

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

**On:** 31 January 2018

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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 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.
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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 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 £74,287,587

- 3.1.3 The sums collected to date for 2017/18 are £65,611,489 which is 88.32% of the billable sum. This is an increase in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed of 0.33% compared with the same position for 2016/17.
- 3.1.4 The Council Tax Reduction awarded is £12,198,327 amounting to 14.10% of the billable sum, which is 0.71% less than at the same point last year. The separation of claims for Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit is the main contributing factor, resulting in a reduction in the number of applications. A further but less significant factor is the interaction between static Council Tax charges, customer income increases and changes to DWP allowances & premiums; resulting in customers having lost or reduced entitlement.
- 3.1.5 The Service is undertaking 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 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 £135,655,774.
- 3.2.3 The cash receipts to date amount to £106,160,018 which is 78.26% of the sums billed. This is a decrease in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed of 1.94% compared with the same position for 2016/17.
- 3.2.4 As reported at the previous cycle, 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.
- 3.2.4 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 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 successfully 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 well within target for the period.

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 10 November 2017 to 07 December 2017</b>	<b>Year to date position</b>	<b>Annual Target</b>
New Claims – processing time	21 days	24 days	24 days
New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received	96%	94%	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 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 total DHP budget for the year has been increased to reflect the additional resources approved at the last board cycle. The total budget remaining at 31 December 2017 is just over £188,000 of which £125,000 is ring-fenced for Bedroom Tax support.

**Table 2 – DHP Budget**

<b>Funding – indicative allocations</b>	<b>amount</b>
Financial Hardship (non Benefit Cap)	£159,631
Financial Hardship (Benefit Cap)	£255,705
Bedroom Tax*	£1,870,877
<b>Total budget for the year</b>	<b>£2,286,213</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 2017 to 31 December 2017</b>
Volume of DHP applications received	5,144 applications
Volume of DHP decisions made	4,965 decisions
Number of DHP awards	4,735 awards
Average processing time (target 29 days)	14 days
<b>Total amount committed/paid</b>	<b>£2,097,897</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 2017/18 in line with Scottish Government guidance and had spent 66.0% of its total budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of December 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**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017</b>
Number of Crisis Grant applications received	6,313
Number of Crisis Grant Awards	4,811
<b>Total amount paid for Crisis Grants</b>	<b>£311,415</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	1,465
Number of Community Care Grant Awards	885
<b>Total amount paid for Community Care Grant</b>	<b>£490,651</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>12 days</b>
<b>Total amount paid/committed from the fund</b>	<b>£802,067</b>
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>£1,216,122.00</b>

\*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 1<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> December 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 December the contact centre received 22,300 calls and answered 97% against a primary target of 90% for the period. The total number of calls received since 1<sup>st</sup> April is 261,911, with 96% these answered by the Contact Centre.

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

Primary target	Year	December	Year to Date
90% calls answered	2017	97%	96%
	2016	95%	87%

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

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	2017	74%	68%
	2016	66%	44%

5.2.5 The performance against the secondary target for December was above target. This is a strong performance given that as usual at this time of year, the number and nature of calls was impacted on specific days due to adverse weather conditions.

Performance against the secondary target remains significantly higher than the same period last year, and performance for the last three months of 2017 has remained above the 70% target for 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. The table below outlines the performance for the period across all Customer Service locations.
- 5.3.2 The service received 2,340 customer visits in the period and continues to deal with these customers within target performance. Year to date, there have been 33,475 customer visits with an overall wait time of 12:48. Wait times overall have reduced year to date compared to 15:15 at the same point last year.

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

Location	Year	December	Year to Date
<b>Paisley</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>12:18</b>	<b>15:06</b>
	2016	09:03	16:47
<b>Renfrew</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>07:26</b>	<b>06:02</b>
	2016	06:35	10:19
<b>Johnstone</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>08:21</b>	<b>11:41</b>
	2016	08:33	15:09

### 5.4 Factors impacting performance in the period

Adverse weather is routinely recognised as having the potential to directly impact on call volumes and performance throughout the winter months, however the resilience the service has developed means that so far, service levels have been maintained.

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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
1. **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.*
2. **Legal** – None
3. **Property/Assets** – None
4. **Information Technology** - None
7. **Equality & Human Rights** -
  - (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their 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. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety** None
9. **Procurement** – None
10. **Risk** - None
11. **Privacy Impact** – None



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**Author:** Rhona McGrath, Ext 6879



## Appendix 1

### RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

#### REVENUES COLLECTION STATEMENT AS AT 28<sup>TH</sup> December 2017

<b>COUNCIL TAX</b>		
	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>
Projected Yield	78.511	82.043
Gross Charges	81.579	86.486
Less rebates	12.039	12.198
Net Charges Billed	<u>69.540</u>	<u>74.288</u>
Cash Collected	66.360	65.611
Rebate Grant	12.039	12.198
	<u>78.399</u>	<u>77.810</u>
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	95.43%	88.32%
Income as % of Projected Yield	99.86%	94.84%

<b>NON DOMESTIC RATES</b>		
	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>
Projected Yield	99.386	132.943
Gross Charges	119.686	154.377
Less reliefs	18.272	18.721
Net Charges Billed	<u>101.414</u>	<u>135.656</u>
Cash Collected	98.809	106.160
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	97.43%	78.26%
Cash collected as % of Projected Yield	99.42%	79.85%



## 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 (number of days)</b>	60		
<b>Result: last 3 months (days)</b>	Oct: 50 days	Nov: 34 days	Dec: 24 days
<b>Average (12 months to date)</b>	42 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>	Jul: 40	Aug: 40	Sep: 31
<b>Result Last 3 months</b>	Oct: 40	Nov: 37	Dec: 34

**Comment:-** The service missed target processing time for Revisions due to short term staff shortage, the Service 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 %
<b>Volume of Audits</b>	3%	12%
<b>Accuracy – December 17</b>	95%	94%
<b>Accuracy – Year to Date</b>	95%	89%

**Comment:-** The Service has set a stretching target for Accuracy and this has been narrowly missed for this reporting period. A much higher level of checking has been carried during this period because of the ongoing training and support for a number of new benefit assessors.

#### Overpayments

The value of overpayments reported at the last board was £7,159,218 the current value is £7,384,343

	Target %	Actual %
<b>16/17: % recovery of debt raised</b>	73%	76.40%
<b>17/18: % recovery of debt raised</b>	73%	77.77%

**Comment:-** The Service is ahead of target and previous year in relation to recovery of Overpayments.