



Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits

Business Plan - 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019



Overview

Services delivered by this Area

The functional services within the area cover:

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

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

The shared service has a combined live Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support caseload of over 17,000, and bills almost 96,000 domestic and more than 9,600 commercial properties.

V2 Prepared by: M.Walmsley, 13th November 2017

Agreement date:

1st Review date:

2nd Review date:

3rd Review date:

Director's comments:

Section One: Key achievements in 2017/18

A. Key activities delivered include:

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
Performance	Shared service	<p>High levels of performance in most areas, despite ongoing economic challenges and impacts on household incomes following welfare reforms.</p> <p>Key highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collections continue to be positive (as at end Quarter 2 2017/18), also prior year arrears reducing; • Significant reduction in outstanding Housing Benefit/ Council Tax Support outstanding items; • Positive customer satisfaction • Collection of BID levy over 99.32% in-year (year ended 30th June 2017)
<p>Localised Business Rates</p> <p>Tax bases</p>	Shared service	<p>Continuing work with Finance colleagues, preparation for and implementation of mechanisms for monitoring effects of potential localisation of Business Rates, as well tax base analysis for both Business Rates and Council Tax.</p> <p>Implementation of new reliefs as introduced through the Spring Budget 2017.</p> <p>Review of Discretionary Rate Relief policies.</p> <p>Continuing project (which commenced in partnership with Lincolnshire Counter Fraud Partnership) proactively identifying areas of potential Business Rates ‘avoidance’ and optimisation of Business Rates taxbase.</p> <p>Implementation and maintenance of 2017 Business Rates Revaluation.</p>

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
Welfare Reform Strategy	Shared service	<p>Ongoing monitoring and management of Welfare Reform Strategy approved in April 2015.</p> <p>Provision of modelled options of Local Council Tax Support 2018/19 schemes, with consultation and scrutiny, with approval to take place prior to 31st January 2018.</p> <p>Recognition of importance of welfare reform response, through creation and recruitment to a full-time permanent Welfare Reform Lead officer position in the shared service.</p> <p>Detailed Universal Credit full service implementation plan in place – including effective partnership working with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), as well as provision for Personal Budgeting Support and Digital Support.</p>
Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)	Shared service	Proactive utilisation of DHP grants to support those most in need of help with their housing costs.
Partnership working	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	<p>Ongoing work through 5-year agreement signed to administer West Lindsey District Council's Business Rates, to 31st March 2021.</p> <p>Provision of Housing Benefit subsidy claim support to West Lindsey District Council.</p> <p>Enhanced working with Jobcentre Plus to provide more effective advice, support and referral services for customers.</p> <p>Key links with partners in both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven on a range of anti-poverty, financial inclusion and employment/skills – related initiatives.</p>

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
		<p>Ongoing successful project working with Lincoln College and Jobcentre Plus – utilising funding through Lincolnshire County Council Health and Wellbeing Fund – to provide free training courses to low income households providing employment/ progression opportunities.</p> <p>Scope opportunities to extend remit of debts recovered by the shared service.</p>
Channel Shift	Shared service	<p>Significant implementation of outsourced correspondence through Critiqom solution. Reduction in officer time spent writing/checking correspondence/ reduce printing costs/increased use of e-initiatives.</p> <p>Introduction of a number of integrated customer self-serve e-forms in Revenues Team.</p> <p>Continued promotion and increased utilisation of Northgate Citizen Access Benefits product for customers to claim via on an online self-service product.</p>
Anti Poverty	Shared service	<p>Responsibility and progression of a number of projects under City of Lincoln’s ‘Let’s Reduce Inequality’ priority.</p> <p>Delivery of initiatives contributing to North Kesteven’s priorities relating to community wellbeing and a vibrant economy.</p> <p>Key involvement in Lincoln Against Poverty Steering Group, particularly around financial inclusion work and digital inclusion initiatives.</p> <p>Proactive utilisation of 2017/18 DHP grants for both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven.</p>

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved

B. Savings initiatives completed or started include:

Key savings initiative	Completed by - service area?	Summary of outcome achieved
Shared Service collaboration – savings mainly from staffing restructure and ICT system change	Shared service	<p>The shared service is delivering savings for both authorities.</p> <p>The cost of the shared service was further reduced from 1st April 2017 in response to a reduction of central government funding, through a review of staffing arrangements as well as reductions in other budget areas.</p>

