

Benefits & Fraud

Benefits performance

Benefits performance continues to meet profiled targets and is on course to achieve year end targets. It should also be noted that Benefits performance for all partners in respect of new claims and change of circumstances continues to better the national figures published by the DWP. In particular, performance at Suffolk Coastal and Waveney has improved and will continue to do so as the single EDMS system is now on stream and as we utilise the resilience of wider teams within the partnership. Indeed, the new EDMS system has embedded better than anticipated with minimal impact upon performance.

With regard to target setting for 2016/17, the following table details current targets, current performance and proposed targets:

| Performance measure | 2015/16 target | 2015/16 performance | Proposed 2016/17 target |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Ben 1: average days to process Council Tax Reduction new claims & changes | 12 days | 11 to 7 days | 8 days |
| BEN 2: average days to process Housing Benefits new claims & changes | 12 days | 11 to 7 days | 8 days |
| Local Authority error overpayments | <0.35% | <0.35% | <0.35% |

DWP ARP fraud funding

The DWP have announced continuance of the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) for 2016/17 and have invited applications for funding to prevent and identify changes in circumstances that lead to a reduction in customer's Housing Benefit. An application has been made for the full funding available, for dedicated staff resources and materials to encourage customers to report changes to their circumstances. At the time of writing a decision on that application has not been received.

Fraud and compliance performance

Following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the DWP on the 1 September 2015, the team have been tasked, in accordance with the Business Case approved by Joint Committee, to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council Tax income in the following areas:

- Local Council Tax Support
- Single Person Discount
- Council Tax & Non Domestic Rates
- Tenancy fraud

Funding towards Single Person Discount work has been secured from Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, whilst Cambridge County have agreed funding subject to satisfactory results. Furthermore, the team are working with Housing Teams and Housing Associations to tackle Right to Buy and subletting abuse.

The team are on track to exceed the Business Case savings approved by Joint Committee for 2015/16; as work has progressed since September 2015 we have developed a better understanding of the opportunities and the savings the team can achieve.

With regard to target setting for 2016/17, the following table details current targets, current performance and proposed targets:

| Description of financial saving | Estimated financial saving (£) | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| | Annual 2015/16 target | From 2015 Sept. (SFIS staff to DWP) performance as at 31.1.16 | 2016/17 proposed annual target |
| Single Person Discount fraud | 120,000 | 104,000 | 300,000 |
| Local Council Tax Support Scheme fraud | 100,000 | 138,000 | 150,000 |
| Tenancy fraud | 50,000 | 360,000 | 360,000 |
| Other (Council Tax and NDR) | 50,000 | 27,000 | 50,000 |
| Total financial savings | 320,000 | 629,000 | 860,000 |

Revenues

Funding has now been secured from Suffolk and Norfolk County Council to enable the further recovery work to continue. Cambridgeshire County Council has also agreed to provide funding if the

results justify their contribution. The further recovery team have collected £403,950.92 in this financial year which includes 24.46% (£171,340.43) of the cases raised in year.

All single discount applications are now being checked by the compliance team in order to prevent discounts being granted incorrectly and avoiding the issue of trying to collect amounts of Council Tax retrospectively. An annual review will also be carried out.

The Enforcement Team continue to perform well and a separate report has been included on the agenda. Indications are that they are matching the performance of external Enforcement Agents. We have met the cost of setting up the service through fees collection and will produce a surplus in the first year of operation.

Non-Domestic Rates Bills were all issued by the end of February. The Government has extended the increase in small business rates relief, however retail relief which was originally granted for two years has now been withdrawn.

Charities are entitled to 80% mandatory Non-Domestic rate relief. Applications have been made nationally for mandatory charity relief, back dated for six years, in respect of property occupied by NHS Trusts. The amount of relief claimed can therefore be considerable. The LGA has obtained Counsel's opinion of behalf of those Local Authorities who have received applications which is that NHS Trusts and Foundation Trusts are not charities and therefore the application should be refused. A template letter has been provided for Authorities to use. To date we have received applications for properties within East Cambridgeshire DC, Fenland DC, Forest Heath DC and St Edmundsbury BC. These applications will be refused in line with Counsel's opinion.

Collection fund targets supplied by the Section 151 Officers from each authority will form the targets for collection of Council Tax and Non-Domestic rates collection.

Support

Imaging System (EDMS)

A bid process, assisted by the Waveney DC Procurement Team, was undertaken during 2015 resulting in the amendment of the existing contract to CIVICA UK Ltd to provide the imaging system (CIVICA-W2) for all seven partners with one single access. This imaging system is essential for the efficient processing and storing of incoming and outgoing documents electronically.

The implementation of the single Imaging system has two stages. The first is to align the daily incoming documents to one single set of document types for all seven councils followed by a migration of all existing images held by Waveney, Coastal and Fenland on their previous imaging system Information@Work.

All seven partners of the Anglia Revenues went live with CIVICA W2 from January 14th for current documentation enabling any member of staff across the four sites to carry out work for any of the seven partners of the Anglia Revenues Partnership. The migration of documents is reaching completion to transfer all stored images from Information@work to CIVICA-W2 for Fenland DC, Waveney DC and Suffolk Coastal DC.

With all sites aligned to the current working practices on the Imaging System, stage 2 of the project will be undertaken from June to enhance the functionality of the system and the expansion of available automation.

Training for all Staff, including Customer Services, new to CIVICA-W2 was successfully undertaken from the beginning of January, with specialists from both Revenues and Benefits delivering the same material at the same time at Woodbridge, March and Lowestoft. Training was supported by "floor

walkers” who were available onsite after the training was delivered, to answer any questions from the users as they became familiar with the new system.

Website www.AngliaRevenues.gov.uk

The Anglia Revenues Partnership, from January 10th, published the new website, designed to be easier to use than conventional websites, providing the customer with the ability to carry out the transaction they want with as few “clicks” as possible, from paying a council tax instalment to making a benefits claim. The wording of all the information on the site has also been designed to be concise, understandable and in plain English.

The website contains a library of over twenty five electronic forms shared by all seven Partners of the Anglia Revenues Partnership, including Change of address for both Council Tax and Benefits and an application for Housing Benefits and/or Council Tax Reduction.