

**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 2024/25.
- 2.2 The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service has now been in operation for almost fourteen years, forming on 1<sup>st</sup> 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 some time.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 At the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2025 meeting of this Committee, a report was presented detailing Revenues and Benefits performance up to the end of Quarter 3 2024/25.
- 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 2024/25, in-year collection for Lincoln is up by 0.69% and North Kesteven is down by 0.20%, compared to 2023/24.
- 4.3 The table below showing how performance has progressed, over the last ten financial years.

Financial Year	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
City of Lincoln	94.73%	94.04%	94.15%	94.00%	94.78%	96.77%	96.76%	97.17%	97.09%	97.12%
North Kesteven	98.28%	98.48%	98.41%	98.38%	98.03%	98.89%	99.08%	99.20%	99.14%	99.16%

- 4.4 Net collectable debit for 2024/25 (compared to 2023/24) increased by £2,773,033 for

Lincoln and £3,382,278 for North Kesteven.

- 4.5 Although performance has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels of collection, ongoing cost of living pressures on residents have to be taken into account. Officers continue to ensure Council Tax is collected proactively, however with the importance of also looking to ensure taxpayers are receiving all the help (e.g. discounts, benefits) they are entitled to, and making payment arrangements to take account of residents' welfare and avoiding undue exceptional hardship. Positively, the in-year collection rate for City of Lincoln was the highest since 2020/21, and North Kesteven's collection rate remained strong despite the economic climate.

#### 4.6 Business Rates

- 4.7 For the financial year 2024/25 in-year collection for Lincoln, North Kesteven and West Lindsey are down by 0.10%, 0.24% and 0.41%, respectively. 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 – despite all being slightly down in 2024/25 – remain positive – particularly in light of the economic climate and significant challenges for businesses over the last few years.

- 4.8 The table below showing how performance has progressed, over the last ten financial years.

Financial Year	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
City of Lincoln	98.22%	98.32%	99.19%	98.45%	98.97%	98.89%	99.81%	98.87%	99.43%	99.78%
North Kesteven	98.79%	99.03%	99.34%	99.74%	97.21%	99.43%	99.42%	99.89%	99.09%	99.46%
West Lindsey	97.93%	98.34%	97.39%	96.75%	97.90%	98.88%	98.63%	98.53%	97.34%	99.44%

#### 4.9 Outstanding Revenues Documents

- 4.10 As at the end of the financial year 2024/25, outstanding Revenues documents stood at a total of 2,804 (split Lincoln 1,831, North Kesteven 874, West Lindsey 99), - this compares to a total of 2,679 at the end of 2023/24. However, as reported to this Committee previously, from 2024/25 this area of performance now includes items outstanding in our Citizens Access Revenues (CAR) self-serve portal, so there will effectively be a new 'baseline' for this measure of performance. Of the 2,804 items outstanding at the end of 2024/25, 331 are items in CAR.

- 4.11 To give some context as to the workload of the Revenues Team, in 2024/25 94,850 items of correspondence were received, as well as 41,297 telephone calls taken.

#### 4.12 Housing Benefit Overpayments

- 4.13 As at the end of the financial year 2024/25, in-year collection rates and outstanding monies are as shown in the table below. In-year collection rates remain high and outstanding debt continues to reduce.

Financial year 2024/25 outturn	City of Lincoln	North Kesteven
In-year collection rate	129.68%	93.00%
Amount collected	£678,918	£392,460
Outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments debt	£1,754,485	£1,075,521

- 4.14 The table below shows how outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments debt has decreased since 2018, when previously this had been rising. This is a result of a review of practices and processes in this area, dedicated resources being allocated to tackle this issue, partnership working with Department for Work and Pensions to look at this area, as well as a reduction in overpayments being raised.

Financial Year	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
City of Lincoln	£1,754,485	£2,199,302	£2,458,833	£2,661,801	£3,153,505	£3,573,112	£3,973,125	£4,219,349	£4,081,552	£3,510,798
North Kesteven	£1,075,521	£1,181,329	£1,267,664	£1,418,662	£1,471,374	£1,530,967	£1,643,394	£1,824,908	£1,793,997	£1,482,271

## 5. Benefits Performance

- 5.1 As at the end of the financial year 2024/25, there were 3,816 Benefits customers outstanding (awaiting assessment) – split Lincoln 2,576, North Kesteven 1,249). This is a rise on numbers outstanding at the end of 2023/24 (3,449 – split Lincoln 2,281, North Kesteven 1,168). It should be noted that demands on the team have continued to be significant throughout the year, 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, and continues to increase. At points there have been reductions in Benefits Officer resources too, due to vacancies and sickness absence.

A significant increase in incoming work items to be processed has been received during Quarter 4 2024/25 (as is always the case in this quarter), for example rent increases and benefits upratings, and it is imperative the outstanding workload is reduced during Quarter 1 2025/26.

- 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 2023/24	City of Lincoln	North Kesteven
New Claims – average time to process	13.20 days (2023/24 14.32 days)	16.63 days (2023/24 17.60 days)
Changes of Circumstance – average time to process	3.72 days (2023/24 3.42 days)	4.08 days (2023/24 2.86 days)

Average processing times for Housing Benefit New Claims have decreased by 1.12 days and 0.97 days for Lincoln and North Kesteven, respectively. It should be noted that different demographics between the partner local authorities contribute to different levels of performance (albeit positive performance for both Councils) for New Claims. With the make-up of the North Kesteven Housing Benefits caseload having fewer new claims than City of Lincoln and less temporary/supported accommodation claims, it is difficult to compare performance as exactly 'like for like' between the two authorities.

To give some context, the latest national data available shows that in Quarter 3 2024/25 New Claims were processed in an average of 20 days by Councils, with Changes of Circumstance being processed in an average of 7 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.

- 5.3 The importance in processing Benefits claims accurately remains of paramount importance, – i.e. 'getting it right, first time.' In 2024/25, City of Lincoln's 'right first time' performance regarding assessment of cases checked is 95.05% (2,075 out of 2,183) and for North Kesteven 98.69% (1,510 out of 1,530).

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 2024/25 (comparing to 2023/24). The demographics and demands are different between the two districts, with Covid-19 undoubtedly having an ongoing 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 – and new ways of working as residents access Councils' services in different ways. Officers continually review demands and processes for the Welfare Team.

	City of Lincoln		North Kesteven	
	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24
<b>Advice provided enabling weekly value of additional benefits</b>	£33,744	£31,246	£20,354	£18,433
<b>Advice provided enabling lump sum award of additional benefits</b>	£335,895	£347,975	£244,941	£235,469
<b>No. of customers to whom help provided</b>	6,340	6,324	2,265	2,032
<b>No. money advice referrals</b>	129	157	89	84

## **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:
- The Public Sector Equality Duty means that the Council must consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, in shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to their own employees.
- It requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination
  - Advance equality of opportunity
  - Foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities
- 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 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2025.

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 2024/25
List of Background Papers:	None
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