

SUBJECT:	REVENUES AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE BUSINESS PLAN 2021/22
DIRECTORATE:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
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 2021/22.

3. Business Plan

- 3.1 The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan for the financial year 2021/22 is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

- 3.2 Key features of the plan, are:

- Key Achievements in 2020/21;
- Savings in 2020/21;
- Key Activities for 2021/22;
- Strategic Priority schemes 2021/22;
- Towards Financial Sustainability projects 2021/22
- Key Risks;
- Performance Management;
- Safeguarding;
- Equality actions;
- Working in Neighbourhoods;
- Workforce Development;
- Social Value;
- Data Protection and Information Governance.

4. Summary of Plan

- 4.1 The year 2020/21 has been another very positive year for our shared service with most areas of performance progressing well, continued implementation and embedment of integrated e-forms, as well as a whole host of improvement and partnership projects. However, the impacts of Covid-19 have been significant and cannot be underestimated. The financial impacts on taxpayers and businesses

have been substantial, which has understandably impacted on revenues collection. The service continues to promote the 'Get in touch, not in debt' message – with very much a focus on 'welfare' when making payment arrangements with customers. Also, the increase in the Benefits workload as more people sadly find themselves out of work has provided another challenge which the service has responded to positively.

- 4.2 Delivery of the Test and Trace Support Payments project from September 2020 to January 2021 was a key project to help people cope with changes in financial circumstances due to needing to self-isolate. Working under the Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, a cross-Councils project team came together with members from a range of service areas, to proactively develop processes, an online application form as well as a policy for discretionary scheme cases. This was a great example of a holistic approach to service delivery, taking on board a range of expertise and ideas.
- 4.3 Despite the increased Benefits workload, average processing times have continued to flourish with notable improvements consistently achieved over the past 12 months.
- 4.4 All across the service, officers have adapted to the new way of working since the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. The service had already embraced the shift to e-channels in recent years, as well as homeworking, which put LiNK in a strong position to deal with new workstyles and processes.
- 4.5 Ongoing budget pressures including combined reductions in funding through Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) means that the service has had to adapt the shared service budget accordingly, allocating resources to areas of higher customer demand, and operating vacancy management extremely carefully.
- 4.6 The plan for 2021/22 continues to look at a range of key initiatives, with new workstyles, e-services, welfare reform support and standards of performance being crucial areas for the new financial year.
- 4.7 The shared service has further increased its 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.
- 4.8 This is 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 provided. It remains the case that our shared service is not seen as a 'transactional service', but a key strategic service that has tangible and real impacts on people's lives – it is important the impacts we have are positive wherever possible, aiming to help people become financially and digitally included and helping those in a position to find employment. 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. Two that have an impact on the Revenues and Benefits Service are:-
- Lincoln: “Let’s Reduce all kinds of Inequality”.
 - North Kesteven: “Our Communities”.
- 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. As at the timing of writing this report details of central government funding for 2021/22 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 2021/22 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 2021/22
Appendix 2 – Risk Register
Appendix 3 – Business Plan 2021/22 (shortened version)

List of Background Papers:

None

Lead Officer:

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