

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

**On:** 30 January 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 31 December 2018 (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.
- 2.2 It is recommended that the Board notes the redistribution of council resources from the DHP fund to support SWF payments in section 4.5.4
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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> December 2018 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 £77,669,776

- 3.1.3 The sums collected to date for 2018/19 are £68,332,939 which is 87.98% of the billable sum. This represents a reduction of 0.34% 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 February and March this year will result in the Council Tax percentage collected figure recovering by year end.
- 3.1.4 The Council Tax Reduction awarded is £12,416,799 amounting to 13.78% of the billable sum, which is 0.32% less than at the same point last year.
- 3.1.5 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 28<sup>th</sup> December 2018 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 £130,675,662.
- 3.2.3 The cash receipts to date amount to £106,692,033 which is 81.65% of the sums billed. This is an increase in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed of 3.39% 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 December 2018. 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**

<b>Performance measure</b>	<b>4 Week Reporting Period 09 November 2018 to 06 December 2018</b>	<b>Year to date position</b>	<b>Annual Target</b>
New Claims – processing time	16 days	20 days	24 days
New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received	94%	95%	92%
Changes in Circumstance – processing time	10 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.

4.4.2 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 2019, if required.

4.4.3 Table 2 below has been updated to reflect the additional resources approved by the Council's Leadership Board on 19 September 2018

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	£99,384
Financial Hardship (Benefit Cap) – Scottish Government	£186,847
Bedroom Tax* – Scottish Government	£1,940,786
Financial Hardship – Renfrewshire Council	£120,000
<b>Total budget for the year</b>	<b>£2,347,017</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 2018 to 31 December 2018</b>
Volume of DHP applications received	6,148 applications
Volume of DHP decisions made	5,547 decisions
Number of DHP awards	5,292 awards
Average processing time (target 29 days)	12 days
<b>Total amount committed/paid</b>	<b>£2,167,371</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 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 70% of its total budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of December 2018.

- 4.5.4 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 are up slightly on the same point last year, with Universal Credit (UC) cases now accounting for about a quarter of the awards made. The average value of these UC awards is 74% higher than for non-UC customers, this has as a result put pressure on the fund. £20k of budget from Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) has therefore been reallocated to Scottish Welfare Fund to better enable the service to meet this demand.
- 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 2018 to 31 December 2018</b>
Number of Crisis Grant applications received	6,383
Number of Crisis Grant Awards	5,037
<b>Total amount paid for Crisis Grants</b>	<b>£377,125</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	1,466
Number of Community Care Grant Awards	951
<b>Total amount paid for Community Care Grant</b>	<b>£491,390</b>
<b>Average processing time year to date (15 working days target)</b>	<b>12 days</b>
<b>Average processing time (within month)</b>	<b>8 days</b>
<b>Total amount paid/committed from the fund</b>	<b>£868,514</b>
<b>Budget provided by Scottish Government</b>	<b>£1,172,473</b>
<b>Additional Council Resources</b>	<b>£68,000</b>
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>£1,240,473</b>

## 5. Customer Service Provision

- 5.1 This section details the performance of the customer service unit for December 2018 and the year to date position from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018. 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 26,848 calls which is 4,548 calls more than the same period last year and the highest volume of calls in the month of December since 2015. Overall 87% 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 14,879 calls compared to the same period last year.

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

Primary target	Year	December - Calls Received	December - % Answered	Year to Date – Calls Received	Year to Date - % Answered
90% calls answered	2018	26,848	87%	276,790	95%
	2017	22,300	97%	261,911	96%

- 5.2.3 The contact centre was below the target of 90% calls answered following an increase in demand during the last 2 months due to the changes in the waste collection service.
- 5.2.4 As shown in table 8, in November and December the contact centre received 14,419 calls through the recycling and environmental queues which compares to 5,033 in the same period in November and December 2017 and equates to a 186% increase in demand. Overall, the contact centre was responding to an average of 8,365 calls per week in December 2018, compared to an average of 6,779 in the previous year.
- 5.2.5 Service analysis of the calls received in relation to environmental and recycling services during November and December shows that 22% of the calls were repeat or follow up calls, while the clear majority, 62%, were initial calls for information or service. The balance of calls is not easily attributable as the caller withheld their number, however it is assumed that they are split along similar lines.

5.2.6 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	2018	48%	61%
	2017	74%	68%

5.2.7 The contact centre was below target for the month of December, mainly due to the increased call volume relating to the changes in the waste collection service and call handling issues experienced during the of the council's telephone system upgrade on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of the month.

