

Performance Report
as at 31 May 2014

Benefit news

On 7th March a member of staff from Derby Council came to visit our offices to pick up on our best practice in

- Electronic claim forms
- Joint working
- Liaison work
- Preparing for Universal Credit

Also on this day the ARP took part in the IRRV Forum which is held quarterly to discuss benefit changes and to share good practice. DHP was discussed and how the various authorities would be looking at awarding DHP in the coming year. This approach is very different across the authorities at the IRRV Forum, most had not spent all of their allocated budget apart from Great Yarmouth.

On 26th March Sue Willcox attended an Older Persons forum at Breckland Council. This is an annual event and this year was focused on palliative care. ARP was able to offer advice on benefits, not just with regards to HB/CTS but also signposting customers to Disability benefits.

On 28th March West Suffolk held a landlord conference at West Suffolk House where ARP contributed with a presentation on current Welfare benefits and also giving details of the website and how it can be used by both customers and landlords alike.

8th April 2014 there was a DWP forum in Bury which is attended by various departments within DWP and also other departments. This is a useful forum where the DWP explain their working practices and also a chance for stakeholders to discuss any issues. This meeting is held in all the ARP areas and we take it in turns by authority to attend. The next forum in June will be in Lowestoft and attended by Sarah Hyman of Suffolk Coastal.

On 1st April 2014 Hayley and Sue met with Martin Ward of the Anglia Care Trust which operates in Suffolk. They are happy to help our customers and more details will follow shortly

On 14th May we held the quarterly meeting with the stakeholders such as CAB etc. and on 15th May with the Housing Associations we use these meetings to let them know about recent changes and also discuss local issues. Within both meetings all concerned were very happy with the service ARP provides. Most organisations report on an improving economic situation with more people getting back into work.

Following feedback from the Financial Inclusion team within Suffolk County Council and also work carried out by Lorraine King a single page DHP form has been developed for single payments which are needed to help customers getting into work and also moving to more affordable accommodation. This is proving very successful and following the work done by ARP has now been adopted Suffolk wide.

Coming up in June we have some Job shadowing with Haverhill, Ely and Thetford Jobcentres where staff of both organisations will get a better understanding of each other's work practices and therefore helping people back into work.

Now that Mildenhall Jobcentre is located within the Council offices in Mildenhall we will be meeting with Jason Whaley of Jobcentreplus to ensure we use this opportunity to start working more closely together making the transition into work easier.

Council Tax News

The team continue to maintain low process levels. Call volumes have reverted to pre Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Technical changes levels. We are also experiencing considerably lower summons volumes than last year.

Work is being undertaken with the housing teams to review empty properties to maximise income for the authority from the new homes bonus as all documents are being issued from and returned to ARP. This will lead to increased call volumes for the council tax team.

The further recovery team has already collected £38,710.64 against further recovery actions since 1st April, which includes 5.8% (£5,967.10) of the cases raised in 2014/15.

NDR News

The team have completed the first empty property review of the year. They have also completed investigations into the first set of potential new businesses data provided from our data analysis programme.

So far no additional hereditaments have been added to our databases, however one property had a report raised with the Valuation Office and 25 other properties are due to be visited to gather further information.

The Valuation Office continues to feed through the ATM's (Cash machines) that they had omitted from the list. The team are monitoring the Valuation Office's progress against the list of machines identified in our data analysis programme.

HBOP News

Having made real progress on the collection of overpayments with two additional members of staff, the team are now feeling the pressure of reduced staffing levels.

The new processes designed by the team have helped the team maintain collection levels however, the identification of cases suitable for each recovery option is slowed and will eventually have an impact on collection.

A business case will be brought to Joint Committee in September to put forward options concerning staffing levels for overpayment recovery.

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Projects

Work on redesign of letters for Council Tax and Benefits is continuing and is linked to the Print/ mailing contract. The systems Administration team are using Pro-Print to redesign the look and feel of our letters and bills

System administration staff have been working together across the whole of the new partnership to get the best results by sharing their expertise and knowledge.

The print/ mailing contract was awarded to Document Outsourcing Ltd (DOL) and it is planned that by the end of July all 7 partners' mailing will be passed to DOL to print and post resulting in better value for money on our mailing.

Learning and support

All managers have received training in one-to-ones and will start to deliver them to their staff. In September we will be able to report progress on completion of one-to-ones to Joint Committee. Appraisals will be completed by the end of October.

A number of members of staff have asked to be able to study for IRRV qualifications across the partnership; we will seek to enable a number of them to be able to do so within training budget allocations.

Customer Survey

An on-line customer satisfaction survey has been used since the middle of March. The customer is given information as to how to complete the survey when they have used the website.

The first set of data will be analysed at the end of June and will include data in respect of the annual bills and benefit letters

A fuller report will be given concerning feedback but early indications are that:

- Most customers are happy with the overall level of service offered
- Over 70% contact has been in respect of Council Tax enquiries
- Over 50% of customers used email or online forms to contact us
- 80% of those people contacting us online found the process straightforward or easy
- Under 25% of people were unhappy with the length of time it took to deal with their query
- 75% of the people surveyed felt that the information given by a member of staff was clear or very clear.
- More than 80% of those completing the survey said that they would be most likely to contact us using email or online forms in the future
- 57% of customers would be more likely to use online forms if the website was easier to navigate.

In summary the survey is providing valuable information concerning how we can improve customers' experience when they engage with the Revenues and Benefits Services.

We have asked for customers to give us contact details if they would like us to speak to them about the service they have received and we will be able to monitor the changes we make to our services in response to customer feedback.

Once we have recorded data for a period of time we will be able to look at trends and assess whether we are improving customer satisfaction with the information available to them and the ease of access to services.

In September we will be able to give a full report to members concerning the feedback we have received and to update concerning changes made to processes to improve services, where we are able to do so, in response to customer feedback.