

To: Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board

On: 7 June 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 March 2017 (including an update on the funding and expenditure position in relation to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and the Scottish Welfare Fund). It also provides a performance update in relation to customer services provision for the same period.
-

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board consider the content of the report.
-

3. Revenue Collection

3.1 Council Tax

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

- 3.1.2 The billable sum for 2016/17 is £69,735,643

3.1.3 The Council Tax Reduction awarded is £12,134,437 amounting to 14.82% of the billable sum, which is 0.81% 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 cash sums collected to date for 2016/17 are marginally lower than the amounts sum collected for the previous year, amounting to £65,877,718 which is 94.47% of the billable sum. Subject to audit, the adjusted year end position following the closure of the account at 31st March has confirmed a full year collection position of 96%, in line with previous year performance.

3.2 Non Domestic Rates

3.2.1 This section details the collection performance as at 28th March 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 2016/17 amount to £101,999,509.

3.2.3 The cash receipts to date amount to £98,774,095 which is 96.84% of the sums billed. This is an increase in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed of 0.21% compared with the same position for 2015/16. Subject to audit, the adjusted year end position following the closure of the account at 31st March has confirmed a full year collection position of 97%, a marginal improvement on the previous year performance.

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 March 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 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..

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	4 Week Reporting Period 10 February 2017 to 09 March 2017	Year to date position	Annual Target
New Claims – processing time	23 days	23 days	24 days
New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received	96%	93%	92%
Changes in Circumstance – processing time	8 days	7 days	10 days

4.4 Discretionary Housing Payments

- 4.4.1 The total budget for Discretionary Housing Payments for 2016/17 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 will 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 maximised 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 helped those experiencing ongoing financial hardship because 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*	£1,505,674
Total budget for the year	£2,180,724

*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	6,724 applications
Volume of DHP decisions made	6,551 decisions
Number of DHP awards	6,088 awards
Average processing time (target 29 days)	11 days
Total amount committed/paid	£2,180,581

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 fully spent its total budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of March 2017.

4.5.2 The performance data relating to the Fund is presented in table 4 below. The Service processed Community Care Grants well within target for the month and as a result the year to date position moved to within one day of the target.*

*The year to date position is an average across the year and the position has improved by a day since the last report.

Table 4 – SWF Performance Summary

Measure	1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017
Number of Crisis Grant applications received	8,514
Number of Crisis Grant Awards	6,805
Total amount paid for Crisis Grants	£475,710.51
Average Processing time (2 working days target)	1 day
Average Processing time (within month)	1 day
Number of Community Care Grant applications received	2,042
Number of Community Care Grant Awards	1,613
Total amount paid for Community Care Grant	£782,349.85
Year end Accrued Payments	£1,800
Average processing time year to date (15 working days target)	16 days
Average processing time (within month)	10 days
Total amount paid/committed from the fund	£1,259,860.36
Total Budget	£1,259,893.00

*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 April 2017. An update is provided 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 The first three months of the calendar year are historically a busy time for the Customer Service Unit due to Council Tax annual billing activity.

5.2.2 The Contact Centre received 28,156 calls and answered 97% against a primary target of 90% for the period.

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

Primary target	Year	April	Year to date
90% calls answered	2017	97%	97%
	2016	83%	83%

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	April	Year to date
70% calls in 40 seconds	2017	71%	71%
	2016	30%	30%

5.2.4 The performance against the secondary target for April was above target, with a significant improvement on the same period last year.

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 minutes. The table below outlines the performance for the period across all Customer Service locations.

5.3.2 The service received 6,684 customer visits in the period and continues to deal with these customers within target performance.

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

Location	Year	April	Year to Date
Paisley	2017	14:07	14:07
	2016	18:06	18:06
Renfrew	2017	08:18	08:18
	2016	11:38	11:38
Johnstone	2017	11:52	11:52
	2016	15:31	15:31

6. **Full year performance (1st April 2016 – 31st March 2017)**

- 6.1 This section outlines the performance of the Customer Service Unit, for the previous financial year.

Table 8 – Customer Service Unit – Primary Target (call handling)

For the full financial year (1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017), the call centre dealt with 383,719 calls, the performance for the year against the primary target is shown in the table below.