### 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 2,333 customer visits in December and continues to deal with these customers within target performance. This is compared to similar volume of 2,340 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 32,877 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
<b>Paisley</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>12:17 mins</b>	<b>15:44 mins</b>
	2017	12:18 mins	15:05 mins
<b>Renfrew</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>05:31 mins</b>	<b>05:53 mins</b>
	2017	07:26 mins	06:02 mins
<b>Johnstone</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>08:06 mins</b>	<b>11:11 mins</b>
	2017	08:21 mins	11:41 mins

## 5.4 Factors impacting performance in the period

5.4.1 The two key factors which caused the reduction in call response performance levels were the Council's change to the waste collection service and the telephone system upgrade on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of the month.

5.4.2 Table 8 below demonstrates the significant increase in demand attributed to the waste collection changes.

**Table 8 – Waste Collection Service - Call Volume Comparison**

Call Centre Queue	2017 Calls Received	2018 Calls Received
Environmental	2448	4148
Recycling	2585	10271
Combined Total	5033	14419

5.4.3 Managers across the Customer Service Unit and Environment and Infrastructure worked together ahead of the introduction of the new waste collection service, to plan for the anticipated impact on the contact centre and a range of actions were progressed to mitigate the impact of the waste collection changes:

- 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](mailto:mybins@renfrewshire.gov.uk)) which also received 2034 customer enquiries in the month of December
- Social media messaging

5.4.4 It is noted that while these actions did mitigate the impact of the change, the contact centre was unable to meet target performance levels due to the nature of the demand and the significant increase in call volumes.

5.4.5 For members reference and in line with best practice, call centre industry standard methodologies based on annualised, monthly and weekly call data, are used by contact centre management to determine the staffing levels required to deliver the call centre service to agreed service standards.



What this cannot fully take into account is any significant service changes that drive an unpredictable spike in demand levels. In response, the additional measures outlined above were deployed, however the level of challenge experienced by the contact centre meant that the service was impacted initially as customers received information about the new waste recycling service and secondly as the changes took effect across Renfrewshire.

- 5.4.6 The second factor impacting on performance was the council's telephone system upgrade on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> December. Members will be familiar with the contact centre system upgrade in April 2018, and this was the next phase of this work to change the remainder of the council's call routing.
- 5.4.7 The upgrade was planned with the telephony provider and was expected to create only very minor disruption with a 10-15-minute downtime of the telephone service. Due to issues experienced by the service provider during the upgrade process, a greater level of disruption over a 2-day period was experienced which impacted on the contact centre, restricting the ability of advisors to log into the call handling system and calls could not be routed to site to be answered.
- 5.4.8 In response to the emerging situation, managers arranged for queue messaging to be altered to advise customers of the issues and information was provided through the Council's social media channels. When service was fully returned, the contact centre experienced a consequential increase in demand immediately following the period of downtime which had a detrimental impact on contact centre performance over the following days.

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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
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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> September 2018

<b>COUNCIL TAX</b>		
	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>
Projected Yield	82.043	85.957
Gross Charges	86.154	90.087
Less rebates	12.117	12.417
Net Charges Billed	<u>74.037</u>	<u>77.670</u>
Cash Collected	70.875	68.333
Rebate Grant	12.117	12.417
	<u>82.992</u>	<u>80.750</u>
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	95.73%	87.98%
Income as % of Projected Yield	101.16%	93.94%

<b>NON DOMESTIC RATES</b>		
	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>
Projected Yield	123.302	128.062
Gross Charges	145.932	151.281
Less reliefs	20.114	20.605
Net Charges Billed	<u>125.819</u>	<u>130.676</u>
Cash Collected	123.333	106.692
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	98.02%	81.65%
Cash collected as % of Projected Yield	100.02%	83.31%

## 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>	October:32 days	November:25 days	December:22 days
<b>Average (12 months to date)</b>	34 days		
<b>Average Appeals Completed</b>	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.

<b>Target</b>	28 days		
<b>Result last report</b>	July: 28	August: 29	September: 23
<b>Result Last 3 months</b>	October: 28	November: 20	December: 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.

	<b>Target %</b>	<b>Actual %</b>
<b>Volume of Audits</b>	4%	21%
<b>Accuracy – December 18</b>	95%	97%
<b>Accuracy – Year to Date</b>	95%	91%

**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 volume of audits completed.

#### OVERPAYMENTS

	<b>Target %</b>	<b>Actual %</b>
<b>17/18: % recovery of debt raised</b>	73%	76.77%
<b>18/19: % recovery of debt raised</b>	73%	96.44%

**Comment:-** The value of overpayments reported at the last Board was £7,433,821, the current value is £7,416,021. Combined collection of both historic and more recently identified housing benefit overpayments has almost matched the total new debt raised within the year to date.