

Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits

Business Plan - 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022



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);
- Welfare Reform Support;
- Benefit appeals;
- Proactive and joined-up responses to anti-poverty, financial inclusion and tenancy sustainment matters;
- Partnership working on employment and skills projects;
- Key links into and delivery of corporate fraud projects.

The shared service has a Housing Benefit caseload of almost 8,400, a Council Tax Support caseload of nearly 15,000, and bills 99,000 domestic and 10,000 commercial properties.

V1 Prepared by: M.Walmsley, 11th November 2020

Agreement date:

1st Review date:

2nd Review date:

3rd Review date:

Director's comments:

Section One: Key achievements in 2020/21

A. Key activities delivered include:

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
Response to Covid-19	Shared service	<p>Response to impact on Covid-19, including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rollout of homeworking to all staff members - Management and peer support to all staff due to new ways of working, with a real focus on wellbeing - Deferrals of Council Tax and Business Rates payments - Processing of increased number of benefit claims - Awarding of Expanded Retail Discount to businesses - Partnership approach to community-focussed responses
Performance	Shared service	<p>Continued positive levels of performance in most areas, despite ongoing economic challenges and impacts on household incomes due to factors such as, for example, welfare reforms, Covid-19.</p> <p>Key highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collections 2019/20 achieved - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Only 8 local authorities achieved a higher level of in-year Council Tax collection than North Kesteven, ○ Business Rates - City of Lincoln came 15th highest and North Kesteven 17th, out of 317 local authorities where collection data is available. • Continuing reduction in outstanding level of Housing Benefit overpayments, as well as in-period recovery rates of over 100%; • Housing Benefit New Claims and Changes of Circumstances processed promptly.
Welfare Reform	Shared service	Over 800 referrals to Welfare Reform Support Team, to assist customers in a range of matters in a joined-up and holistic

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
		<p>manner.</p> <p>Provision of modelled options of Local Council Tax Support 2021/22 schemes, with consultation and scrutiny, with approval to take place prior to 31st January 2021.</p> <p>Delivery of Test and Trace Support Payments – mandatory scheme, and development and delivery of discretionary scheme.</p> <p>Proactive utilisation of Discretionary Housing Payments grants.</p>
Partnership working	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	<p>Ongoing work through agreement to administer West Lindsey District Council's Business Rates.</p> <p>Provision of Housing Benefit subsidy claim support to West Lindsey District Council.</p> <p>Senior management support to South Kesteven District Council's Revenues and Benefits service, + advice on a range of matters.</p> <p>Linked arrangements/referral mechanisms in relation to Universal Credit support, with Department for Work and Pensions, Citizens Advice.</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>Further preparation and planning for increased '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. Identification of further areas which would benefit from e-forms.</p> <p>Continued utilisation of Northgate Citizen Access Benefits product for customers to</p>

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
		claim via on an online self-service product.
Anti Poverty	Shared service	<p>Active and key role in activities under the Communities & Volunteer Co-ordination Cell with other Lincolnshire Councils, proactively responding to Covid-19 challenges.</p> <p>Responsibility and progression of a number of initiatives under City of Lincoln's 'Let's reduce all kinds of inequality priority.</p> <p>Delivery of initiatives contributing to North Kesteven's priorities relating to Our Communities.</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits is Chair of Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership (https://www.lincscreditunion.org.uk/financial-inclusion-partnership).</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits sits on the Lincolnshire Food Partnership Board.</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 reviewed with effect from 1st April 2020 to take account of increased resources required in Council Tax, as well as a reduction in Benefits staffing.</p> <p>Income from senior managements support to South Kesteven District Council's Revenues and Benefits service.</p>

C. All other key achievements

Include in this section any other achievements – for example, independent reviews, awards, nominations etc.

Audit Lincolnshire assurances:

- North Kesteven Housing Benefit Subsidy – Substantial Assurance.

