

To: Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board

On: 29 January 2020

Report by: Director of Finance and Resources

Heading: Customer & Business Services Performance Report

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report details performance across key Customer & Business Service (CBS) functions including revenue collection and benefit administration for the period ending 28 December 2019 (including an update on the funding and expenditure position in relation to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and the Scottish Welfare Fund). This report also provides a performance update in relation to customer services provision for December and year to date.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board:
- Consider the contents of the report;
 - Approve allocation of £40,000 of existing welfare reform resources to the Scottish Welfare Fund;
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3. Revenue Collection

3.1 Council Tax

- 3.1.1 This section details the collection performance as at 28th December 2019 for Council Tax. It also provides details of the total sums collected for the previous year.
- 3.1.2 The billable sum for 2019/20 is £82,845,044

- 3.1.3 The sums collected to date for 2019/20 are £72,740,103 which is 87.80% of the billable sum. This represents a reduction of 0.18% in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed compared with the same position for 2018/19.
- 3.1.4 The Council Tax Reduction awarded is £12,792,092 amounting to 13.38% of the billable sum, which is 0.41% less than at the same point last year.
- 3.1.5 The Service continues to work to address encourage the take-up of Council Tax Reduction. Activities include close tracking of potential applications, data matching and the use of visiting officers to maximise Council Tax Reduction awards.

3.2 Non-Domestic Rates

- 3.2.1 This section details the collection performance as at 28th December 2019 for Non-Domestic Rates (NDR). It also provides details of the total sums collected for the previous year.
- 3.2.2 The Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) charges billed for 2019/20 amount to £127,342,725.
- 3.2.3 The cash receipts to date amount to £103,487,480 which is 81.27% of the sums billed. This is a decrease in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed of 0.38% compared with the same position for 2018/19. Payment profiles of NDR customers can vary from year to year and this impacts the percentage collection rate comparison, it is expected the overall collection rate at year end will be about the same as last year.

4. Benefit administration

- 4.1. This section details the processing performance in relation to Housing Benefit and the Scottish Welfare Fund, as at the end of December 2019. Also provided is an update on the funding and expenditure position in relation to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and the Scottish Welfare Fund.
- 4.2 The Service continues to successfully balance the varied and changing work load resulting from the ongoing effect from the UK Government's welfare reform agenda, including Universal Credit Full Service Roll out which commenced in Renfrewshire on 19 September 2018.
- 4.3 **Speed of Processing – Housing/Council Tax Benefit**
 - 4.3.1 As detailed in Table 1 below, processing speed for New Claims is well within target, due to a revised, improved process.
 - 4.3.2 In relation to New Claims processed within 14 days of all information received, this measure is also within target for the period.
 - 4.3.3 Processing of Changes in Circumstance (CIC) is within target for the period.

(Supplementary processing information is attached in Appendix 2 for members' reference)

Table 1 – Performance Summary

Performance measure	4 Week Reporting Period 08 November 2019 to 05 December 2019	Year to date position	Annual Target
New Claims – processing time	20 days	17 days	24 days
New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received	100%	95 %	92%
Changes in Circumstance – processing time	7 days	6 days	10 days

4.4 Discretionary Housing Payments

4.4.1 The total budget for Discretionary Housing Payments for 2019/20 is shown in table 2 below.

4.4.2 Funding for DHP was previously provided to Local Authorities by the Department for Work and Pensions, following the new social security powers devolved to the Scottish Government (SG), DHP funding is now provided entirely by SG. The total budget is detailed in table 2 below and shows the indicative spending split provided to the Council.

4.4.2 The DHP budget has been calculated to include the full Scottish Government estimate of the amount of funding required to fully mitigate the effect of the Bedroom Tax. This estimate includes a 20% reserve allocation which will be paid in May 2020, if required.

4.4.3 In line with DHP Policy and DHP Regulations, the Service makes awards to fully mitigate the effect of the Bedroom Tax and maximise spend within the year.

4.4.4 Table 3 shows the performance information in relation to DHPs. The table shows that processing time in relation to DHP is within target.

Table 2 – DHP Budget

Funding – indicative allocations	amount
Financial Hardship (non Benefit Cap) – Scottish Government	£92,351
Financial Hardship (Benefit Cap) – Scottish Government	£181,684
Bedroom Tax* – Scottish Government	£1,997,109
Total budget for the year	£2,271,144

*This figure represents the maximum amount required to cover the estimated shortfall of customers impacted by the Bedroom Tax.

