

To: Finance and Resources Policy Board

On: 25 January 2017

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 31 December 2016 (including an update on the funding and expenditure position in relation to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and the Scottish Welfare Fund). It brings together two previously separate reports; the Revenues Collection Statement; and the Benefit Administration – Welfare Reform & Performance Statement previously provided to the Board. In addition, as decided by Council on 16 December 2016, a section has been included that 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 content 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 28th December 2016 for Council Tax. It also provides details of the total sums collected for the last year.

3.1.2 The billable sum for 2016/17 is £69,899,477

3.1.3 The Council Tax Reduction awarded is £12,149,786 amounting to 14.81% of the billable sum, which is 0.77% less than at the same point last year.

3.1.4 The sums collected to date for 2016/17 are at a similar level compared with the same point last year, amounting to £61,503,236 which is 87.99% of the billable sum.

3.2 Non Domestic Rates

3.2.1 This section details the collection performance as at 28th December 2016 for Non Domestic Rates (NDR). It also provides details of the total sums collected for the last year.

3.2.2 The Non Domestic Rates (NDR) charges billed for 2016/17 amount to £102,493,982.

3.2.3 The cash receipts to date amount to £82,201,054 which is 80.20% of the sums billed. This is a decrease in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed of 1.71% compared with the same position for 2015/16.

3.2.4 The Service tracks NDR receipts closely. Where appropriate and in line with the recovery process the Service will proactively target businesses for payment.

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 2016. 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 welfare reform agenda.

4.3 Speed of Processing – Housing/Council Tax Benefit

4.3.1 As detailed in Table 1 below, processing speed for New Claims is within target for the period and year to date. 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.

4.3.2 Processing of Changes in Circumstance (CIC) is within target for the period, and year to date.

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

Table 1 – Performance Summary

Performance measure	4 Week Reporting Period 4 November 2016 to 1 December 2016	Year to date position	Annual Target
New Claims – processing time	21 days	22 days	24 days
New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received	94%	93%	92%
Changes in Circumstance – processing time	8 days	5 days	10 days

4.4 Discretionary Housing Payments

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

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 would be paid in May 2017, if required. In line with DHP Policy and DHP Regulations, the Service makes awards to fully mitigate the effect of the Bedroom Tax and will maximise spend within the year.

4.4.3 An amount of £147,863 (included within the total budget figure in table 2 below) is funding allocated by the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) for other types of financial hardship (not Bedroom Tax.)

4.4.4 Resources of £250,000, approved by the Finance and Resources Policy Board on 24 August 2016 have been added to the DHP budget, shown in table 2 below. These funds were allocated to support customers affected by new Benefit Cap thresholds which were applied by the UK Government and affected customers in Renfrewshire from mid November 2016.

4.4.5 In addition to providing support following the impact of the Benefit Cap, the additional funds provided by the Council will help those experiencing ongoing financial hardship as a result of wider austerity measures implemented by the UK Government.

Table 2 – DHP Budget

Funding Source	amount
DWP	£425,050
Renfrewshire Council	£250,000
Scottish Government*	£1,522,925
Total budget for the year	£2,197,975

*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 2016 to 31 March 2017
Volume of DHP applications received	4,971 applications
Volume of DHP decisions made	4,798 decisions
Number of DHP awards	4,450 awards
Average processing time (target 29 days)	14 days
Total amount committed/paid	£1,905,860

4.5 The Scottish Welfare Fund

4.5.1 The Service continued to make awards in 2016/17, in line with Scottish Government guidance and had spent/committed 71% of its total budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of December 2016.

4.5.2 The performance data relating to the Fund is presented in table 4 below. The Service processed Community Care Grants within target for the month and as a result the year to date position has improved since the last report.

Table 4 – SWF Performance Summary

Measure	1 April 2016 to 31 December 2016
Number of Crisis Grant applications received	6,032
Number of Crisis Grant Awards	4,813
Total amount paid for Crisis Grants	£338,621
Average Processing time (2 working days target)	2 days
Average Processing time (within month)	1 day
Number of Community Care Grant applications received	1,533
Number of Community Care Grant Awards	1,259
Total amount paid for Community Care Grant	£558,355
Average processing time year to date (15 working days target)	17 days
Average processing time (within month)	14 days
Total amount paid/committed from the fund	£896,976
Total Budget	£1,259,893

*Note that figures are adjusted each month to reflect awards previously made, but not fulfilled.

