

**To:** Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board

**On:** 4 September 2019

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**Report by:** Director of Finance and Resources

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**Heading:** Customer & Business Services Performance Report

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## **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 July 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 the same period.
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## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board consider the contents of the report.
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## **3. Revenue Collection**

### **3.1 Council Tax**

- 3.1.1 This section details the collection performance as at 28<sup>th</sup> July 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 £82,974,320
- 3.1.3 The sums collected to date for 2019/20 are £34,532,155 which is 41.62% of the billable sum. This represents a reduction of 0.22% 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 £12,926,144 amounting to 13.48% of the billable sum, which is 0.42% 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 28<sup>th</sup> July 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 £132,072,202.

3.2.3 The cash receipts to date amount to £39,089,757 which is 29.60% of the sums billed. This is an increase in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed of 0.99% compared with the same position for 2018/19. Members will note that as businesses are not due to pay their first instalment until May, leading to an unpredictable assessment on collection performance at this early point in the year.

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## **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 July 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 a significant work load along with managing the impact of 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**

<b>Performance measure</b>	<b>4 Week Reporting Period 14 June 2019 to 11 July 2019</b>	<b>Year to date position</b>	<b>Annual Target</b>
New Claims – processing time	13 days	16 days	24 days
New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received	93 %	95 %	92%
Changes in Circumstance – processing time	6 days	5 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**

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

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

**Table 3 – DHP Performance Summary**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>1 April 2019 to 31 July 2019</b>
Volume of DHP applications received	3,661 applications
Volume of DHP decisions made	3,522 decisions
Number of DHP awards	3,439 awards
Average processing time (target 29 days)	14 days
<b>Total amount committed/paid</b>	<b>£2,028,827</b>

#### **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 37% of its total budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of July 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 16% of the awards made. The average value of these UC awards is 28% higher than for non-UC customers.
- 4.5.4 It is anticipated that the SWF budget will be fully utilised by the end of the financial year. The service will continue to assess demand against the budget profile to set the priority level for applications.
- 4.5.5 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**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>1 April 2019 to 31 July 2019</b>
Number of Crisis Grant applications received	3,141
Number of Crisis Grant Awards	2/493
<b>Total amount paid for Crisis Grants</b>	<b>£190,744</b>
<b>Average Processing time (2 working days target)</b>	<b>1 day</b>
<b>Average Processing time (within month)</b>	<b>1 day</b>
Number of Community Care Grant applications received	741
Number of Community Care Grant Awards	470
<b>Total amount paid for Community Care Grant</b>	<b>£244,844</b>
<b>Average processing time year to date (15 working days target)</b>	<b>6 days</b>
<b>Average processing time (within month)</b>	<b>8 days</b>
<b>Total amount paid/committed from the fund</b>	<b>£435,588</b>
<b>Budget provided by Scottish Government</b>	<b>£1,172,473</b>

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## **5. Customer Service Provision**

5.1 This section details the performance of the customer service unit for July 2019 and the year to date position covering the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 31 July 2019.

5.2 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.

### **5.3 Telephone Call handling**

5.3.1 High level monthly summary – in July the contact centre received 34,097 calls and answered 93% against a primary target of 90% for the period.

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

Primary target	Year	Calls Received	July	Year to Date
90% calls answered	2019	34,097	93%	94%
	2018	30,991	95%	93%

5.3.2 The contact centre achieved the primary target of answering 90% of all calls. The percentage of calls answered has reduced slightly compared to the same period last year, mainly due to a 10% increase in total calls received.

5.3.3 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	July	Year to date
70% calls in 40 seconds	2019	64%	63%
	2018	63%	59%

5.3.4 The contact centre performance was below target for the month of July, mainly due to increased demand at the start of the month coinciding with the start of the main summer holiday period and the resulting impact on the resources available in the contact centre, however performance was slightly higher than for the same month last year.

5.3.5 The performance against the secondary target in the contact centre has improved compared to the same month last year. The year to date position is also higher than the previous year.

#### **5.4 Face to face provision**

5.4.1 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.

5.4.2 The service received 3,626 customer visits in the period and continues to deal with these customers within target performance. This is compared to 3,923 visits for 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	July	Year to Date
<b>Paisley</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>09:33 mins</b>	<b>11:30 mins</b>
	2018	13:55 mins	17:53 mins
<b>Renfrew</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>06:01 mins</b>	<b>05:52 mins</b>
	2018	05:51 mins	05:55 mins
<b>Johnstone</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>11:55 mins</b>	<b>11:34 mins</b>
	2018	12:55 mins	11:15 mins

5.4.3 Face to face wait are broadly in line in Renfrew and Johnstone with a significant reduction in wait times in Paisley compared to the same period last year, mainly due to an increase in online service availability and offering customers the ability to book specific appointment times for some service.

## **5.5 Factors impacting performance in the period**

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

- The service was impacted by an increase in demand during the first week of the month as the school holiday period starts coinciding with a reduced level of resources available due to peak annual leave.
- The performance recovered and remained stable for the remainder of the month

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## 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

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**List of Background Papers**

- (a)           None

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## Appendix 1

### RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

#### REVENUES COLLECTION STATEMENT AS AT 28<sup>TH</sup> July 2019

<b>COUNCIL TAX</b>		
	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>
	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>
Projected Yield	85.957	90.560
Gross Charges	89.713	95.900
Less rebates	12.327	12.926
Net Charges Billed	<u>77.386</u>	<u>82.974</u>
Cash Collected	73.871	34.532
Rebate Grant	12.327	12.926
	<u>86.198</u>	<u>47.458</u>
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	95.46%	41.62%
Income as % of Projected Yield	100.28%	52.41%

<b>NON DOMESTIC RATES</b>		
	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>
	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>
Projected Yield	125.355	129.431
Gross Charges	149.340	152.680
Less reliefs	21.427	20.607
Net Charges Billed	<u>127.913</u>	<u>132.072</u>
Cash Collected	127.089	39.090
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	99.36%	29.60%
Cash collected as % of Projected Yield	101.38%	30.20%

## 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.

<b>Target processing speed</b>	60		
<b>Result: last 3 months (days)</b>	May:29 days	June:35 days	July:32 days
<b>Average (12 months to date)</b>	28 days		
<b>Average Appeals Completed</b>	7 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.

<b>Target</b>	28 days		
<b>Result last report</b>	February: 11	March: 14	April: 17
<b>Result Last 3 months</b>	May: 18	June: 18	July: 17

**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 %
<b>Volume of Audits</b>	4%	34%
<b>Accuracy – July 19</b>	95%	89%
<b>Accuracy – Year to Date</b>	95%	92%

**Comment:-** The Service has set a stretching target for Accuracy, during the period new employees continue with development in their roles and this is reflected in the volume of audits completed.

## 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.

<b>Overpayments raised year to date</b>	£678,243
<b>Overpayments raised and recovered in year</b>	£155,026
<b>% recovery</b>	22.86%
<b>All recovery year to date</b>	£321,076
<b>All recovery vs raised in year</b>	65.68%
<b>All recovery vs all debt</b>	5.41%
<b>Total debt outstanding at end of reporting period</b>	£7,794,572