Table 3 – DHP Performance Summary

Measure	1 April 2019 to 31 December 2019
Volume of DHP applications received	5,014 applications
Volume of DHP decisions made	4,698 decisions
Number of DHP awards	4,540 awards
Average processing time (target 29 days)	14 days
Total amount committed/paid	£2,215,057

4.5 The Scottish Welfare Fund

- 4.5.1 The Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) provides a safety net for vulnerable people on low incomes through the provision of Community Care Grants and Crisis Grants. The Scottish Welfare Fund is a national scheme, underpinned by law and delivered on behalf of the Scottish Government by all local councils. The SWF replaced elements of the Social Fund abolished by the Department for Work and Pensions in 2013.
- 4.5.2 The Service makes awards in 2019/20 in line with Scottish Government guidance and had spent 77% of its total budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of December 2019.
- 4.5.3 The recent roll out of Universal Credit (UC) Full Service within Renfrewshire has led to increased customer demand for financial support from the SWF. The volume of Crisis Grant awards is up slightly on the same point last year, with Universal Credit (UC) cases now accounting for about 15% of the awards made. The average value of these UC awards is 32% higher than for non-UC customers.

- 4.5.4 Last financial year (2018/19) £68,000 of additional funds were directed to supplement the fund, based on analysis of current trends and incorporating a recent increase in supplier prices it is anticipated that similarly, this year's fund will be exhausted prior to the financial year end.
- 4.5.5 To avoid significantly reducing individual payment levels to customers and to ensure award consistency it is recommended that the Council augments the fund with £40,000 of additional resources from existing welfare reform resources. The service will continue to assess demand against the budget profile to set the priority level for applications.
- 4.5.6 The performance data relating to the Fund is presented in table 4 below. The Service has processed Crisis and Community Care Grants well within target for the month.

Table 4 – SWF Performance Summary

Measure	1 April 2019 to 31 December 2019
Number of Crisis Grant applications received	6,470
Number of Crisis Grant Awards	5,155
Total amount paid for Crisis Grants	£398,033
Average Processing time (2 working days target)	1 day
Average Processing time (within month)	1 day
Number of Community Care Grant applications received	1,595
Number of Community Care Grant Awards	1,036
Total amount paid for Community Care Grant	£505,586
Average processing time year to date (15 working days target)	6 days
Average processing time (within month)	4 days
Total amount paid/committed from the fund	£903,619
Budget provided by Scottish Government	£1,172,473

5. Customer Service Provision

- 5.1 This section details the performance of the customer service unit for December 2019 and the year to date position from 1st April 2019.

The report provides an update on the overall contact centre call handling response times as well as face to face response times across the three customer service locations in Paisley, Renfrew and Johnstone.

5.2 Telephone Call handling

- 5.2.1 High level monthly summary – in December the contact centre received 21,457 calls and answered 94% against a primary target of 90% for the period.

Table 5 – Customer Service Unit – Primary Target (call handling)

Primary target	Year	Calls Received	December	Year to Date
90% calls answered	2019	21,457	94%	94%
	2018	26,848	85%	93%

- 5.2.3 The contact centre achieved the primary target of answering 90% of all calls.

The percentage of calls answered has increased compared to the same period last year, mainly due to a reduction in overall call volume.

- 5.2.4 The secondary target is to respond to 70% of all calls within 40 seconds

Table 6 – Customer Service Unit – Secondary Target (call handling)

Secondary target	Year	December	Year to date
70% calls in 40 seconds	2019	67%	64%
	2018	48%	61%

- 5.2.5 The contact centre was just below target for the month of December, due to increased volume of calls each Monday of the month driven by housing repairs calls (heating and hot water issues) as a result of the change to colder weather conditions.

The performance against the secondary target in the contact centre was significantly higher than the same month last year which has also had a positive effect on the overall year to date position.

5.3 Face to face provision

5.3.1 The primary target for Face to Face customer service is to ensure average wait time for all customer visits is below 20:00 minutes. The table below outlines the performance for the period across all Customer Service locations.

5.3.2 The service received 2,145 customer visits in December and continues to deal with these customers within target performance. This is a reduction of 188 customer visits compared to the same period last year.

All locations continue to achieve target for face to face customer service visits.

Table 7 – Customer Service Unit – Primary Target (Face to Face)

Location	Year	December	Year to Date
Paisley	2019	10:37 mins	11:35 mins
	2018	12:17 mins	15:44 mins
Renfrew	2019	04:05 mins	05:22 mins
	2018	05:31 mins	05:53 mins
Johnstone	2019	07:59 mins	10:13 mins
	2018	08:06 mins	11:11 mins

Face to face wait time has reduced in all locations for the month of December compared to the same period last year, mainly due to a reduction in demand as a result of an increase in online service availability and offering customers the ability to book specific appointment times for certain services.

