

Housing Benefit Review – Action Plan

Appendix C

Recommendation	Timescale	Responsible Officer	Comments
<p>Undertake a benchmarking exercise with similar local authorities, in terms of cost and performance in 2010/11 in dealing with both new claims and changes in circumstances (cost per claim).</p> <p>Consider revising key performance targets to reflect recent improvements in performance.</p>	All timescales to be agreed as part of management response	Jean Saxby	Need to set recent service improvement within the context of additional costs to the authority. Comparative service performance and cost data required from other LAs.
Consider implications and develop proposals for the transfer of routine HB functions to the contact centre (key corporate objective). In doing so, fully consider the relationship between the Town Hall and back office functions and interviewing facilities at Aquila House.		Jean Saxby/ Kevin Boorman	Opportunity to reduce customer waiting times - minimise avoidable contact.
Consider co-location of Housing and Housing Benefit Services, particularly in respect of reception and interviewing facilities.		Jean Saxby Andrew Palmer Richard Homewood	Achieved in terms of Aquila House, but interviewing space and facilities needs considering in context of the implementation of the contact centre.
<p>Undertake a cost/benefit analysis and prepare a business case for an automated application system which would allow for data to be entered directly by an applicant online from home or via a public access point.</p> <p>As first step, remove transcription errors by introducing an electronic entry wand system (bar coding).</p>		Jean Saxby/ IT	A 'right first time' approach would reduce manual checking and rechecking, staff training costs etc. Allows for more time to be spent on reaching difficult to reach groups, home visits etc.
Further evaluate the benefits of additional investment in respect of ecapture and ebenefits or alternative IT enhancements. Undertake a cost/benefit analysis and prepare a business case following in situ site visits to other LAs.		Jean Saxby/ IT	The Review Team did not get the opportunity to see the systems in operation.
Introduce a filter system to ensure that all claim supporting documentation is available to assessors at the point at which an interview takes place.			Minimise abortive visits and free up staff time.
Undertake a further review of benefit overpayments.		To be agreed	Not within the remit of the

			current review but considered a problem significant enough to warrant further scrutiny.
<p>Develop a joint action plan and communications strategy with Housing Services and Registered Providers (Housing Associations) to minimise the impact of the proposed benefit and welfare reforms and prevent homelessness.</p> <p>Jointly review how Discretionary Housing Payments policy is currently operated and consider how best to target payments at homelessness prevention.</p>		Jennie Perkins / Jean Saxby	
<p>Consider the early implementation of a 'landlord portal' so as to aid improvement in communication between HBC and landlords.</p> <p>Regularly attend the Landlord Forum and consider setting up specific benefit-focused surgeries for landlords (social & private) to deal with enquires.</p>		Jean Saxby	Improve liaison with landlords.
<p>Include detailed recommendations from the DWP and HB review group visits including:</p> <p>Introduction of 'pull' system for claim processing so that staff can manage their own workload.</p> <p>A numbered box system on application forms for ease of reference by staff/customers.</p> <p>Improve general good housekeeping by dealing with long standing unresolved cases.</p> <p>Extend risk-based verification where different information sources are utilised.</p>		Jean Saxby	Improves workflow. Empowers staff, reducing need for allocation of work by Team Leader.