Section Two: Key activities in the group's forward plans for 2021/22

Agreed delivery projects

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
<p>Continue response to impacts of Covid-19, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lead and engage in 'new workstyles' - Support for staff in terms of new ways of working, wellbeing and communication - Analyse and proactive respond to revenues collection matters and benefit claims impacts 	<p>Linking into corporate steer from both partner Councils, to provide a clear direction and response to new ways of working, ICT and staffing-related matters.</p> <p>Daily, weekly and monthly monitoring of revenues and benefits work demands – to ensure there is a focus on customer welfare, whilst recognising the need to collect monies due.</p>	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager</p>	<p>Throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Throughout 2021/22</p>
<p>Continue implementation of a strategy for the Councils' response to Welfare Reform support and advice</p>	<p>Provide a clear and proactive response to the challenges presented to the service in relation to the national and local welfare reform agendas, as well as due to impacts of Covid-19.</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>Work with City of Lincoln and North Kesteven Housing teams to ensure a joined-up approach to tenancy sustainment</p>	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits</p>	<p>Throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Throughout 2021/22</p>
<p>Reducing Inequality / Anti-Poverty</p>	<p>To ensure the service helps to reduce poverty in the districts,</p>	<p>Head of Shared</p>	<p>Throughout 2021/22</p>

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
	working with other internal and external stakeholders to provide proactive responses to poverty-related issues	Revenues and Benefits	
Customer Experience/ Channel Shift:	Identification of further e-form self-serve solutions in Revenues and Benefits, including enhanced telephone services to better accommodate working from home	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Throughout 2021/22
	Identification of efficiencies (both financial and otherwise) through customer experience initiatives	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2021/22
	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 2021/22
Revenues and Benefits assurance	To further develop and embed robust quality-control/subsidy programme for Benefits assessments, reviewing outcomes from audits (internal and external) and implementing resultant actions	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Throughout 2021/22
	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	2021/22
	Analyse impacts on subsidy claim from continued rollout of Universal Credit	Subsidy and Quality Control Lead Officer	2021/22
	To review fraud and error projects in place in shared service (also working with other LAs through Lincolnshire Counter Fraud	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits,	2021/22

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
	Partnership) to ensure most effective usage of limited resources	Revenues and Benefits Manager	
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. Actively maximise opportunities to enhance wider service delivery and grow as a shared service</p> <p>Positively review current partnership arrangements with other local authorities and organisations</p> <p>The 2021/22 budget for the Revenues and Benefits shared service will continue to deliver savings for the partner local authorities.</p>	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits</p>	<p>Prior to, throughout 2021/22 and ongoing</p> <p>Prior to 2021/22, for implementation from 1st April 2021</p> <p>Throughout 2021/22</p>
Optimise performance levels with reference to impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly around Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collection, and increased number of Benefits applications	<p>Maintenance and/or improvement of current in-year collection levels, however reference will need to be made in relation to reasonably achievable performance levels due to Covid-19 impacts</p> <p>Maximisation of Council Tax and Business Rates taxbases</p> <p>Maintenance of/ Improvement in Benefits claim processing times and reduction in outstanding workload – aim to</p>	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager</p> <p>Benefits Team Leaders</p>	<p>2021/22</p> <p>2021/22</p> <p>2021/22</p>

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
Utilise Discretionary Housing Payment grants in the most appropriate and effective manner	work within a maximum of 2 weeks		
	Review policy/guidelines in advance of 2021/22	Revenues and Benefits Manager	In advance of 2021/22, ready for 1 st April 2021
	Monthly monitoring of DHP spend and issues	Revenues and Benefits Manager	2021/22
Employment and Skills	To actively identify and engage with employment and skills projects with other organisations, - for example, The Network, Lincoln College, Department for Work and Pensions – with the aim of increasing employability skills, reducing dependency on benefits and to increase levels of financial inclusion	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2021/22
Reacting to funding challenges 2021/22 and in preparation for 2022/23 – e.g. in respect of Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy, Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government Council Tax Support grant, New Burdens grant/s	To ensure that the budget is managed throughout 2021/22 and responses made accordingly, as well as preparation of a budget for 2022/23	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2021/22

