

To: Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board

On: 27 March 2019

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 February 2019 (including an update on the funding and expenditure position in relation to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and the Scottish Welfare Fund). The report provides a performance update in relation to customer services provision for the same period and also includes an update on progress being made to deliver the Council's Customer Strategy 2017-2022.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board;
- 2.2 Note the progress being made in delivering the programme of work to deliver the Customer Strategy 2017-2022.

3. Revenue Collection

3.1 Council Tax

- 3.1.1 This section details the collection performance as at 28th February 2019 for Council Tax. It also provides details of the total sums collected for the previous year.
- 3.1.2 The billable sum for 2018/19 is £77,581,532
- 3.1.3 The sums collected to date for 2018/19 are £73,205,621 which is 94.36% of the billable sum. This represents a reduction of 0.09% in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed compared with the same position for 2017/18
- 3.1.4 The percentage of customers paying Council Tax over 12 months has increased in 2018/19 compared with the previous year. It is therefore anticipated that the greater expected revenue in March this year will result in the Council Tax percentage collected figure recovering fully by year end.
- 3.1.5 The Council Tax Reduction awarded is £12,395,433 amounting to 13.78% of the billable sum, which is 0.33% less than at the same point last year.
- 3.1.6 The Service continues to work to address the reduction in applications referred above. 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 February 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 2018/19 amount to £129,814,132.
- 3.2.3 The cash receipts to date amount to £126,006,751 which is 97.07% of the sums billed. This is an increase in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed of 1.48% compared with the same position for 2017/18.

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 February 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.
- 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 and year to date.
- 4.3.3 Processing of Changes in Circumstance (CIC) is within target for the period, the year to date position remained ahead of target.

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

Table 1 – Performance Summary

Performance measure	4 Week Reporting Period 18 January 2019 to 14 February 2019	Year to date position	Annual Target
New Claims – processing time	17 days	20 days	24 days
New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received	96%	95%	92%
Changes in Circumstance – processing time	5 days	8 days	10 days

4.4 Discretionary Housing Payments

- 4.4.1 The total budget for Discretionary Housing Payments for 2018/19 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, DHP funding is now provided entirely by them. The total budget is detailed in table 2 below and shows the indicative spending split provided to the Council.
- 4.4.3 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 2019, if required.
- 4.4.4 Table 2 below has been updated to reflect the additional resources approved by the Council's Leadership Board on 19 September 2018
- 4.4.5 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.

4.4.6 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	£99,384
Financial Hardship (Benefit Cap) – Scottish Government	£186,847
Bedroom Tax* – Scottish Government	£1,940,786
Financial Hardship – Renfrewshire Council	£120,000
Total budget for the year	£2,347,017

*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 2018 to 31 December 2018
Volume of DHP applications received	6,683 applications
Volume of DHP decisions made	6,154 decisions
Number of DHP awards	5,866 awards
Average processing time (target 29 days)	14 days
Total amount committed/paid	£2,281,673

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 Table 4 below has been updated to reflect the additional resources approved by the Council's Leadership Board on 19 September 2018 in anticipation of increased demand following the commencement of Universal Credit Full Service.

4.5.3 The Service makes awards in 2018/19 in line with Scottish Government guidance and had spent 89% of its total budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of February 2019.

4.5.4 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 2018 to 28 February 2019
Number of Crisis Grant applications received	8,219
Number of Crisis Grant Awards	6,505
Total amount paid for Crisis Grants	£494,034
Average Processing time (2 working days target)	1 day
Average Processing time (within month)	1 day
Number of Community Care Grant applications received	1,795
Number of Community Care Grant Awards	1,152
Total amount paid for Community Care Grant	£610,767
Average processing time year to date (15 working days target)	12 days
Average processing time (within month)	8 days
Total amount paid/committed from the fund	£1,104,801
Budget provided by Scottish Government	£1,172,473
Additional Council Resources	£68,000
Total Budget	£1,240,473

5. Customer Service Provision

5.1 This section details the performance of the customer service unit for February and the year to date position from 1st April 2018 to 28th February 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 February the contact centre received 27,980 calls which is 2,243 calls more than the same period last year and the highest volume of calls in the month of February since 2016. Overall 98% of calls were answered against a primary target of 90% for the period.

Year to date, the percentage of calls answered remains above the primary target with an increase of 18,808 calls compared to the same period last year.

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

Primary target	Year	February - Calls Received	February - % Answered	Year to Date – Calls Received	Year to Date - % Answered
90% calls answered	2018/19	27,980	98%	340,869	95%
	2017/18	25,737	98%	322,061	96%

5.2.2 The contact centre is currently exceeding the primary target of 90% of calls answered.

5.2.3 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	February	Year to date
70% calls in 40 seconds	2018/19	68%	60%
	2017/18	77%	68%

5.2.4 The contact centre was slightly below target for February at 68% of calls answered in 40 seconds. Demand remains higher than the same period last year, with the volume of calls being received relating to waste collection changes currently double that of February 2018. Actions previously reported, and outlined in section 5.4, have however resulted in a 20% improvement in performance against the secondary target since December 2018.

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 3,151 customer visits in February and continues to deal with these customers within target performance. This is compared to similar volume of 3,209 visits for the same period last year. All locations continue to achieve target for face to face customer service visits.

5.3.3 Year to date, the customer service centre has supported 39,686 customers within the performance target. The volume of customers is broadly in line with the same period last year.

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

Location	Year	December	Year to Date
Paisley	2018/19	15:26 mins	14:51 mins
	2017/18	15:14 mins	14:57 mins
Renfrew	2018/19	05:51 mins	05:56 mins
	2017/18	07:19 mins	06:25 mins
Johnstone	2018/19	10:10 mins	11:04 mins
	2017/18	10:43 mins	11:36 mins

5.4 Factors impacting performance in the period

5.4.1 The main factor impacting on performance remains an increased volume of calls to support the changes to waste collection.