C. All other key achievements

<p>Include in this section any other achievements – for example, independent reviews, awards, nominations etc.</p> <p>Audit Lincolnshire assurances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revenues and Benefits Support Costs – Substantial Assurance • Business Rates – High Assurance • Council Tax Key Controls – High Assurance • Recovery – Substantial Assurance <p>In progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Rates Key Controls • Housing Benefit Key Controls.
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Section Two: Key activities in the group's forward plans for 2018/19

Agreed delivery projects

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
Continue implementation of a strategy for the Council's response to Welfare Reform	<p>Provide a clear and proactive response to the challenges presented to the service in relation to the national and local welfare reform agendas.</p> <p>Continue rollout of increased and enhanced digital inclusion facilities, with support from Digital Champions and work experience, throughout City of Lincoln North Kesteven.</p> <p>Continue work with co-located Jobcentre Plus to improve customer experience and maximise opportunities for joint-working where possible and appropriate.</p> <p>Agreement with DWP to delivery arrangements for Personal Budgeting Support and Assisting Digital Support prior to introduction of Universal Credit Full Service in Lincoln (March 2018) and North Kesteven (July 2018).</p>	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	<p>Throughout 2018/19</p> <p>2018/19</p> <p>2018/19</p> <p>Agreement prior to March 2018 (Lincoln) and prior to July 2018 (North Kesteven). Implementation and management of throughout 2018/19</p>
Fit for purpose job roles and staffing arrangements	<p>To review job roles and arrangements in the shared service to ensure these meet current and forthcoming internal and external impacts – for example;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Credit – to include piloting of potential changes to working arrangements – for example; more cross-working/generic 	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and throughout 2018/19

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
	<p>working arrangements, digital and financial support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for increased demands on recovery of debts due to impact of Universal Credit. • Consideration of steep increase in the number of residential properties being built in the districts and the level of administration required within the shared service. • Level of resources committed to subsidy, quality control and training. 		
Business growth	<p>Increase in Business Rates taxbase – to work with Finance, Planning and Economic Development colleagues to improve business growth in both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven. Consideration of usage of Discretionary Relief effective from April 2018.</p> <p>Proactive preparation for full Business Rates retention scheme by 2020 (perhaps earlier if selected as an earlier pilot)</p> <p>Working with Finance/Revenues internally and across Lincolnshire to continue to improve ability to forecast business rates/understand appeals/make more informed decisions</p>	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits</p>	<p>Prior to and throughout 2018/19</p> <p>Prior to and throughout 2018/19</p> <p>Prior to and throughout 2018/19</p>
Anti-poverty	To ensure the service helps to reduce poverty in the districts, working with other service areas to provide proactive responses to poverty-related	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2018/19

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
	issues		
Channel Shift:	<p>Identification of further e-form self-serve solutions in Revenues and Benefits</p> <p>Identification of efficiencies (both financial and otherwise) through channel shift initiatives</p>	<p>Revenues and Benefits Manager</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits</p>	<p>Throughout 2018/19</p> <p>Throughout 2018/19</p>
Training Needs Analysis	Full TNA of shared service staff to ensure officers have the skills needed to perform duties, also to enhance skills to further progress the service	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Quarters 1 and 2 2018/19
Fraud and Error reduction	Consideration of funding and options for processing Right Benefit Information (RBI), Real Time Information (RTI) data from 1 st April 2018 – as well as Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) and National Fraud Initiative (NFI).	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Prior to 2018/19 for consideration of implementation from 1.4.18
General Data Protection Regulation	Working with Legal Services, to ensure Revenues and Benefits shared service is ready to comply with GDPR from May 2018	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Prior to and effective from 25.5.18
Delivery of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service between City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council. opportunities to deliver other work areas	<p>Ongoing shared service, further development of operations of the service – looking for potential enhancements and growth for service. Maximise opportunities to enhance wider service delivery and grow as a shared service</p> <p>The 2018/19 budget for the Revenues and Benefits shared service will continue to deliver savings for the partner local authorities.</p>	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2018/19 and ongoing

