

SUBJECT:	REVENUES AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE BUSINESS PLAN 2019/20
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 2019/20.

3. Business Plan

- 3.1 The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan for the financial year 2019/20 is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

- 3.2 Key features of the plan, are:

- Key achievements in 2018/19;
- Savings in 2018/19;
- Key activities for 2019/20;
- Strategic priority schemes 2019/20;
- Towards financial sustainability projects 2019/20
- 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 2018/19 has been another positive year for our shared service with most areas of performance progressing well, continued implementation of embedment of integrated e-forms, as well as a whole host of improvement and partnership projects, as outlined in the paragraphs below. Again, these notable achievements have been carried out under the ongoing demands placed on the service from both national and local challenges – such as welfare reforms, as well as the economic climate.

- 4.2 Most areas of our shared service are performing well, however the impact of Universal Credit has had a detrimental impact on Benefit processing times due to the volume of related documents requiring to be processed by the team. Housing Benefit Overpayments collection has been a real success story, through implementation of an action plan following a piece of work with Department for Work and Pensions in April 2018.
- 4.3 Our Universal Credit (UC) Support arrangements, described as ‘flagship’ have been invaluable in assisting customers to make and maintain their claims, provide digital assistance, provide or refer to personal budgeting support, as well as a variety of related areas – a holistic model of service to residents of Lincoln and North Kesteven.
- 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 2018/19 meant that a reduction in staffing levels (1 FTE officer) was implemented.
- 4.4 The plan for 2019/20 continues to look at a range of key initiatives, not least of which are Universal Credit support arrangements following central government’s announcement in October 2018 to contract with Citizens Advice and cease local authority funding for this support. Also, Business Rates continues to remain a key area in our shared service with announcements made in the Autumn Budget 2018, as well as the preparation for Business Rates local retention scheme changes.
- 4.5 Maintaining and improving levels of performance in 2019/20 will continue to be remain of paramount importance – the impact of not providing high standards of service to our customers cannot be underestimated – our shared service deals with every domestic household and every business in Lincoln and North Kesteven (also West Lindsey for businesses) – currently a Housing Benefit caseload of more than 11,000, a Council Tax Support caseload of almost 14,400, and billing over 97,500 domestic and almost 9,800 commercial properties. Providing e-services and integrated e-forms wherever possible is key for our service, to ensure customers expectations of a modern Revenues and Benefits Service are met.
- 4.6 The shared service continues to proactively seek partnership working opportunities and new areas of work which fit within the service’s wider remit – and these will be further explored throughout 2019/20.
- 4.7 It was especially pleasing for our shared service to secure a prestigious national award in October 2018, for ‘Excellence in Partnership Working’ – at the annual Institute of Rating Revenues and Valuation (IRRV) Performance Awards. This is testament to the success of our shared service partnership itself, as well as our positive partnership with local DWP services, as well as a range of other public, private and voluntary sector partners. Our shared service is progressive and ambitious, and this award is testament of everyone’s hard work in making our service a success.

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 2019/20 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 2019/20 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

Appendix 1 – Business Plan 2019/20

the report contain?

Appendix 2 – Risk Register

List of Background Papers:

None

Lead Officer:

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