

Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits

Business Plan - 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021



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, including Universal Credit Support;
- Proactive response to anti-poverty and financial inclusion agendas;
- Digital and budgeting support to residents of Lincoln and North Kesteven;
- Key links into and delivery of corporate fraud projects.

The shared service has a Housing Benefit caseload of almost 10,000, a Council Tax Support caseload of over 14,000, and bills almost 98,000 domestic and almost 9,800 commercial properties.

V1 Prepared by: M.Walmsley, 31st October 2019

Agreement date:

1st Review date:

2nd Review date:

3rd Review date:

Director's comments:

Section One: Key achievements in 2019/20

A. Key activities delivered include:

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
Performance	Shared service	<p>Continued high levels of performance in most areas, despite ongoing economic challenges and impacts on household incomes due to factors such as, for example, welfare reforms.</p> <p>Key highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collections - <i>City of Lincoln's Business Rates in-year collection rate was ranked 5th out of 326 billing authorities;</i> • Reduction in outstanding level of Housing Benefit overpayments, as well as in-period recovery rates of over 100%; • Housing Benefit Changes of Circumstances processed promptly.
Localised Business Rates Tax bases	Shared service	<p>Continued implementation and review of reliefs as introduced through the Spring Budget 2017 and subsequent announcements.</p> <p>North Kesteven's Business Rates 'Growth Policy' now established, - City of Lincoln's equivalent Policy approved by Executive in July 2018 and implemented.</p>
Welfare Reform Strategy	Shared service	<p>Ongoing monitoring and management of Welfare Reform Strategy approved in April 2015.</p> <p>Over 3,000 customers assisted with Universal Credit support – including digital assistance and personal budgeting support.</p> <p>Provision of modelled options of Local Council Tax Support 2020/21 schemes, with consultation and scrutiny, with approval to take place prior to 31st January 2020.</p>
Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)	Shared service	<p>Proactive utilisation of DHP grants to support those most in need of help with their housing costs:</p>

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - City of Lincoln 100.5% of government grant spent; - North Kesteven 95.2% of government grant spent.
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 – 3-year agreement currently in place to 31st March 2021.</p> <p>Universal Credit support arrangements in contract with DWP.</p> <p>Key links with partners in both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven on a range of anti-poverty, financial inclusion and employment/skills –related initiatives.</p> <p>Fourth (and final) year of 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>Preparation for further 'marketing' of shared service.</p>
Customer Experience / Channel Shift	Shared service	<p>Embedment of a number of integrated customer self-serve e-forms in Revenues Team, resulting in more efficient, automated and customer-focussed processes.</p> <p>Continued 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, including completion of a project relating to 'Promotion of a range of financial products'.</p>

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
		<p>Delivery of initiatives contributing to North Kesteven's priorities relating to Our Communities.</p> <p>Key involvement in Lincoln Against Poverty Steering Group, particularly around financial inclusion work and digital inclusion initiatives.</p> <p>Proactive utilisation of 2018/19 DHP grants for both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven.</p> <p>Role on Steering Group of Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership (https://www.lincscreditunion.org.uk/financial-inclusion-partnership).</p>

B. Savings initiatives completed or started include:

Key savings initiative	Completed by - service area?	Summary of outcome achieved
Shared Service collaboration – savings mainly from staffing restructure and ICT system change	Shared service	<p>The shared service is delivering savings for both authorities.</p> <p>The cost of the shared service was further reduced from 1st April 2019 in response to a reduction of central government funding, through a 1 FTE in staffing levels.</p>

C. All other key achievements

<p>Include in this section any other achievements – for example, independent reviews, awards, nominations etc.</p>
<p>Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation Performance Awards 2018</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Winners: Excellence in Partnership Working ✓ Shortlisted as Finalists: Most Improved Team of the Year ✓ Shortlisted as Finalists: Benefits and Welfare Reform Team of the Year <p>Audit Lincolnshire assurances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Tax – Substantial Assurance • North Kesteven Housing Benefit Subsidy – Substantial Assurance.

