

Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits

Business Plan - 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023





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;
- Response initiatives supporting Covid-19 recovery, including: Test and Trace Support Payments, Household Support Fund
- 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 7,500, a Council Tax Support caseload of nearly 14,500, and bills almost 100,000 domestic and 10,000 commercial properties.

V1 Prepared by: M.Walmsley, 5th November 2021

Agreement date:

1st Review date:

2nd Review date:

3rd Review date:

Director's comments:

Section One: Key achievements in 2021/22

A. Key activities delivered include:

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
<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 	Shared service	<p>Linked into corporate steer from both partner Councils, providing a clear direction and response to new ways of working, ICT and staffing-related matters. Delivery of 'hybrid/blended' working from September 2021.</p> <p>Daily, weekly and monthly monitoring of revenues and benefits work demands – ensuring focus on customer welfare, whilst recognising the need to collect monies due.</p>
Continued implementation of a strategy for the Councils' response to Welfare Reform support and advice	Shared service	<p>Provision of 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, including Universal Credit changes and Test and Trace Support Payments.</p> <p>Positive and proactive work with City of Lincoln and North Kesteven Housing teams to ensure a joined-up approach to tenancy sustainment.</p>
Reducing Inequality / Anti-Poverty	Shared service	Key role in a number of initiatives aiming to reduce poverty in the districts, working with other internal and external stakeholders providing proactive responses to poverty-related issues.
Customer Experience/ Channel Shift:	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and	Enhanced telephone services to better accommodate working from home and allowing better management and flexibility of calls to the shared service.

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
	Benefits Manager	Focus on reducing usage of e-mails, promoting usage of e-forms to obtain all relevant information needed for Council Tax enquiries.
Revenues and Benefits assurance	Shared service	<p>Further embedment of robust quality-control/subsidy arrangements, achieving high levels of 'right first time' Benefit assessments.</p> <p>Achievement of 100% subsidy on local authority error overpayments in respect of 2019/20 claims.</p> <p>Key role in working with Lincolnshire Counter Fraud Partnership developing a potential Single Person Discount rolling review initiative.</p>
<p>Delivery of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service between City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council.</p> <p>Opportunities to deliver other work areas</p>	Shared service	<p>Secured new 5-year arrangement to administer Business Rates for West Lindsey District Council.</p> <p>Secured new 3-year (plus potential 2-year extension) to work with West Lindsey District Council on Housing Benefit subsidy arrangements.</p> <p>10-week Revenues work with West Lindsey District Council, September-November 2021.</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	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	<p>Generally positive performance levels achieved, although Covid-19 is understandably impacting on revenues collection levels as well as resulting in increased Benefits/ Universal Credit related-work.</p> <p>Proactive utilisation of 2021/22 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) grants, to help those most in need with assistance regarding housing costs.</p> <p>Review of DHP arrangements, looking at procedures in advance of 2022/23 in light of anticipated reduction in government grant</p>

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
		funding.

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>Income from partnership arrangements with West Lindsey District Council.</p> <p>Reduction in Benefits Officer resources to take into account decrease in central government funding.</p> <p>£34k staffing savings regarding City of Lincoln, through Towards Financial Sustainment initiative</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"> • Business Rates – High Assurance. • Housing Benefit Subsidy Testing 2020/21 – High Assurance. • Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support – High Assurance.

Section Two: Key activities in the group's forward plans for 2022/23

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"> - Embed and review new ways of working, including any associated accommodation reviews. - Analyse and proactive respond to revenues collection matters and benefit claims impacts 	<p>Linking into corporate steer from both partner Councils, to continue providing 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. Review and re-allocate resources as required in light of increased Benefits and Universal Credit demands.</p>	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager</p>	<p>Throughout 2022/23</p> <p>Throughout 2022/23</p>
<p>Continue implementation of a strategy for the Councils' response to Welfare Reform support and advice</p>	<p>Continue to 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>Analyse impacts of Discretionary Housing Payments funding and any associated changes in related procedures and policy</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 2022/23</p> <p>Throughout 2022/23</p> <p>Throughout 2022/23</p>
<p>Customer Experience/ Channel Shift:</p>	<p>Identification of further e-form self-serve solutions in</p>	<p>Revenues and</p>	<p>First review by end</p>

