

Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

Martin Walmsley, Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits

Business Plan - 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024



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 and Cost of Living 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 7,000, a Council Tax Support caseload of nearly 14,000, and bills more than 100,000 domestic and over 10,000 commercial properties.

V1 Prepared by: M.Walmsley, 11th November 2022

Agreement date:

1st Review date:

2nd Review date:

3rd Review date:

Director's comments:

Section One: Key achievements in 2022/23

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"> - 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>Shared service</p>	<p>Linking into corporate steer from both partner Councils, provided 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 – ensuring a focus on customer welfare, whilst recognising the need to collect monies due.</p> <p>Reviewed and re-allocated resources as required in light of increased Benefits and Universal Credit demands.</p>
<p>Continue implementation of a strategy for the Councils’ response to Welfare Reform support and advice</p>	<p>Shared service</p>	<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 and rising cost of living.</p> <p>Analysed impacts of Discretionary Housing Payments funding and any associated changes in related procedures and policy</p> <p>Worked with City of Lincoln and North Kesteven Housing teams to ensure a joined-up approach to tenancy sustainment</p>
<p>Customer Experience/ Channel Shift</p> <p>Consider/ implement replacement ‘self-serve’ online system for Revenues and Benefits</p>	<p>Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager, Revenues and Benefits Support and Systems Team Leader</p>	<p>Procurement of new self-serve solutions to replace MyInfo and enhance customer self-serve systems moving forward, - linked into new contract with NEC (previously Northgate)</p>

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
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 2020/21 claims.</p> <p>Working with Lincolnshire Counter Fraud Partnership, progression with developing a potential Single Person Discount rolling review initiative.</p>
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	Shared service	<p>Positive management and review of existing partnership arrangements with West Lindsey District Council</p> <p>2022/23 budget for the Revenues and Benefits shared service delivering savings for the partner local authorities.</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/ Universal Credit applications	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	<p>Generally positive levels of in-year collection achieved</p> <p>2021/22 Non Domestic Rate in-year collection was the highest in the whole country</p> <p>Maintenance of positive average Benefits claim processing times</p> <p>Reduction in level of outstanding Revenues-related work</p> <p>Reduction in level of outstanding Benefits-related work</p> <p>New DHP guidelines, with reduced government grants, managed and monitored</p>
Employment and	Assistant Director	Support the 'reducing all types of inequality'

Key activities	Completed by	Summary of outcome achieved
Skills	– Shared Revenues and Benefits	and ‘Our Economy’ strategic priorities by actively engaging with employment and skills projects and food poverty organisations, - for example, The Network, Lincoln College, Restart, DWP, FIP
Reacting to funding challenges 2022/23 and in preparation for 2023/24 – e.g. in respect of Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy, Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities Council Tax Support grant, New Burdens grant/s	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	Effective utilisation of New Burdens funding and careful vacancy management, to ensure Shared Service continued to deliver savings for partner local authorities

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>Staffing savings regarding City of Lincoln, through Towards Financial Sustainment initiative</p>

C. All other key achievements

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

Audit Lincolnshire assurances:

- Housing Benefit Subsidy Testing 2021/22 – High Assurance

Section Two: Key activities in the group's forward plans for 2023/24

Agreed delivery projects

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
Delivery of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service between City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council - opportunities to deliver other work areas and continue to develop and manage positive relationship with West Lindsey District Council	Ongoing shared service, further development of operations of the service – looking for potential enhancements and growth for service, wherever possible	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2023/24
	Positively review current partnership arrangements with other local authorities and organisations	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2023/24
	The 2023/24 budget for the Revenues and Benefits shared service will continue to deliver savings for the partner local authorities.	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2023/24
Performance improvement required in terms of Benefits and Revenues outstanding workloads, developing appropriate action plans where required	Reduction in outstanding workloads – aiming to work within two weeks/ as close as practicable	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	Throughout 2023/24
Maintain performance levels in Council Tax and Business Rates collection rates, Housing Benefit processing times/accuracy, and Housing Benefits overpayment collection	Maintenance and/or improvement of current in-year collection levels and Benefits processing times, however reference will need to be made in relation to reasonably achievable performance levels due to cost of living impacts	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager	Throughout 2023/24
Reacting to funding challenges in 2023/24 – e.g. in respect of Housing	To ensure that the budget is managed throughout 2023/24 and responses made	Assistant Director – Shared	Throughout 2023/24

