

To: Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board

On: 8 November 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 30 September 2017 (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
- Approve the allocation of £120,000 of additional resources to support Discretionary Housing Payments as detailed at 4.4.5

3. Revenue Collection

3.1 Council Tax

- 3.1.1 This section details the collection performance as at 28th September 2017 for Council Tax. It also provides details of the total sums collected for the previous year.

3.1.2 The billable sum for 2017/18 is £74,439,928

3.1.3 The Council Tax Reduction awarded is £12,310,712 amounting to 14.19% of the billable sum, which is 0.72% less than at the same point last year. The separation of claims for Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit is a contributing factor, resulting in a reduction in the number of applications.

3.1.4 The sums collected to date for 2017/18 are £44,868,403 which is 60.27% of the billable sum. This is an increase in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed of 0.44% compared with the same position for 2016/17.

3.2 Non Domestic Rates

3.2.1 This section details the collection performance as at 28th September 2017 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 2017/18 amount to £135,624,989.

3.2.3 The cash receipts to date amount to £69,531,009 which is 51.27% of the sums billed. This is a decrease in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed of 2.90% compared with the same position for 2016/17.

3.2.4 The decreased collection rate is a payment phasing change which will equalise with the 16/17 position by year end. A single business, whose rates bill forms a significant part of the total levied charges, has elected to pay in instalments for 2017/18, they paid a lump sum in advance in 2016/17.

3.2.5 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 September 2017. 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 balance a significant work load along with managing the impact of the ongoing effect from the UK Government's 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 slightly outside target for the period. Resources have been deployed to ensure

affected claims have been prioritised. The year to date position remained ahead of target.

4.3.2 In relation to New Claims processed within 14 days of all information received, this measure is 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	5 Week Reporting Period 11 August 2017 to 14 September 2017	Year to date position	Annual Target
New Claims – processing time	27 days	24 days	24 days
New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received	94%	93%	92%
Changes in Circumstance – processing time	10 days	7 days	10 days

4.4 Discretionary Housing Payments

4.4.1 The total budget for Discretionary Housing Payments for 2017/18 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 2018, 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 The overall budget (assuming the bedroom tax estimate) for DHP has increased slightly for 2017/18, however the amount available to pay

customers experiencing financial hardship (not bedroom tax) is £102K less than last year, when the Council augmented the fund with its own resources.

- 4.4.5 Following mid-year budget analysis it is recommended that, similar to previous years, the Board approves the allocation of additional resources to support DHP payments. Based on the analysis, it is recommended that additional budget of £120,000 is allocated from existing welfare reform resources to support customers experiencing ongoing financial hardship, following ongoing changes to the welfare system.

Table 2 – DHP Budget

Funding – indicative allocations	amount
Financial Hardship (non Benefit Cap)	£99,631
Financial Hardship (Benefit Cap)	£195,705
Bedroom Tax*	£1,870,877
Total budget for the year	£2,166,213

*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 2017 to 31 September 2017
Volume of DHP applications received	4,009 applications
Volume of DHP decisions made	3,951 decisions
Number of DHP awards	3,778 awards
Average processing time (target 29 days)	6 days
Total amount committed/paid	£1,901,492

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 2017/18 in line with Scottish Government guidance and had spent 45.0% of its total budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of September 2017.
- 4.5.3 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 2017 to 30 September 2017
Number of Crisis Grant applications received	4,409
Number of Crisis Grant Awards	3,392
Total amount paid for Crisis Grants	£220,311
Average Processing time (2 working days target)	1 day
Average Processing time (within month)	1 day
Number of Community Care Grant applications received	1,024
Number of Community Care Grant Awards	569
Total amount paid for Community Care Grant	£314,876
Average processing time year to date (15 working days target)	11 days
Average processing time (within month)	10 days
Total amount paid/committed from the fund	£535,187
Total Budget	£1,216,122.00

*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 30th September 2017. 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 – during September the Contact Centre received 27,913 calls and answered 95% against a primary target of 90% for the period. The total calls receive since 1st April is 179,719, with 96% being answered as outlined in Table 5.

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

Primary target	Year	September	Year to date
90% calls answered	2017	95%	96%
	2016	87%	87%

5.2.2 The contact centre performance remains above the primary target and year to date significantly higher than the same period last year

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	September	Year to date
70% calls in 40 seconds	2017	65%	66%
	2016	55%	43%

5.2.4 Performance against the secondary target for September was below target, mainly due to the impact of public holidays on customer demand. While resource plans take account of public holidays, the significantly higher call volumes after a public holiday impact on response times. The first few days of the month were affected by the holiday at the end of August, and the end of month saw an increase in call volume caused by the long weekend (22-25 September), with over 2,400 calls being received on the 26th. This is against routine call volumes of around 1700.

5.2.5 Performance against the secondary target remains significantly higher than the same period last year, and performance in October, unaffected by public holidays has already recovered, with the service level reaching 75% of calls answered within 40 seconds.

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. Table 7 below outlines the performance for the period across all Customer Service locations.
- 5.3.2 The service received 3,833 customer visits in the period and continued to deal with these customers within target performance. Year to date, there have been 23,654 customer visits with an overall wait time of 13:23. Wait times in all locations have reduced compared to the same period last year.

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

Location	Year	September	Year to Date
Paisley	2017	16:14	16:10
	2016	17:41	17:53
Renfrew	2017	07:31	05:42
	2016	08:58	11:28
Johnstone	2017	11:54	11:44
	2016	15:06	16:42

5.4 Factors impacting performance in the period

The main cause of a reduced service level during September was increased call volumes following the public holidays that at the start and end of the month. Of the 19 working days in the month, the performance target of 70% was exceeded on 12 of those days.

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** - None

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 September 2017

COUNCIL TAX		
	2016/17	2017/18
	£m	£m
Projected Yield	78.511	82.043
Gross Charges	81.675	86.751
Less rebates	12.064	12.311
Net Charges Billed	<u>69.611</u>	<u>74.440</u>
Cash Collected	66.230	44.868
Rebate Grant	12.064	12.311
	<u>78.294</u>	<u>57.179</u>
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	95.14%	60.27%
Income as % of Projected Yield	99.72%	69.69%

NON DOMESTIC RATES		
	2016/17	2017/18
	£m	£m
Projected Yield	99.413	132.912
Gross Charges	119.672	154.727
Less reliefs	18.231	19.102
Net Charges Billed	<u>101.442</u>	<u>135.625</u>
Cash Collected	98.881	69.531
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	97.48%	51.27%
Cash collected as % of Projected Yield	99.47%	52.31%

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.

Target processing speed (number of days)	60		
Result: last 3 months (days)	Jul: 56 days	Aug: 46 days	Sep: 48 days
Average (12 months to date)	44 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	May: 30	Jun: 31	Jul: 40
Result Last 3 months	Jul: 40	Aug: 40	Sep: 31

Comment:- The service missed the target processing time for Revisions due to a short term staff shortage, the Service has improved the position over the past 3 months and aims to be back within target by the next reporting period.

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%	17%
Accuracy – March 17	95%	86%
Accuracy – Year to Date	95%	88%

Comment:- The Service has set a stretching target for Accuracy and this has been missed for this reporting period. A much higher level of checking has been carried during this period because, similar to the previous report, a number of new benefit assessors have been recruited and this has led to higher than normal levels of inaccuracy. This is expected to improve.

Overpayments

The value of overpayments reported at the last board was £7,151,244 the current value is £7,159,218

	Target %	Actual %
16/17: % recovery of debt raised	73%	76.40%
17/18: % recovery of debt raised	73%	81.10%

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