

SUBJECT: PERFORMANCE UPDATE

DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK

REPORT AUTHOR: MARTIN WALMSLEY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update on performance in the Revenues and Benefits shared service.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides an update on Revenues and Benefits performance, in respect of annual outturns for the financial year 2022/23.
- 2.2 The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service has now been in operation for twelve years, forming on 1st June 2011. Levels of performance have largely been maintained and improved whilst continuing to provide value for money. Continual improvement and success is being achieved in terms of both statistical and financial performance, as well as positive outcomes for customers of the partner local authorities. However, the Covid-19 global pandemic and then cost of living challenges have understandably impacted on some areas of performance, - these impacts are likely to continue for many more months.

3. Background

- 3.1 At the 23rd February 2023 meeting of this Committee, a report was presented detailing Revenues and Benefits performance up to the end of Quarter 3 2022/23.
- 3.2 Performance is reported to this Committee on a quarterly basis.

4. Revenues Performance

4.1 Council Tax

- 4.2 For the financial year 2022/23, in-year collection for Lincoln and North Kesteven is up by 0.15% and up by 0.03% respectively, compared to 2021/22.
- 4.3 The table below showing how performance has progressed since the shared service formed in June 2011.

| Financial Year | 2022/23 | 2021/22 | 2020/21 | 2019/20 | 2018/19 | 2017/18 | 2016/17 | 2015/16 | 2014/15 | 2013/14 | 2012/13 | 2011/12 |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| City of Lincoln | 94.15% | 94.00% | 94.78% | 96.77% | 96.76% | 97.17% | 97.09% | 97.12% | 96.93% | 96.56% | 96.32% | 96.80% |
| North Kesteven | 98.41% | 98.38% | 98.03% | 98.89% | 99.08% | 99.20% | 99.14% | 99.16% | 99.25% | 99.16% | 99.13% | 99.40% |

- 4.4 Net collectable debit for 2022/23 (compared to 2021/22) increased by £2,955,932 for Lincoln and £4,464,550 for North Kesteven.
- 4.5 Although performance has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels of collection, to increase both in-year collection rates is a positive achievement in light of the significant impacts of the well-documented cost of living challenges locally and nationally.

4.6 Business Rates

- 4.7 For the financial year 2022/23 in-year collection for Lincoln is up by 0.74%, North Kesteven down by 0.40% and West Lindsey up by 0.64%. It should be noted that performance in financial years since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic is not wholly comparable 'like for like' due to differing levels of discounts/reliefs available, - however all three collection outturns are positive – particularly in light of the economic climate and significant challenges for businesses over the last three years.
- 4.8 The table below showing how performance has progressed since the shared service formed in June 2011.

| Financial Year | 2022/23 | 2021/22 | 2020/21 | 2019/20 | 2018/19 | 2017/18 | 2016/17 | 2015/16 | 2014/15 | 2013/14 | 2012/13 | 2011/12 |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| City of Lincoln | 99.19% | 98.45% | 98.97% | 98.89% | 99.81% | 98.87% | 99.43% | 99.78% | 99.46% | 99.31% | 99.08% | 99.20% |
| North Kesteven | 99.34% | 99.74% | 97.21% | 99.43% | 99.42% | 99.89% | 99.09% | 99.46% | 99.78% | 99.53% | 99.93% | 99.70% |
| West Lindsey | 97.39% | 96.75% | 97.90% | 98.88% | 98.63% | 98.53% | 97.34% | 99.44% | 99.17% | 99.12% | 99.13% | 98.90% |

4.9 Outstanding Revenues Documents

- 4.10 As at the end of the financial year 2022/23, outstanding Revenues documents stood at a total of 935 (split Lincoln 637, North Kesteven 298). This figure is significantly lower than at the end of 2021/22 (total 3,022) – with progress being made in the latter half of 2022/23 due to a number of reasons; recruiting to vacant positions, resources reallocated to 'core' Revenues work following delivery of the Council Tax energy Rebate scheme, and recruitment to vacant posts. However, there are again currently vacant positions on this team – it is hoped these are recruited to as soon as possible to help curb the rising level of outstanding work in 2023/24 so far.
- 4.11 To give some context as to the workload of the Revenues Team, in 2022/23 51,585 documents were completed in our electronic document management system, as well as 44,846 telephone calls taken.

4.12 Housing Benefit Overpayments

- 4.13 As at the end of the financial year 2022/23, in-year collection rates and outstanding monies are as shown in the table below:

| Financial year 2022/23 outturn | City of Lincoln | North Kesteven |
|---|-----------------|----------------|
| In-year collection rate | 114.59% | 143.02% |
| Amount collected | £704,467 | £377,867 |
| Outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments debt | £2,458,831 | £1,267,664 |

- 4.14 Performance in this area continues to be positive – outstanding debt continues to decrease and in-period collection is exceeding 100% for both partner Councils.