Primary target	Full Year
90% calls answered	91%

Table 9 - Customer Service Unit – Secondary Target (call handling)

For the full financial year (1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017), the call centre dealt with 383,719 calls, the performance for the year against the secondary target is shown in the table below.

Primary target	Full Year
70% calls in 40 seconds	52%

Table 9 – Customer Service Unit – Primary Target (Face to Face)

For the full financial year (1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017), the customer service centre dealt with 53,014 customers, the average wait time for these customers is outlined below.

Location	Full Year
Paisley	15:35
Renfrew	09:38
Johnstone	14:28

- 6.2 Factors impacting performance in the previous financial year

- 6.2.1 As reported previously to the Finance and Resources Policy Board, there were significant contributing factors which affected telephone call handling performance levels in the previous financial year:

- An exceptional period of staff turnover, (calculated at 30% for 2015), with 75% of staff moving on from the Customer Service Unit (CSU) to take up other opportunities elsewhere across the Council which reflects the high level of skills advisors gain across a wide range of services when they work within the customer service environment.
- While turnover levels improved to 17% for the first six months of 2016, it was only in the last 6 months that it returned to normal levels and currently stands at 9.05%. 10% has been average turnover level in CSU over last 5 years.
- The recruitment of skilled and trained staff in the customer contact centre proved challenging for a prolonged period with managers carrying out bi-monthly recruitment exercises during 2016/17
- 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 deployed.

6.2.2 A range of management actions were actively progressed during the period to recover performance, with performance against targets achieved from 16 January 2017 onwards. The actions taken are listed below:

- Advanced queue management technology was introduced. For the first time, this means that at the busiest times for the high-demand services (CT, 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 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, reducing the calls to the call centre by over 24,000.
- Automated telephone payments provide customers the opportunity to make payments 24/7 across arrange 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 services continue to be introduced to MyAccount, the council's fully authenticated on line account. To date over 20,000 people have signed up, with over 1400 customers accessing their account each week.
- 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 were keen to work with the customer service team to develop the appointment system.

- 6.2.3 Detailed analysis of performance focussing on the three main services that drive high volume calls (CT, Benefits and Housing Repairs) was carried out and actions agreed with the services to address repeat contacts and initiate process improvements and overall improve the 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** - 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

Author: Rhona McGrath, Ext 6879

Appendix 1

RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

REVENUES COLLECTION STATEMENT AS AT 28TH March 2017

COUNCIL TAX		
	2015/16	2016/17
	£m	£m
Projected Yield	77.434	78.511
Gross Charges	80.439	81.870
Less rebates	12.516	12.134
Net Charges Billed	<u>67.922</u>	<u>69.736</u>
Cash Collected	64.871	65.878
Rebate Grant	12.516	12.134
	<u>77.387</u>	<u>78.012</u>
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	95.51%	94.47%
Income as % of Projected Yield	99.94%	99.36%

NON DOMESTIC RATES		
	2015/16	2016/17
	£m	£m
Projected Yield	92.608	99.960
Gross Charges	115.129	120.115
Less reliefs	20.630	18.116
Net Charges Billed	<u>94.498</u>	<u>102.000</u>
Cash Collected	91.923	98.774
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	97.27%	96.84%
Cash collected as % of Projected Yield	99.26%	98.81%

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)	Jan: 64 days	Feb: 50 days	Mar: 29 days
Average (12 months to date)	41 days		
Average Appeals Completed	7 Appeals per month		

Comment:-

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	November: 28	December: 31	January: 36
Result Last 3 months	January: 36	February: 26	March: 24

Comment:- The service missed target processing time for Revisions in January, this delay in processing is due to the two week festive closure of the Council. Performance was recovered during February and improved again in March.

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%	12%
Accuracy – March 17	95%	88%
Accuracy – Year to Date	95%	92%

Comment:- The Service has set a stretching target for Accuracy and this has been narrowly missed for this reporting period and over the full year. The Service has identified an area of common error and carried out some refresher training. A much higher level of checking has been carried during this period because a number of new benefit assessors have been recruited.

Overpayments

The value of overpayments reported at the last board was £6,957,679 the current value is £7,063,637

	Target %	Actual %
% recovery of debt raised	73%	76.40%
15/16: % recovery of debt raised	73%	83.50%

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