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
<p>Performance maintenance/improvement – particularly around Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collection, Benefits processing times/outstanding workload/accuracy, and Housing Benefits overpayment collection and tackling outstanding debt.</p> <p>Utilise Discretionary Housing Payment grants in the most appropriate and effective manner.</p>	Maintenance and/or improvement of current in-year collection levels	Revenues and Benefits Manager	2018/19
	Maximisation of Council Tax and Business Rates taxbases	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	2018/19
	Improvement in Benefits claim processing times and first-time accurate assessments.	Benefits Team Leaders	2018/19
	Stabilise and reduce outstanding Housing Benefit debt	Revenues and Benefits Manager	
	Monthly monitoring of DHP spend and issues through internal DHP working group	Revenues and Benefits Manager	
Optimising Housing Benefit subsidy	To achieve 100% subsidy on local authority error overpayments, and optimisation of subsidy in other areas such as exempt accommodation.	Subsidy and Quality Control Lead Officer	2018/19
	Analyse impacts on subsidy claim from rollout of Universal Credit.	Subsidy and Quality Control Lead Officer	2018/19
<p>Review and secure arrangement for new Revenues and Benefits ICT contract</p> <p>Explore potential for further integration between Northgate and Information@Work</p>	Seek best possible ICT solution going forward, with regard to system performance and potential financial savings	Revenues and Benefits Manager	2018/19
	Enhanced ICT system functionality, reduction in 'double-keying', more efficient processes	Revenues and Benefits Support &	Quarters 1 & 2 2018/19

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
		Systems Team Leader	
Reacting to funding challenges 2018/19 and in preparation for 2019/20 – e.g. in respect of Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy, Department for Communities and Local Government Council Tax Support grant, New Burdens grant/s, Universal Credit delivery.	To ensure that the budget is managed throughout 2018/19 and responses made accordingly, as well as preparation of a budget for 2019/20.	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2018/19
Single Person Discount – managed service review	To identify properties in Lincoln and North Kesteven which have Single Person Discounts for Council Tax applied incorrectly – this project is in conjunction with other Lincolnshire local authorities	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Q3 2017/18- Q2 2018/19
Enforcement Agent tender	Also, working with West Lindsey District Council to re-procure enforcement agents services to assist in collection and recovery of debts for the shared service	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Q3 2017/18 – Q2 2018/19

D. Strategic priority schemes and any additional Leadership priorities

Service	Key activity/project	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale
Revenues and Benefits shared service	Vision 2020/Reducing Inequality: Work with training providers, businesses and partners to increase opportunities for local people to access training and employment	Ongoing Assisting Low Income Households (ALIH) project, also any other potential areas of opportunity/funding	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	2018/19
Revenues and	Vision	Reduce benefits	Head of	2018/19

Service	Key activity/ project	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale
Benefits shared service	2020/Reducing Inequality: Reduce benefits dependency and encourage employment or career advancement	dependency through welfare reform programmes, also potentially for in-work opportunities through skills agenda	Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager / Potentially other service area/s too	
Revenues and Benefits shared service	Vision 2020/Reducing Inequality: Providing a central hub of support for young people through The Network	Increasing skills, training and employment opportunities for the NEET group	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	2018/19
Revenues and Benefits shared service	Vision 2020/Reducing Inequality: Increase the role of the welfare advice service	Reviewing role of the Welfare Team, in consideration of the wider implications from factors such as welfare reforms	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Customer Services Manager	2018/19
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Vision 2020/Reducing Inequality: Life skills training	Work in partnership with providers to offer a joint service to unemployed people of all ages who are currently facing barriers to gaining employment	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Customer Services Manager	2018/19
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Vision 2020/Reducing Inequality: Actively support the further development of the Public Services Hub at City Hall	Building on the biggest co-location with DWP in the country, we will further develop City Hall as a Public Services Hub to improve the way residents are signposted between services	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager Customer Services Manager	2018/19
Revenues and	NK Plan 2018-21	Once Plan agreed,	Head of	Prior to 2018/19

Service	Key activity/ project	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale
Benefits shared service		ascertain any key projects to be delivered by the shared service	Shared Revenues and Benefits	

E. Towards Financial Sustainability projects

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

Service	Key activity	Strand (*)	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Review of costs	R	To ensure equitable and appropriate support services/costs	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and 2018/19
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Identification of efficiencies for potential contribution to corporate channel shift savings target	R	To ensure efficiencies are realised into tangible financial savings, wherever possible and appropriate and in consideration of other competing factors and demands	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and 2018/19
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Consideration of other shared service options – e.g. other areas of work, potential opportunities	R	Efficiencies/savings through shared service opportunities	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and 2018/19