5. Benefits Performance

- 5.1 As at the end of the financial year 2022/23, there were 2,720 Benefits customers outstanding (awaiting assessment) – split Lincoln 1,792, North Kesteven 928. This is almost the same figure as at the end of 2021/22 (2,768) – a notable and positive achievement, when considering the demands on the team throughout the year – i.e., not only having to keep on top of the incoming workload, but delivering other schemes such as the Household Support Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments, as well advice to customers around cost of living support. The number of Universal Credit (UC) documents requiring processing continues to have a real impact on the team, too. To give some context as to the workload of the Benefits Team, in 2022/23 62,714 documents were completed in our electronic document management system, as well as 3,179 telephone calls taken.
- 5.2 Despite the team's workload, due to efficient and proactive processes in place, Benefit claims were assessed on a timely basis – as shown in the table below.

| Financial Year 2022/23 | City of Lincoln | North Kesteven |
|---|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| New Claims – average time to process | 15.85 days (2021/22 16.54 days) | 19.18 days (2021/22 17.34 days) |
| Changes of Circumstance – average time to process | 3.08 days (2021/22 3.55 days) | 2.77 days (2021/22 2.80 days) |

To give this some context, the latest national data available shows that in Quarter 3 2022/23 New Claims were processed in an average of 20 days by Councils, with Changes of Circumstance being processed in an average of 8 calendar days (although it should be noted for Changes of Circumstance the average normally decreases in Quarter 4, due to high volumes of '1-day' changes processed due to annual rent, pension changes, etc). This helps to reaffirm the positive nature of Lincoln and North Kesteven average processing times.

However, the slip in North Kesteven's average New Claims figure has been a concern throughout 2022/23. The table below shows how the cumulative figure performed at the end of each quarter:

| 2022/23 (cumulative each quarter) | Average days to process Housing Benefit New Claims – North Kesteven |
|---|--|
| Quarter 1 | 21.57 |
| Quarter 2 | 20.55 |
| Quarter 3 | 19.93 |
| Quarter 4 | 19.18 |

The table shows a positive direction of travel throughout the year, - and it is important this trend continues into 2023/24. In Quarter 1 2022/23, outstanding work had risen meaning a number of new claims had taken longer on average than would have been usual to process – and due to the cumulative nature of this performance measure – it then becomes more difficult as the year progresses to reduce this average. Performance in this area will continue to be monitored and managed closely moving forward.

- 5.3 The importance in processing Benefits claims accurately remains of paramount importance, – i.e., ‘getting it right, first time.’ In 2022/23, City of Lincoln’s ‘right first time’ assessment of cases checked is 95.26% (1,427 out of 1,498) and for North Kesteven 96.70 (1,113/1,151). A significantly higher number of checks took place in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22, with a focus on a number of areas including the assessment of homelessness cases, in line with the team’s robust quality checking mechanisms.

It should be noted that these checks are in addition to those carried out through the checks required to be carried out under the requirements of the annual Housing Benefit Subsidy claims.

6. Welfare and Benefits Advice

- 6.1 The table below shows the vital monies that our Welfare Team has continued to assist customers to access during 2022/23 (comparing to 2021/22). The demographics and demands are such in the districts, with Covid-19 undoubtedly having an impact in North Kesteven where home visits (which had pre-Covid been key in offering welfare/benefits advice) not being possible to deliver in the same way. As the new financial year 2023/24 moves forward, officers will further develop the new ways of working to ensure customers can access the services of this team through a variety of different methods.

| | City of Lincoln | | North Kesteven | |
|---|-----------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | 2022/23 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2021/22 |
| Advice provided enabling weekly value of additional benefits | £28,257 | £22,752 | £10,094 | £9,839 |
| Advice provided enabling lump sum award of additional benefits | £299,598 | £299,193 | £143,282 | £128,069 |
| No. of customers to whom help provided | 7,637 | 6,848 | 1,571 | 1,234 |
| No. money advice referrals | 127 | 134 | 49 | 59 |

There are a number of key reasons why the levels of Welfare/Money advice in Lincoln is higher than in North Kesteven, including:

- Differences in demographics;
- 'Customer journey' different at each Council;
- Significant number of foodbank vouchers issued at Lincoln (1,686) compared to North Kesteven (79).

A small working group of officers from both partner Councils is currently reviewing demands and processes for the Welfare Team.

7. Strategic Priorities

7.1 Both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven have a number of strategic priorities. Three that have an impact on the Revenues and Benefits Service are:-

- Lincoln: "Let's reduce all kinds of inequality."
- North Kesteven: "Our Communities," "Our Economy."

7.2 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, Employment, Skills and Partnership Working are all key priorities for the shared service.

8. Organisational Impacts

8.1 Finance

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules

There are no direct Legal or Procurement implications arising from this report.

8.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights

There are no direct implications arising from this report.

9. Risk Implications

9.1 A Risk Register is in place for the Revenues and Benefits shared service.

10. Recommendations

10.1 To note the performance information as set out in this report.

10.2 To note that a performance update will be presented at the next meeting of this committee on 7th September 2023.

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|--|--|
| Is this a key decision? | No |
| Do the exempt information categories apply? | No |
| Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? | No |
| How many appendices does the report contain? | Appendix 1: Performance Data for the Financial Year 2022/23 |
| List of Background Papers: | None |
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