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
Benefit Administration Subsidy, DLUHC Council Tax Support grant, New Burdens grant/s, DHP's etc	accordingly, as well as preparation of a budget for 2024/25	Revenues and Benefits	
The shared service supports the authorities' cost-of-living responses, working with other service areas to provide proactive responses to specifically lead on and deliver any further government funded support schemes	Ensuring residents and businesses incomes are maximised, wherever possible	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2023/24
	Clear communication and delivery of/ signposting to relevant initiatives and responses	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2023/24
	Prompt, accurate and effective delivery of government-funded support schemes	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2023/24
To support the reducing all types of inequality and Our Economy strategic priorities by actively engaging with employment and skills projects and food poverty organisations, - for example, The Network, Lincoln College, Restart, DWP, FIP	Demonstrable contribution to creating training and employment opportunities by working with partner organisations	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	Throughout 2023/24
To embed, further promote and enhance new NEC self-serve modules	Increased usage of self-serve modules by residents and businesses	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager, Revenues and	Throughout 2023/24

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Owner	Timescale
		Benefits Support and Systems Team Leader	
Revenues and Benefits assurance	Achievement of 100% subsidy on local authority error overpayments in respect of 2022/23 claims Working with Lincolnshire Counter Fraud Partnership, progression to implement a potential Single Person Discount rolling review initiative	Revenues and Benefits Manager, Subsidy and Quality Control Lead Officer Revenues and Benefits Manager	Throughout 2023/24

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 2023/24 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2023/24
Revenues and Benefits shared service	NK Plan 2022-25	Identify projects for 2023/24 ensuring these are delivered on time and within any associated budget	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	In advance of and throughout 2023/24

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	R	City of Lincoln – target £24k ongoing (from	Assistant Director – Shared	With effect from 1 st

	savings to contribute towards corporate savings targets and pressures		2022/23, onwards) North Kesteven – no specific target at this stage	Revenues and Benefits	April 2023 (for 2023/24)
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Continuing active consideration of other shared service options – e.g. other areas of work, potential opportunities	R/C	Efficiencies/savings through shared service opportunities	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and throughout 2023/24
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Contribution to corporate savings targets/initiatives, as required	R	Efficiencies/savings through shared service opportunities	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and throughout 2023/24
Revenues and Benefits Shared Service	Identifying ongoing funding for NEC self-serve modules	R	Ongoing funding for NEC self-serve modules – for example, through vacancy management	Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits	Prior to and throughout 2023/24

F. Other agreed delivery projects

N/A

Service	Activity	Outcomes sought	Owner	Timescale

Section Three: Other Service Planning considerations in 2023/24

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.	Controls in place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance targets/measures reviewed in advance of 2023/24, to take account 	

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>of Covid-19 impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance is monitored and managed on a regular basis • Impacts of cost of living challenges 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, other integrated e-forms and new NEC self-serve modules (being implemented in second-half of 2022/23) • Council Tax Support Schemes to be approved January 2023 <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 2023/24 • 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>Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2023/24</p>
Failure to provide timely and	Controls in place:	Assistant Director –

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>accurate assessment of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support and Discretionary Housing payment applications on behalf of the Shared Service</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 NEC 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 • 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, of cost of living challenges impacts 	<p>Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2023/24</p>
<p>Failure to respond to government initiatives to mitigate impact of covid/cost of living</p>	<p>Controls in place: Customers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 'Get in touch, not in debt' message promoted 	

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"> ○ 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, self-serve modules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lead role in Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership (FIP), and various Cost of living groups – internal and external ● Effective partnerships with public and third sector bodies ● Effective communications regarding cost of living support matters ● 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"> ● Embedding cost of living support throughout Councils through effective communications and distribution of support tools and advice 	<p>Assistant Director – Shared Revenues and Benefits, Revenues and Benefits Manager – Throughout 2023/24</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 Assistant Director Shared Revenues and 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 2023/24, to ensure all measures are still appropriate and whether and also that targets/measures take appropriate account of the ongoing impacts of cost of living challenges.</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 the service users of Revenues and Benefits and developing an action plan to address any E&D 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 Assistant Director sign off is required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Tax Support Schemes for 2024/25. • Discretionary Housing Payment policy (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?
<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

<p>How are you, as Assistant Director, going to engage with the neighbourhood agenda? In which specific services will you ensure there is a focus on neighbourhood working?</p>
<p>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. Assistant Director Shared Revenues and 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 the voluntary sector, working with other Lincolnshire Councils as appropriate. Assistant Director 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.</p>

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 hybrid working model	To fully engage with and embed hybrid working model, communicating effectively with all team members	Revenues and Benefits Shared Service
Improving workforce capability	Staff appraisals April 2023-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 2023/24	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?		

Social Value	Planned action	Service
Assistant Director Shared Revenues and 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. 		

N. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility	Planned action	Service
Can you support the council in its approach to CSR?		
Through the nature of the Revenues and Benefits Service's work, there are real opportunities to link into CSR activities – including support for The Network, working with foodbanks, and various voluntary sector organisations.		