

Recommendation	Progress Report
1. Undertake a benchmarking exercise with similar local authorities in terms of cost and performance (cost per claim)	<p>A benchmarking exercise was undertaken which included our Audit Family group.</p> <p>All data relates to 2011/12.</p> <p>The sources of information are the Audit Commission and the Department for Work and Pensions.</p> <p>Appendix B provides details on administrative subsidy grants, caseload, performance and cost per claim.</p> <p>HBC are the best performers in the group (as at 30 June 2011)</p> <p>HBC are the third most efficient on a cost per claim basis.</p> <p>Thanet and HBC have the highest percentage of Private Sector cases.</p>
2. Revise key performance targets to reflect recent improvements in performance	<p>Target for 2011/12 reduced from 25 days and 12 days to 22 days and 10 days.</p> <p>Performance as at 31 January 2012 - New claims 14 days; change of circumstances 4 days</p>
3. Consider implications and develop proposals for the transfer of routine HB functions to the contact centre.	<p>This work is ongoing. Current timescales for the transfer of housing benefit functions to the contact centre is scheduled for July 2012.</p> <p>We are continually reviewing our processes from both an efficiency point of view and a customer perspective.</p>
4. Consider co-location of housing and housing benefit services, particularly in respect of reception and interviewing facilities	<p>Housing Services relocated to Aquila House in March 2011. We currently share the counter area and interviewing facilities.</p>
5. Undertake a cost/benefit analysis 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>Items 5 and 7 are linked.</p> <p>See Appendix C</p>
6. Remove transcription errors by introducing an electronic entry wand system	<p>There are no stand alone products that have been identified that currently meet this requirement.</p>
7. Further evaluate the benefits of additional investment in respect of e-Capture and e-Benefits or alternative IT enhancements	<p>Appendix C</p>

Recommendation	Progress Report
8. Introduce a filter system to ensure that all claim supporting documentation is available to assessors at the point an interview takes place	A 'Triage' desk will form part of the layout of the new contact centre with all customers reporting to this area before being signposted to the appropriate officer.
9. Undertake a further review of benefit overpayments	<p>Housing Benefit overpayments are being monitored on a monthly basis.</p> <p>Prevention is still the key to minimising the number of overpayments being created.</p> <p>We are also currently 'piloting' a new process for recovery of Overpayments.</p> <p>The Invoice and Reminder is still issued as normal by HBC, with a period of 14 days between the two.</p> <p>After the Reminder has been issued there is a limited time for the claimant or landlord to get in contact to make payment before the case is then passed over to Rossendales Collect Ltd, who now issue all our Final Demands and collect payment from thereon. The wording of the Reminder has been amended to advise customers of the involvement of a Debt Collector if the overpayment remains unpaid.</p> <p>This approach gives staff more time to concentrate on pursuing recovery at the front end and hopefully customers will respond positively rather than risk having the debt passed to a debt collection agency.</p>
10. Develop a joint action plan with Housing Services to minimise the impact of the proposed benefit and welfare reforms and prevent homelessness	<p>There is good working relationship between the Benefits and Housing Services Team.</p> <p>A pro-active approach is being taken in order to minimise the impact. For example, the new under 35 rules took effect from 1 January 2012. Housing has appointed a temporary Visiting Officer who is working closely with the Benefits Team. Benefits provide names and addresses of customers who are likely to be affected by the changes; the Visiting Officer then makes contact and appropriate advice and support given. This is working very well so far.</p>
11. Jointly review how discretionary payment policy is currently operated and consider how best to target payments at homelessness prevention	<p>We are closely monitoring the payment of awards from the Discretionary Housing Fund. The major changes which will have an impact on the Fund fall into the next financial year ie 2012/13.</p> <p>A revised policy is currently being drafted based on our understanding of the potential problems facing our customers in the coming months. We will then invite comments/suggestions from other interested parties before drafting a policy which Members will need to approve.</p>

Recommendation	Progress Report
12. Consider an early implementation of 'landlord portal'	<p>The Landlord portal was installed on 8 December 2011.</p> <p>There is a lot of work to be undertaken before the portal can 'go live'.</p> <p>Amicus Horizon is our preferred landlord for the initial pilot.</p> <p>Work will begin in April, after we have completed annual billing and benefit uprating.</p>
13. Regularly attend the Landlord Forum and consider setting up specific benefit-focused surgeries	<p>The Landlord Forum continues to be attended with updates being provided on both performance and changes to regulations.</p> <p>Landlords are invited to make an appointment to meet with the Revenues and Benefits Manager to discuss any issues or concerns they may have.</p> <p>Communication with landlords is being improved as we have now introduced more electronic communications (e-mails). This is proving to be more cost, time and resource efficient.</p>
14. Introduce 'pull' system for work allocation	Most staff now self-serve.
15. A numbered box system on application forms	As previously advised, the application form is jointly produced with our colleagues in East Sussex. The suggestion has been put forward for consideration by the group.
16. Improve general good housekeeping by dealing with long standing unresolved cases	Team Leaders are monitoring the reasons why some claims/changes exceed 31 days and are chasing up unprocessed claims/changes which have been outstanding longer than 31 days.
17. Extend risk-based verification where different information sources are utilised	Completed