5. Customer Service Provision

5.1 This section details the performance of the customer service unit for the period 1st to 31st December 2016. An update is provided in relation to the overall the customer service unit 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 Members will be aware that the Council is, through the Customer Access project, enabling and encouraging self-service and digital service delivery however the telephone is still the channel of choice for many of our customers and in the period 1st to 31st December 2016 the service received a total of 20,590 calls (281,404 Year to Date). This is a decrease of 8700 calls compared to the equivalent period in the previous year. The main reasons for the decrease in the number of calls over this period are; automated switchboard functionality reduced calls to an adviser by almost 4000; Housing Repairs calls reduced by 2400 and roads calls reduced by almost 1000 due to more favourable weather conditions during December.

5.2.2 Performance against both the primary and secondary target for responding to calls over the period 1st to 31st December 2016 and year to date is shown in table 5 below.

5.2.3 The primary target for responding to calls is to answer 90% of all telephone calls to the customer service centre

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

Primary target	Year	December	Year to date
90% calls answered	2016	95%	89%
	2015	87%	88%

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	2016	66%	46%
	2015	46%	44%

5.2.5 The Customer Service Unit is now achieving the primary target of answering 90% of all calls, with performance against the secondary target of 70% calls answered within 40 seconds recovering to reach 71% in the last week before the Christmas break (66% for December as a whole). Members are advised that the start of January is historically a period of highest demand for the Contact Centre, with performance levels routinely dropping by 25% from optimal levels with the seasonal impact of winter weather a significant factor that may impact the reported performance moving into January.

5.3 Face to face provision

5.3.1 The primary target for Face to Face customer service is an average wait time of less than 20 minutes across all services and locations

5.3.2 The total number of face to face visits completed in the period was 2849 (39,922 Year to Date), with average wait times by location outlined in the following table.

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

Location	Year	December	Year to Date
Paisley	2016	09:03	16:47
	2015	08:59	16:09
Renfrew	2016	06:35	10:19
	2015	05:51	06:50
Johnstone	2016	08:33	15:09
	2015	11:41	14:38

5.4 Factors impacting full recovery of performance

There have been a number of contributing factors influencing full recovery of performance and significant management effort has been involved in returning to target performance level over the preceding 12 months:

- The service has responded to an exceptional period of staff turnover (calculated at 30% for 2015); 75% of those leaving the CSU are moving to other opportunities elsewhere in the Council which reflects the high level of skills advisors gain across a wide range of services within the customer service environment.
- While turnover levels improved to 17% for the first six months of 2016, it is only in the last three months of 2016 that it has return to historically normal levels and currently stands at 9.05%. 10% has been average turnover level in CSU prior to the exceptional period noted above.
- The recruitment of skilled and trained staff in the customer service unit has proved challenging for a prolonged period with managers continuing to carry out bi-monthly recruitment exercises during 2016/17 with another planned for January 2017 in order to return staffing levels to their full complement.
- Training of new staff is critical to ensure they are both productive and capable of resolving calls however the complexity of some services means that it can take up to 3 months after recruitment before staff are fully trained. Moving into January it is anticipated, as this training is completed, that performance levels will stabilise as staff are skilled to support an increased number of services.

5.5 Service improvement actions progressed to achieve optimal performance levels

5.5.1 In addition to performance recovery actions progressed, a number of key service improvements have also been introduced over recent weeks and months, including:

- Advanced queue management technology has been introduced. For the first time, this means that at the busiest times for the high-demand services (Council Tax, Benefits and Housing Repairs) rather than hang on waiting for an adviser to become available, customers can now choose to hang up having requested that an adviser phone them back. This reduces the cost of phone calls for customers, whilst importantly the system preserves their place in the call queue. On average 5% of customers are now choosing to take advantage of this functionality.
- Automated switchboard functionality was implemented at the start of the year to route calls to individuals and departments within the Council without the need to speak to an individual advisor, since its implementation this has

reduced the total calls to Switchboard by 24,000 compared to the same period last year.

