, of vital importance, is a focus on outcomes for our customers.
- 4.6 The shared service proactively seeks partnership working opportunities and new areas of work which fit within the service’s wider remit – and these will be further explored throughout 2018/19.

5. Strategic Priorities

- 5.1 Both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven have a number of strategic priorities. Two that have an impact on the Revenues and Benefits Service are:-
- Lincoln: “Let’s Reduce Inequality”.
 - North Kesteven: “Our Community 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, Financial

Inclusion and Partnership Working are all key priorities for the shared service.

6. Organisational Impacts

- 6.1 Finance: Any costs/savings need to have due regard to the Medium Term Financial Strategies of both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven. As at the timing of writing this report details of central government funding for 2018/19 is unavailable (e.g. Housing Benefits Administration Subsidy).
- 6.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules: There are no direct Legal or Procurement implications arising from this report.
- 6.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights: There are no direct implications arising from this report.

7. Risk Implications

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

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 The Joint Committee is recommended to:
- 1) Comment on the Annual Business Plan for the shared service, and
 - 2) Approve the 2018/19 Business Plan.

Is this a key decision? ~~Yes/No~~

Do the exempt information categories apply? ~~Yes/No~~

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

How many appendices does the report contain? Appendix 1 – Business Plan 2018/19
Appendix 2 – Risk Register

List of Background Papers: None

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