5.4 Factors impacting performance in the period

The service level for the contact centre was slightly below the target of 70% of calls answered in 40 seconds. The key factor during the month which caused this is outlined below.

- Increased volume of calls each Monday of the month driven by housing repairs calls (heating and hot water issues) as a result of the change to colder weather conditions.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** - The level of collection of Local Taxation continues to provide funding for the delivery of Council services throughout Renfrewshire.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** - None
3. **Community/Council Planning –**
 - Our Renfrewshire is fair - An effective Benefits service is vital to the quality of life of many of our citizens as it provides vital support for low income households to sustain tenancies and meet their rent obligations
 - Working together to improve outcomes - An efficient and effective billing and administrative process for the collection of local taxes is vital for ensuring the recovery of income to the council to support the provision of local services. This is supported by a range of payment opportunities for the public, including electronic and digital payments (e.g. Direct Debit, Website and Telephone).
 - Working together to improve outcomes – An efficient and effective Customer Service Unit is vital to ensuring citizens have equality of access to Council services whether this is digitally, by telephone or face to face
4. **Legal** - None
5. **Property/Assets** - None
6. **Information Technology** - None
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The Recommendation contained within this report has been considered in relation to its impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for consideration of performance only.
8. **Health & Safety** - None
9. **Procurement** – None

- 10. **Risk - None**
- 11. **Privacy Impact – None**
- 12. **Cosla Policy Position – None**
- 13. **Climate Risk – None**

List of Background Papers

- (a) **None**

Author: Rhona McGrath Ext 6879

Appendix 1

RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

REVENUES COLLECTION STATEMENT AS AT 31st DECEMBER 2019

COUNCIL TAX		
	2018/19	2019/20
	£m	£m
Projected Yield	85.957	90.560
Gross Charges	89.586	95.637
Less rebates	12.285	12.792
Net Charges Billed	<u>77.301</u>	<u>82.845</u>
Cash Collected	74.026	72.740
Rebate Grant	12.285	12.792
	<u>86.311</u>	<u>85.532</u>
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	95.76%	87.80%
Income as % of Projected Yield	100.41%	94.45%

NON DOMESTIC RATES		
	2018/19	2019/20
	£m	£m
Projected Yield	120.277	124.796
Gross Charges	143.878	148.295
Less reliefs	21.147	20.952
Net Charges Billed	<u>122.731</u>	<u>127.343</u>
Cash Collected	122.396	103.487
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	99.73%	81.27%
Cash collected as % of Projected Yield	101.76%	82.93%

Customer & Business Services Performance Report – Appendix 2

Supplementary KPIs – Finance & Resources Policy Board

APPEALS

Where a claimant disputes a Benefits decision and also disputes a revision decision they can formally make an Appeal. The Benefits Service will prepare a detailed submission which is then considered by the Independent Tribunals Service. Preparation of a submission is a very involved process and requires significant data gathering.

Target processing speed	60		
Result: last 3 months (days)	October: 34 days	November: 51 days	December: 60 days
Average (12 months to date)	37 days		
Average Appeals Completed	5 Appeals per month		

Comment:- Appeals have been processed well within target over the period.

REVISIONS

Where a claimant disputes a benefits decision in the first instance, they can request for it to be looked at again. This is known as a Revision. The process involves a Senior Benefit Assessor reviewing the decision thoroughly to decide whether the decision should stand.

Target	28 days		
Result last report	July: 17	August: 26	September: 30
Result Last 3 months	October: 24	November: 23	December: 24

Comment:- The Service remains well within target for revisions processing

ACCURACY

The Service proactively monitors the accuracy of benefits decisions made through a robust audit checking programme. The Service targets to audit 4% of all calculations. The actual level of checking for this reporting period is higher due to a number of new staff joining the Benefits team and therefore requiring 100% of their work to be checked.

	Target %	Actual %
Volume of Audits	4%	22 %
Accuracy – December 19	95%	95 %
Accuracy – Year to Date	95%	91 %

Comment:- The Service has set a stretching target for Accuracy which has been achieved for December.

Customer & Business Services Performance Report – Appendix 2 Supplementary KPIs – Finance & Resources Policy Board

HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS

The service is responsible for raising overpayments where Housing Benefit has been paid in error. If these have resulted from errors made by claimants, the cost is partially funded by the DWP. The service attempts to recover both newly raised and historic debts from claimants or landlords as appropriate. In year collections performance is detailed below.

Overpayments raised year to date	£1,253,738
Overpayments raised and recovered in year	£377,932
% recovery	30.14%
All recovery year to date	£926,955
All recovery vs raised in year	73.94%
All recovery vs all debt	10.70%
Total debt outstanding at end of reporting period	£7,736,731