- Automated telephone payments provide customers the opportunity to make payments 24/7 across a range of services including Council Tax and Rents without requiring to speak to an adviser.
- Increased access to alternative channels have continued to be made available to the public as new services are introduced to MyAccount, the Council's fully authenticated on line account. To date over 12,000 people have signed up, with over 900 customers accessing their account each week resulting in an average of weekly 630 service requests, including direct debit set up and discount requests.
- In December, MyAccount was extended to include access to Housing Rent accounts with work already underway to implement improvements and digital solutions for housing repairs and environmental reports and services such as reporting missed bins, roads and lighting faults and Streetscene activity. Over the coming months, customers will be encouraged to sign up for the new MyAccount service as a way of saving them time and widening access and choice.
- For customers who prefer the certainty of a specific appointment to deal with their enquiry face to face, new technology is being deployed that will offer customers the facility to pre-book an appointment at a time most suitable for them. This is currently being piloted with Taxi and Private Hire drivers who are keen to work with the customer service team to develop the appointment system.
- Detailed analysis of performance focussing on the three main services that drive high volume calls (CT, Benefits and Housing Repairs) has been carried out and initial actions agreed with the services to address repeat contacts and initiate process improvements and improve the overall service being provided to customers.

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 Planning** –

Empowering our Communities – The collection of Local taxes through electronic payments (e.g. Direct Debit, Website and Telephone) is increasing and provides an extensive range of payment opportunities for the public.

Jobs and the Economy – An efficient and effective billing and administrative process is vital in ensuring the recovery of income to the council in order to support the provision of local services.
4. **Legal** – None
5. **Property/Assets** – None
6. **Information Technology** - None
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - None
8. **Health & Safety** None
9. **Procurement** – None
10. **Risk** - None
11. **Privacy Impact** – None

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Appendix 1

RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

REVENUES COLLECTION STATEMENT AS AT 28TH December 2016

COUNCIL TAX		
	2015/16	2016/17
	£m	£m
Projected Yield	77.434	78.511
Gross Charges	80.494	82.049
Less rebates	12.538	12.150
Net Charges Billed	<u>67.956</u>	<u>69.899</u>
Cash Collected	64.772	61.503
Rebate Grant	12.538	12.150
	<u>77.310</u>	<u>73.653</u>
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	95.32%	87.99%
Income as % of Projected Yield	99.84%	93.81%

NON DOMESTIC RATES		
	2015/16	2016/17
	£m	£m
Projected Yield	92.598	100.444
Gross Charges	115.13	120.317
Less reliefs	20.642	17.823
Net Charges Billed	<u>94.488</u>	<u>102.494</u>
Cash Collected	91.771	82.201
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	97.12%	80.20%
Cash collected as % of Projected Yield	99.11%	81.84%

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 (number of days)	60		
Result: last 3 months (days)	Oct: 21 days	Nov: 44 days	Dec: 69 days
Average (12 months to date)	39 days		
Average Appeals Completed	6 Appeals per month		

Comment:-

Due to the complexity of the small number of Appeals received in December target was missed. The Service continues to manage Appeals processing and aims to be back within target by the next reporting cycle.

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: 51	August: 38	September: 34
Result Last 3 months	October: 37	November: 28	December: 31

Comment:- The service missed target processing time for Revisions in December , however with new staff having joined the team recently it aims to be within target by next reporting cycle.

ACCURACY

The Service proactively monitors the accuracy of benefits decisions made through a robust audit checking programme. The Service targets to audit 3% 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	3%	19%
Accuracy – December 16	95%	95%
Accuracy – Year to Date	95%	92%

Comment:- The Service has set a stretching target for Accuracy and this has been achieved for this reporting period.

Overpayments

The value of overpayments reported at the last board was £6,928,873 the current value is £6,957,679

	Target %	Actual %
% recovery of debt raised	73%	74.63%
15/16: % recovery of debt raised	73%	83.50%

Comment:- The Service is ahead of target in relation to recovery of Overpayments.