Section Two: Key activities in the group's forward plans for 2020/21

Agreed delivery projects

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
Continue implementation of a strategy for the Council's response to Welfare Reform	Provide a clear and proactive response to the challenges presented to the service in relation to the national and local welfare reform agendas.	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2020/21
	Ascertain, working with DWP and Citizens Advice, Universal Credit Support arrangements in place, pending a national announcements on arrangements after 2019/20 – Consider Councils' role in these arrangements		Prior to 2020/21
	Continue work with co-located Jobcentre Plus to improve customer experience and maximise opportunities for joint-working where possible and appropriate.		Prior to and throughout 2020/21
	Ascertain arrangements in place to support Universal Credit 'managed migration' process, pending an announcement on the rollout schedule		2020/21
Fit for purpose job roles and staffing arrangements	To review job roles and arrangements in the shared service to ensure these meet current and forthcoming internal and external impacts – for example; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'One Council' approach to working, potentially including Universal Credit advice/support, and tenancy sustainment. • Potential for increased demands on recovery of debts due to impact 	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and throughout 2019/20

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
	<p>of Universal Credit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Level of resources committed to collection and recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments. 		
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</p> <p>Continued utilisation of Discretionary/Growth Relief Policy for both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven</p> <p>Proactive preparation for full Business Rates retention scheme, potentially in 2021</p> <p>Working with Finance/Revenues internally and across Lincolnshire to continue to improve ability to forecast business</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 , Revenues and Benefits Manager</p> <p>Revenues and Benefits Manager</p>	<p>2019/20</p> <p>2019/20</p> <p>Prior to and throughout 2020/21</p>

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
	rates/understand appeals/make more informed decisions		
Reducing Inequality / Anti-Poverty	To ensure the service helps to reduce poverty in the districts, working with other internal and external stakeholders to provide proactive responses to poverty-related issues	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2020/21
Customer Experience/ Channel Shift:	Identification of further e-form self-serve solutions in Revenues and Benefits	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Throughout 2020/21
	Identification of efficiencies (both financial and otherwise) through customer experience initiatives	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2020/21
	Embed standards of response (to be agreed) for all customer channels – focus on e-mails to take place	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and throughout 2020/21
Fraud and Error reduction	To review fraud and error projects in place in shared service to ensure most effective usage of limited resources	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	Prior to and throughout 2020/21
Delivery of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service between City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council. opportunities to deliver other work areas	Ongoing shared service, further development of operations of the service – looking for potential enhancements and growth for service. Actively maximise opportunities to enhance wider service delivery and grow as a shared service The 2020/21 budget for the Revenues and Benefits	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2020/21 and ongoing

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
	<p>shared service will continue to deliver savings for the partner local authorities.</p> <p>Review existing partnership arrangements – those with West Lindsey District Council – current agreements which are due to expire 31st March 2021</p>	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	To commence Q1 2020/21
Performance maintenance/improvement – particularly around Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collection, Council Tax e-mail responses, Benefits processing times and outstanding workload	Maintenance and/or improvement of current in-year collection levels	Revenues and Benefits Manager	2020/21
	Maximisation of Council Tax and Business Rates taxbases	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	2020/21
	Improvement in Benefits claim processing times and reduction in outstanding workload	Benefits Team Leaders	2020/21
	Reduce response time to Council Tax e-mails	Revenues and Benefits Manager	2020/21
	Utilise Discretionary Housing Payment grants in the most appropriate and effective manner	Monthly monitoring of DHP spend and issues	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	2020/21
	Analyse impacts on subsidy claim from continued rollout of Universal Credit.	Subsidy and Quality Control	2020/21

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
		Lead Officer	
Review and secure arrangement for new Revenues and Benefits ICT contract	Agree new contract effective from 1 st January 2020	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Prior to 1 st January 2020
Reacting to funding challenges 2020/21 and in preparation for 2021/22 – e.g. in respect of Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy, Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government Council Tax Support grant, New Burdens grant/s, Universal Credit delivery.	To ensure that the budget is managed throughout 2020/21 and responses made accordingly, as well as preparation of a budget for 2021/22.	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2020/21

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 2020/21 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2020/21
Revenues and Benefits shared service	NK Plan 2019-22	Identify projects for 2020/21 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2020/21

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	R	Efficiencies/savings through shared service opportunities	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and 2020/21

	of work, potential opportunities				
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F. Other agreed delivery projects

N/A

Service	Activity	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale

Section Three: Other Service Planning considerations in 2020/21

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 Council Tax and Business Rates Collection Levels on behalf of the Shared Service.	<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 • Range of customer experience initiatives ongoing such as e-billing, online Council Tax DD forms and other integrated e-forms. • Council Tax Support Schemes approved January 2019 <p>Further action required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing challenge of working practices and moving resources to areas of demand. • Continue to review of staffing arrangements and 'pressure points' in 	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2020/21