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
	Revenues and Benefits	Benefits Manager	Quarter 2 2022/23
	Embed standards of response (to be agreed) for all customer channels – focus on e-mails/ e-forms to take place	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	By end of Quarter 2 2022/23
Revenues and Benefits assurance	To achieve 100% subsidy on local authority error overpayments, and optimisation of subsidy in other areas such as exempt accommodation	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Throughout 2022/23
	Analyse impacts on subsidy claim from continued rollout of Universal Credit	Subsidy and Quality Control Lead Officer	Throughout 2022/23
	To further develop / introduce Single Person Discount rolling review arrangements	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Quarter 3 2022/23
Delivery of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service between City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council, whilst seeking 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	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to, throughout 2022/23 and ongoing
	Positively review current partnership arrangements with other local authorities and organisations	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Monthly and quarterly as required, throughout 2022/23
	The 2022/23 budget for the Revenues and Benefits shared service will continue to deliver savings for the partner local authorities.	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to 2022/23 and through quarterly reviews with Finance colleagues
Optimise performance	Maintenance and/or	Head of	2022/23

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
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/ Universal Credit applications	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	Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	2022/23
	Maximisation of Council Tax and Business Rates taxbases	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	
	Maintenance of/ Improvement in Benefits claim processing times and reduction in outstanding workload – aim to work within a maximum of 2 weeks	Benefits Team Leaders	Review by end Quarter 2 2022/23
	Reduction and maintenance of lower level of Revenues-related work, aiming to work within a maximum of 2 weeks	Council Tax and Recovery Team Leaders	Review by end Quarter 2 2022/23
	Monthly monitoring of DHP spend and issues	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Monthly throughout 2022/23
Employment and Skills	To actively identify and engage with employment and skills projects with other organisations, - for example, The Network, 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 2022/23
Reacting to funding challenges 2022/23 and in	To ensure that the budget is managed throughout 2022/23	Head of Shared	In advance of and

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
preparation for 2023/24 – e.g. in respect of Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy, Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government Council Tax Support grant, New Burdens grant/s	and responses made accordingly, as well as preparation of a budget for 2023/24	Revenues and Benefits	throughout 2022/23
Consider/ implement replacement 'self-serve' online system for Revenues and Benefits	Sustainable, cost-efficient and customer-focussed self-serve online facilities for Revenues and Benefits customers of our shared service	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefit	By end Quarter 2 2022/23

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 2022/23 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2022/23
Revenues and Benefits shared service	NK Plan 2021-24	Identify projects for 2022/23 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2022/23

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 £24k for 2022/23 and ongoing North Kesteven – no specific target at this stage	Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits	With effect from 1 st April 2022

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 2022/23
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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?
Failure to respond to impacts from Covid-19, from both customer and staffing perspectives	<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 	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – prior to and throughout 2022/23</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – prior to and throughout 2022/23</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – prior to and throughout 2022/23</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – throughout 2022/23</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>- Staffing:</p> <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 ○ Regular communications through a variety of channels from management and peer-to-peer ○ 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>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – prior to and throughout 2022/23</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – throughout 2022/23</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – prior to and throughout 2022/23</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – monthly meetings with HR</p> <p>RBMT – throughout 2022/23</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 2022/23, 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 	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits – January-March 2022</p> <p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2022/23</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>daily workflow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 2022 <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 advance of and throughout 2022/23 • Review Council Tax Support Scheme 2022/23 and options for 2023/24 • Review of Exceptional Hardship Fund 2022/23 and options for 2023/24 	
<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 	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2022/23</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"> • 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 • 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"> • Lead Welfare Reform Officer role in place (currently to 31.3.2022) • Welfare Reform Strategy in place and approved in April 2015 • Effective partnerships with public and third sector bodies 	

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"> • Co-location with DWP • Welfare Reform Support team in place (currently to 31.3.2022) • Effective comms in all welfare reform changes • Regular liaison with Department for Work and Pensions and Citizens Advice re UC support arrangements <p>Further controls required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly updates to RB Joint Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Welfare Reform Strategy 	<p>Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2022/23</p> <p>Initial review prior to 2022/23</p>

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 2022/23, 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 2022/23 and 2023/24. • Discretionary Housing Payment policy (if required). • Welfare Reform Strategy (if required).
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 Sincil Bank revitalisation projects, 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. The Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits is currently Chair of Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership (FIP), looking at neighbourhood-wide, district/s-wide and countywide financial inclusion 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
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 2022-July 2023	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 2022/23	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 – 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. 		