

To: Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board

On: 6 June 2018

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 April 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.
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3. Revenue Collection

3.1 Council Tax

- 3.1.1 This section details the collection performance as at 28th April 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 £77,463,120
- 3.1.3 The sums collected to date for 2018/19 are £11,304,362 which is 14.59% of the billable sum. This is broadly the same level of cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed compared with the same position for 2017/18, reporting a less than 0.1% difference.

3.1.4 The Council Tax Reduction awarded is £12,490,536 amounting to 13.89% of the billable sum, which is 0.43% 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 28th April 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 £132,544,042.

3.2.3 The cash receipts to date amount to £3,000,261 which is 2.26% of the sums billed. This is a decrease in cash collection as a proportion of net charges billed of 0.91% compared with the same position for 2017/18.

3.2.4 NDR collection is at a very early stage with 1st instalment not due until 7th May 2018, 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 April 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.

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

Performance measure	5 Week Reporting Period 16 March 2018 to 19 April 2018	Year to date position	Annual Target
New Claims – processing time	20 days	20 days	24 days
New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received	93%	93%	92%
Changes in Circumstance – processing time	6 days	6 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 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 slightly behind target, this is due mainly to the initialisation process for the new financial year, it is expected that this figure will be within target by the next reporting cycle.

Table 2 – DHP Budget

Funding – indicative allocations	amount
Financial Hardship (non Benefit Cap)	£99,384
Financial Hardship (Benefit Cap)	£186,847
Bedroom Tax*	£1,940,786
Total budget for the year	£2,227,017

*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 2018 to 28 April 2018
Volume of DHP applications received	79 applications
Volume of DHP decisions made	135 decisions
Number of DHP awards	121 awards
Average processing time (target 29 days)	31 days
Total amount committed/paid	£52,498

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 2018/19 in line with Scottish Government guidance and had spent 5.77% of its total budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of April 2018.
- 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 2018 to 28 April 2018
Number of Crisis Grant applications received	814
Number of Crisis Grant Awards	652
Total amount paid for Crisis Grants	£45,228
Average Processing time (2 working days target)	1 day
Average Processing time (within month)	1 day
Number of Community Care Grant applications received	161
Number of Community Care Grant Awards	89
Total amount paid for Community Care Grant	£50,904
Average processing time year to date (15 working days target)	14 days
Average processing time (within month)	14 days
Total amount paid/committed from the fund	£67,686
Total Budget	£1,172,473

5. Customer Service Provision

5.1 This section details the performance of the customer service unit for April 2018 and a full year overview for the 2017/18 financial year. 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 April the contact centre received 35,360 calls and answered 90% against a primary target of 90% for the period.

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

Primary target	Year	Calls Received	April	Year to Date
90% calls answered	2018	35,360	90%	90%
	2017	28,156	97%	97%

5.2.3 The contact centre achieved the primary target of answering 90% of all calls. This was achieved despite an increase of 7,204 calls (25%) compared to 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	April	Year to date
70% calls in 40 seconds	2018	56%	56%
	2017	71%	71%

5.2.5 The contact centre performance in relation to the secondary target was below target for the month of April, mainly due to the increased demand which can be attributed to Council Tax Annual Billing and the Easter Weekend holiday period coinciding with the start of the financial year.

5.2.6 Call handling was further impacted by the introduction on the 25th of April, of a new contact centre call management system. The new system will deliver enhanced functionality to the call centre operating system however as with any new system, it required significant effort to ensure continuity of service for our customers while training staff to handle calls effectively and adjust to the new ways of working.

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 3,795 customer visits in the period and continues to deal with these customers within target performance. This is compared to 3,684 visits for the same period last year. All locations continue to achieve target for face to face customer service visits.

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

Location	Year	April	Year to Date
Paisley	2018	19:03	19:03
	2017	14:07	14:07
Renfrew	2018	05:41	05:41

	2017	08:18	08:18
Johnstone	2018	11:13	11:13
	2017	11:52	11:52

5.4 Factors impacting performance in the period

The service level for the contact centre was below the target of 70% of calls answered in 40 seconds. The key factors during the month which caused this are outlined below.

- The contact centre experienced a 25% increase in demand compared to the same period in the previous year. This is mainly attributed to the timing of this year's Council Tax Annual Billing which historically increases queries from customers in relation to billing and payment issues.
- The service was also affected by the Easter Weekend shutdown coinciding with the start of the financial year and the start of the school holidays, with the combination of all three at the one time impacting on call response times.
- Finally, the contact centre implemented a new enhanced call management system on the 25th April. As noted at 5.2.6 the change over from one system to another required significant effort to develop and test the new system to ensure continuity of service and the necessary training activity resulted in reduced resources at times through the month.

5.5 Last Year Performance Summary

5.5.1 The table below outlines the overall performance for the contact centre from 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018. Overall the primary target of 90% of calls answered was achieved, with the service level ending marginally lower than the 70% target at 69%.

	Calls Received	% Answered	Service Level
Full Year	353,684	96%	69%

The Table below outlines the overall performance for the customer service centre and service points in Renfrew and Johnstone from 1st April 2017 to 31st

March 2018, with overall performance below the primary target of 20 minutes wait time.

	Customer visits	Average Wait Time
Full Year	27,049	12:53

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

List of Background Papers

- (a) None

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Appendix 1

RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

REVENUES COLLECTION STATEMENT AS AT 28TH APRIL 2018

COUNCIL TAX		
	2017/18	2018/19
	£m	£m
Projected Yield	82.043	85.957
Gross Charges	86.359	89.954
Less rebates	12.185	12.491
Net Charges Billed	<u>74.174</u>	<u>77.463</u>
Cash Collected	70.431	11.304
Rebate Grant	12.185	12.491
	<u>82.617</u>	<u>23.795</u>
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	94.95%	14.59%
Income as % of Projected Yield	100.70%	27.68%

NON DOMESTIC RATES		
	2017/18	2018/19
	£m	£m
Projected Yield	124.132	129.893
Gross Charges	146.359	151.335
Less reliefs	19.693	18.791
Net Charges Billed	<u>126.666</u>	<u>132.544</u>
Cash Collected	122.730	3.000
Cash collected as % of Net Charges	96.89%	2.26%
Cash collected as % of Projected Yield	98.87%	2.31%

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	60		
Result: last 3 months (days)	Feb: 60 days	March: 33 days	April: 33 days
Average (12 months to date)	42 days		
Average Appeals Completed	6 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	Dec: 34	Jan: 40	Feb: 38
Result Last 3 months	Feb: 38	March: 44	April: 50

Comment:- The service missed target processing time for Revisions due to year end activity, the outstanding volume of Revisions is significantly lower than last year therefore 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 %
Volume of Audits	3%	15%
Accuracy – February 18	95%	98%
Accuracy – Year to Date	95%	98%

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

OVERPAYMENTS

	Target %	Actual %
16/17: % recovery of debt raised	73%	76.77%
17/18: % recovery of debt raised	73%	96.16%

Comment:- The value of overpayments reported at the last Board was £7,384,343, the current value is £7,460,758. The collection percentage was boosted by targeted action for recovery of overpayments from ongoing Housing Benefit during April.