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>advance of and throughout 2020/21</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with Finance colleagues, to ensure effective arrangements are in place for Business Rates retention (from 2021?) • Review Council Tax Support Scheme 2020/21 and options for 2021/22 • Review of Exceptional Hardship Fund 2020/21 and options for 2021/22 	
<p>Failure to provide timely and accurate assessment of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support and Discretionary Housing payment applications on behalf of the Shared Service</p>	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily management of workload through Document Management System • Processes in place to deal with claims 'on demand' wherever possible • Rolling review of subsidy data from Northgate System • Management of incoming work and processes to minimize value of overpayments raised • Training and mentoring of staff • Review of subsidy-quality assurance processes - reviewed • More targeted and efficient quality control mechanisms, improving accuracy levels and rolling training plan to address any training requirement. • Performance and quality assurance framework in place 	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2020/21</p>

Risks from Service Managers and those allocated from CMT strategic risk register	Action we will take to mitigate the risk	Who and by When?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HB New Claims process review project plan scoped and implemented Q1 2019/20 <p>Further action required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued monitoring of resource allocation – e.g. HB /CTS, Universal Support and other Benefits-related projects • Maintaining improvements in HB Overpayments processes and collection taking into account resources required • Ongoing weekly/monthly monitoring of New Claims and Change of Circumstances process improvements and positive impacts on KPIs 	
Failure to respond to national Welfare Reform and UC agenda	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent Lead Welfare Reform • Officer on the establishment • Welfare Reform Strategy in place and approved in April 2015 (monitored by Revs and Bens Joint Committee) • Effective partnerships with public and third sector bodies • Co-location with DWP • UC Support team in place • Effective comms in all welfare reform changes • UC support arrangements working in conjunction with Citizens Advice Help to Claim arrangements in place 	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2020/21

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>from 1.4.19</p> <p>Further controls required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly updates to RB Joint Committee • Executive 25.11.19 to consider/ make decision on UC support arrangements in Lincoln 1.12.19-31.3.20 • Consider future arrangements for UC support and how this may be delivered, pending central government announcement in respect of 2020/21 • Review of Sleaford-based UC support arrangements to take place in advance of 2020/21 	

H. Performance Management

Performance	Planned action	Service
What are the key plans for ensuring reported performance is of good quality		
What service measures do you want to see reviewed this year		
<p>Strong and robust performance reporting arrangements are well embedded in the Revenues and Benefits shared service – a detailed spreadsheet of performance data and management information is completed monthly and reviewed/challenged by the Head of Shared Revenues & Benefits and Revenues & Benefits Manager. Performance is a standing agenda item at Revenues & Benefits Management Team (RBMT) meetings.</p> <p>Service measures are continually reviewed to ensure the most appropriate performance areas are being reported to Members and Corporate Management Teams – a further review is required in 2020/21, to ensure all measures are still appropriate and whether or not any further development of, for example, Universal Credit –related measures is required.</p>		

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

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

Key actions within your services that are being under-taken as part of the Equality Objective Action Plan – progress and plans for the coming year
Profiling of service users profile and development of action plan to address any issues identified.
What key actions are services taking to close significant Equality Information gaps?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of language interpretation telephone line service • Ongoing review of availability of Revenues and Benefits correspondence in other formats.
List the policies and strategies to receive an Equality Analysis this year where Head of Service sign off is required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Tax Support Schemes for 2020/21 and 2021/22.
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 Head of Service, going to engage with the neighbourhood agenda? In which specific services will you ensure there is a focus on neighbourhood working?
The Welfare Team within the shared service has a specific role of working in neighbourhoods via outreach surgeries and in individual customers’ homes – providing benefits, money and debt advice. Head of Shared Revenues & Benefits has key links into the Sincil Bank revitalisation project, in particular in relation to Employment and Skills – related initiatives.

J. Workforce Development

Workforce Development	Planned action	Service
What are the key plans for training and developing staff?		

Workforce Development	Planned action	Service
Proactive response to changing climate in relation to Revenues and Benefits	Ongoing review job roles, skill sets and staff development/training requirements.	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Improving workforce capability	Appraisals April 2020-July 2020	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 2020/21	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

L. Social Value

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

M. Data Protection and Information Governance

Data Protection and Information Governance	Planned action	Service
What are the key plans/ considerations in respect of Data Protection and Information Governance in respect of your services?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure ongoing compliance from all staff – a high volume of sensitive and confidential data is held within the shared service - Working with Information Governance Lead Officer to ensure ongoing review of data held within the service and that appropriate Information Sharing Agreements are in place - General Data Protection Regulation – Working with IT and Legal Services, to ensure Revenues and Benefits shared service continues to comply with GDPR - Ensure continuing adherence to requirements of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Department for Work and Pensions, with annual sign-off of MoUs for both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven. 		