5.4.2 The following measures have resulted in a 20% increase in performance level since December 2018.

- Recruitment of temporary resources,
- Additional overtime worked by existing contact centre staff,
- Re-skilling of staff from other contact centre services (without impacting on overall service delivery),
- Changes in queue messaging to help inform customers of the change
Introduction of a dedicated e-mail address
(mybins@renfrewshire.gov.uk) which has received 5,717 e-mails since it was introduced in November

- Regular liaison with Environment and Infrastructure operational managers

6. Customer Strategy update

6.1 The Customer Strategy was created in 2017 following a period of consultation with customers and staff and resulted in a strategy that was developed around five key themes; Customers, Service Fulfilment, Access to Services, Communication and Developing Digital Skills. The Customer Strategy 2017-2022 was approved by the Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board on 8th November 2017.

6.2 An action plan was developed, following the approval of the strategy and a programme of work is structured around the five key themes of the strategy. Updates on progress against each of the themes is provided below.

6.3 Theme 1 – Customer

6.3.1 A service design framework has been developed by the Digital First Programme team, which centres around understanding the needs of our customers. This is supported by a customer engagement framework and specialist resources including customer research and user experience roles.

6.3.2 This approach to service design has been piloted with a team in Environment and Infrastructure and has demonstrated the value of involving customers at the start of a service redesign process.

6.3.3 Following the success of the pilot, the defined framework will be used in all future service redesign activity being driven by the Digital First programme.

6.4 Theme 2 - Service Fulfilment

6.4.1 The MyAccount customer portal has been enhanced to offer customers with a more personalised homepage which is configurable to their needs and continues to provide access to an increasing range of digital council service.

6.4.2 Since the last update, customers can now book a special uplift, order copy birth, death and marriage certificates, make a referral for adult care support, request community meals or community alarms and book appointments for a range of council services.

6.4.3 It was recognised that the frontline customer service staff need to be aware of back office performance issues and regular liaison arrangements have been set up with key services to ensure frontline staff are updated and can help support and manage customer expectations.

6.4.5 The customer service team continue to develop staff skills and capabilities in the customer service unit through enhanced training on complaint handling and service delivery.

6.5 Theme 3 – Access to Services

- 6.5.1 The Self-Service areas in Renfrewshire House and Johnstone Town Hall are now up and running, giving customers the ability to use online services. Staff in customer services have been trained to offer supported service, and this has been frequently used for new claims to universal credit.
- 6.5.2 The roll out of payment kiosks has also been completed in Paisley, Renfrew and Johnstone where customers can choose to pay for a range of Council services using the automated machines. The general feedback from customers has been positive and support continues to be offered to any customer who is not familiar with using the kiosks.
- 6.5.3 With over 40,000 of Renfrewshire's residents signed up, Myaccount continues to be available to customers across a range of devices and has been developed to be easily accessible and usable on all screen sizes, giving customers with smartphones the same experience as those with tablets or computers.

6.6 Theme 4 – Communication

- 6.6.1 The contact centre technology has been updated to facilitate Web chat capability, providing customers with direct on-line support in real time. This facility is currently being configured and will be tested soon. Web chat has been recognised as a key support mechanism for customers who have a limited level of digital skills.
- 6.6.1 Social media is a channel that customers are using more regularly, and a pilot has been running in the communications team to deal directly with any service requests received through Facebook and Twitter instead of passing these over to the contact centre telephone channel. Feedback from the pilot is being reviewed to inform the creation of an online customer service team who will support customers over all digital channels.

6.7 Theme 5 – Digital Skills

- 6.7.1 It is essential our staff have the correct skills to operate digital services and support customers who are using them. A training programme has been developed in partnership with West College to train frontline catering staff in preparation for the roll out of online school payments and cashless catering.
- 6.7.2 Additional training has also been provided to Customer Services staff to enable them to support customers to complete their online claims for universal credit.

- 6.7.3 A digital for staff project has been set up and is looking to carry out an overall assessment of the digital skills of the workforce with a view to develop training to meet the future skill needs.
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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

List of Background Papers

- (a) None

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Appendix 1

RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

REVENUES COLLECTION STATEMENT AS AT 28TH February 2019

COUNCIL TAX		
	2017/18	2018/19
	£m	£m
Projected Yield	82.043	85.957
Gross Charges	86.109	89.977
Less rebates	12.108	12.395
Net Charges Billed	<u>74.001</u>	<u>77.582</u>
Cash Collected	70.923	73.206
Rebate Grant	12.108	12.395
	<u>83.031</u>	<u>85.601</u>
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	95.84%	94.36%
Income as % of Projected Yield	101.20%	99.59%

NON DOMESTIC RATES		
	2017/18	2018/19
	£m	£m
Projected Yield	122.778	127.218
Gross Charges	145.431	150.784
Less reliefs	20.147	20.969
Net Charges Billed	<u>125.283</u>	<u>129.814</u>
Cash Collected	123.409	126.007
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	98.50%	97.07%
Cash collected as % of Projected Yield	100.51%	99.05%

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)	December:22 days	January:30 days	February:14 days
Average (12 months to date)	27 days		
Average Appeals Completed	8 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	October: 28	November: 20	December: 17
Result Last 3 months	December: 17	January: 24	February: 11

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%	11%
Accuracy – February 19	95%	94%
Accuracy – Year to Date	95%	92%

Comment:- The Service has set a stretching target for Accuracy, during the period new employees had taken up benefit assessment roles and this is reflected in the slight reduction in the level of accuracy.