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 2021/22 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2021/22
Revenues and	NK Plan 2020-23	Identify projects for	Head of	In advance of

Service	Key activity/ project	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale
Benefits shared service		2021/22 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget	Shared Revenues and Benefits	and throughout 2021/22

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 staffing resources and identify/deliver savings to contribute towards corporate savings targets and pressures	R	City of Lincoln – target £29.5k for 2021/22 North Kesteven – no specific target at this stage	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	With effect from 1 st April 2021
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Continuing active 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 throughout 2021/22
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Review staffing resources and identify/deliver savings to contribute towards corporate savings targets and pressures	R	City of Lincoln – target £58k for 2022/23 North Kesteven – no specific target at this stage	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Review in 2021/22, to deliver from 1 st April 2022

F. Other agreed delivery projects

N/A

Service	Activity	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale

Section Three: Other Service Planning considerations in 2021/22

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 respond to impacts from Covid-19, from both customer and staffing perspectives</p>	<p>Controls in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 'Get in touch, not in debt' message promoted ○ Staffing resources (re)-allocated to areas of demand ○ Welfare Reform support and Welfare Benefits/Advice functions in place ○ Channels of customer access regular reviewed and changes implemented – e.g. e-forms - Staffing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ICT facilities for homeworking made available where appropriate – PCs and telephones ○ Overall and individual risk assessments for access to work premises, visits, etc ○ Identification of more vulnerable staff and associated risk assessments made ○ Regular communications through a variety of 	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – prior to and throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – prior to and throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – prior to and throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues</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>channels from management and peer-to-peer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wellbeing arrangements in place – Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits has monthly meeting with HR Associate, ad hoc staffing matters are proactively responded to by management 	<p>and Benefits Manager – prior to and throughout 2021/22</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – monthly meetings with HR</p> <p>RBMT – throughout 2021/22</p>
<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 targets/measures reviewed in advance of 2021/21, to take account of Covid-19 impacts ● Performance is monitored and managed on a regular basis ● Impacts of Covid-19 proactively analysed and responded to accordingly ● 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 to be approved January 2021 <p>Further action required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continuing challenge of 	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – January-March 2021</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2021/22</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>working practices and moving resources to areas of demand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to review of staffing arrangements and 'pressure points' in advance of and throughout 2021/22 • Review Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22 and options for 2022/23 • Review of Exceptional Hardship Fund 2021/22 and options for 2022/23 	
<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 2021/22</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\ <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, to also take account of Covid-19 impacts • 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 • Effective partnerships with public and third sector bodies • Co-location with DWP • Welfare Reform Support team in place • Effective comms in all welfare reform changes • Regular liaison with Department for Work and Pensions and Citizens Advice re UC support arrangements 	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2021/22

Risks from Service Managers and those allocated from CMT strategic risk register	Action we will take to mitigate the risk	Who and by When?
	Further controls required: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly updates to RB Joint Committee 	

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 advance of 2021/22, to ensure all measures are still appropriate and whether and also that targets/measures take appropriate account of the ongoing impacts of Covid-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.

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 2021/22 and 2022/23.
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?
Ensure appropriate staff in the shared service receive/ have received (refresher) training on safeguarding requirements and processes, as required.
In line with corporate training place, ensure any new/ refresher Safetalk/ ASIST training takes place, as required.

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. The service also engages with the Communities and Voluntary Coordination cell, working with other Lincolnshire Councils.

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	Ongoing review job roles, skill sets and staff development/training requirements.	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Proactive support for new workstyles	To fully engage with new workstyles agenda, communicating effectively with all team members	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Improving workforce capability	Staff appraisals April 2021-July 2021	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 2021/22	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. 		