F. Other agreed delivery projects

N/A

Service	Activity	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale

Section Three: Other Service Planning considerations in 2017/18

G. Key risks for the area

Risks from Service Managers and those allocated from CMT strategic risk register	Action we will take to mitigate the risk	Who and by When?
<p>Failure to maintain Council Tax and Business Rates Collection Levels on behalf of the Shared Service.</p>	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance is monitored and managed on a regular basis • Regular reporting into Revenues and Benefits Management Team, Revenue and Benefits Operational Board, Joint Committee • Effective management of daily workflow • Northgate auto-recovery module now implemented • Additional x2 permanent Council Tax Admin Officers established to as part of Management of Change effective from 1.4.18 • Review of and launch of new online procedure manual from 30.10.17 <p>Further action required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing challenge of lean processes and procedures • Range of channel shift initiatives ongoing such as e-billing, online Council Tax DD forms and other related e-forms. • Business Rates consultation and approval of DR 	<p>Revenues and Benefits Manager – 2018/19</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>Policy in progress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Council Tax Support Scheme 2017/18 and options for 2018/19 • Review of Exceptional Hardship Fund 2017/18 and options for 2018/19 	
<p>Failure to provide timely and accurate assessment of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support and Discretionary Housing payment applications on behalf of the Shared Service</p>	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily management of workload through Document Management System • Processes in place to deal with claims 'on demand' wherever possible • Quality control rolling programme • Rolling review of subsidy data from Northgate System • Management of incoming work and processes to minimise value of overpayments raised • Training and mentoring of staff • Action plan carried out to reduce backlog in Housing Benefits • Review of structure of the shared service to ensure services are targeted correctly from 1.4.18 • 2016/17 HB subsidy claim review with external audit, and PIR of any issues raised to take place • Performance and quality assurance framework has been introduced and the subsidy lead will be 	<p>Revenues and Benefits Manager – throughout 2018/19</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?
	setting a timetable for targeted accuracy checks from April 2017. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidy and Quality Control Officer now in post (following changes in officer roles) 	
Ensure compliance with data protection governance arrangements within revenues and benefits shared service.	Controls in place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, detailed and up to date Information Governance policies and procedures are in place at City of Lincoln Council • From the data collection forms reviewed both electronically and manually, privacy notices were present • Data Protection briefing sessions are being rolled out across the teams • Personal data is securely disposed of through the Council's confidential waste provider • Implementation of agreed actions from audit 	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Ongoing through 2018/19

H. Performance Management

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

Performance	Planned action	Service
<p>Strong and robust performance reporting arrangements are well embedded in the Revenues and Benefits shared service – a detailed spreadsheet of performance data and management information is completed monthly and reviewed/challenges by the Head of Shared Revenues & Benefits and Revenues & Benefits Manager. Performance is a standing agenda item at Revenues & Benefits Management Team (RBMT) meetings.</p> <p>Service measures are continually reviewed to ensure the most appropriate performance areas are being reported to Members and Corporate Management Teams. From an internal MI perspective, measures will be further developed around Universal Credit and related support (e.g. financial and digital) for 2018/19.</p>		

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

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

<p>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</p>
<p>Profiling of service users profile and development of action plan to address any issues identified.</p>
<p>What key actions are services taking to close significant Equality Information gaps?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of language interpretation telephone line service • Ongoing review of availability of Revenues and Benefits correspondence in other formats – to be included as part of correspondence outsourcing project.
<p>List the policies and strategies to receive an Equality Analysis this year where Head of Service sign off is required</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare Reform Strategy.
<p>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>
<p>Ensure appropriate staff in the shared service receive have received (refresher) training on safeguarding requirements and processes.</p>

I. Working in Neighbourhoods

<p>How are you, as Head of Service, going to engage with the neighbourhood agenda? In which specific services will you ensure there is a focus on neighbourhood working?</p>
<p>The Welfare Team within the shared service has a specific role of working in neighbourhoods via outreach surgeries and in individual customers’ homes – providing benefits, money and debt advice. Head of Shared Revenues & Benefits has key links into</p>

the Sincil Bank revitalisation project.

J. Workforce Development

Workforce Development	Planned action	Service
What are the key plans for training and developing staff?		
Proactive response to changing climate in relation to Revenues and Benefits	Review job roles, skill sets and staff development/training requirements.	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Improving workforce capability	Appraisals May 2018-July 2018 TNA Quarters 1 & 2 2018/19	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
City of Lincoln Council Workforce Development Strategy	Delivery of actions as required within the Strategy action plan / Throughout 2018/19	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

L. Social Value

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

M. Data Protection and Information Governance

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

Data Protection and Information Governance	Planned action	Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure ongoing compliance from all staff – a high volume of sensitive and confidential data is held within the shared service - Working with Information Governance Lead Officer to ensure ongoing review of data held within the service and that appropriate Information Sharing Agreements are in place - General Data Protection Regulation – to work with Legal Services in preparation for GDPR introduction from 25.5.18 - Ensure adherence to requirements of Memorandum of Understanding with Department for Work and Pensions. 		