

# Briefing Note



Subject: **Corporate Services and Governance Director's Quarter 2 report**

Submitted to: **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **30 November 2016**

Prepared by: **Jane Hartnell, Director of Corporate Services and Governance**

---

## Performance Exceptions

### Revenues and Benefits

1. The following performance indicators in Revenues are identified as Not Met:

**6.1 Increase the % of Council Tax collected in year to 96.3%**

Quarter two performance was 61.4% compared to profile target of 63.1%. The Revenues Manager remains confident that this performance will be improved and the year-end target of 96.3% will be met – performance is monitored on a weekly basis and changes are made to working practices as required.

**6.2 Increase the % of non-domestic rates collected in year to 98% (JS)**

Quarter two performance was slightly below target 59.1% compared to profile target of 59.5 and again the Revenues Manager remains confident that the year-end target of 98.0% will be met.

The benefits performance targets for this quarter have all been met.

2. There are a number of issues which are impacting significantly on the Revenues and Benefits service and this in turn is impacting on the delivery of some projects e.g. implementation of the landlord and bailiff portals:

- a. The introduction of the **Benefits Cap** is causing significant additional workload and uncertainty. Senior benefits managers in many councils, including ours, spent the weekend working and waiting for files to come from the DWP which never arrived – the updates can only be made when the system is off-line.

These changes now need to be made in a very short timescale to achieve a software system capable of handling the benefit cap. If not achieved there

will be a series of benefit overpayments – which although we will log as DWP errors and claim subsidy on, will not assist those customers affected not only with a cap but also an overpayment. The main transfer (200 people) was due to take place on 21 November but has been delayed to the 28 November.

The Revenues Manager has been successful in attracting additional external funding of £37k to enable proactive work with those residents faced with the benefit cap.

- b. The planning for further roll out of **Universal Credit** is also causing significant additional work for the team and the CCC who also need to be trained and prepared for the changes expected from 14<sup>th</sup> December.

There are many issues to be resolved including questions surrounding exempt properties for social landlords. If exempt then Universal Credit will not apply at present, but many are having difficulty showing they are really supported accommodation and therefore exempt.

The numbers going onto Universal Credit are also unclear, our previous experience has shown that DWP predictions but have been a gross exaggeration.

- c. The recommendation to keep the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme the same for 2017/18 is currently being considered by Cabinet and Council following the review and consultation exercise undertaken in the summer.

### **Organisational staffing issues**

- 3. The proportion of working days/shifts lost due to **sickness absence** in quarter 2 was 3.44 which was higher than the target of 3.15, however this is much improved on the second quarter target this time last year of 4.06.

The sickness case absence management team have reviewed trigger points at which intervention is made and are actively working with managers to address areas of concern.

- 4. Recruitment to some vacant posts remains challenging. Of the 20 posts advertised in qtr 2, only 12 were recruited to. Examples include the Senior Accountant and Senior Planner posts. Some successful candidates choose to remain with their current employers, and some other posts are fixed term and therefore unattractive to applicants.

### **Transformation Programme**

- 5. A detailed presentation was given to O & S at quarter 1 setting out progress and next steps. The priority for resources in quarter two has been business process mapping to contribute to the service reviews and budget discussions.

The process mapping approach works with service areas to identify the 'as is' position, and then through a series of discussions identifies the 'ideal' and what is required to get there. The key challenges posed to the teams are

which parts processes involve double handling of information, which parts can be automated and what relationship does it have to other teams' processes/activities. The solutions offered use digital by design as a fundamental driver and the Firmstep platform which is being embedded in many areas of our work.

6. Further priority customer transaction processes are being tested and launched on My Hastings for self-service, including complaints and FOI. A significant channel shift marketing campaign is being planned for January to coincide with the spike in contact post Christmas and as a result of annual billing.
  - There have been 46,543 cases created on FirmStep since the launch in May 2015. We have 19,607 customers on FS and 7,238 have activated their self-account.

<u>Account Type Summary</u>			
Account Type	Number	%age of All Accounts	%age of Self Accounts
Customers on FirmStep	19607		
Customers with Self Accounts	7238	36.92%	
Customers with Council Tax MyAccount	568	2.90%	7.85%
Customers with Benefits MyAccount	160	0.82%	2.21%

- Take up of the Council tax and Housing Benefits accounts is increasing every month but is still low, promotion will be undertaken to encourage customers to activate their accounts and self-serve more.
- In order to see how effective the channel shift from telephone to self is, the focus is on the waste service which is high volume and ideal for self. Telephone contact has reduced and in October self-service was the highest channel at 49.1%. The increase in waste self cases has happened since the introduction of pink sack requests on My Hastings of which 80% of requests are now via self.
- The missed collection data is also useful for an indicator of channel shift and is a high volume service request. The number of cases varies month to month but have been decreasing for the last 2 months. October has also seen a significant increase in % of cases reported through self at 42% and a corresponding decreased in telephone and email cases.

## Financial Services and Internal Audit

7. The close down of the annual accounts was particularly challenging this year as we piloted meeting the more demanding timetable for 2017, by when the accounts need to be closed by end of June. The budget preparation period is also made more challenging this year by the loss of our Senior Accountant to Sussex Police.

8. The ongoing serious health condition of one of our Auditors means that the internal audit plan is behind schedule but this will be addressed by use of external auditors if necessary.

### **Legal Service and Elections**

9. The work to prepare for the Pier arbitration, now due to take place in December has taken a significant amount of senior and junior legal officer time. In addition preparatory work for the introduction of the Public Space Protection Orders has been undertaken
10. The capacity in the small elections team would normally be fully directed at the annual household canvas at this time of year. In addition this year however they are implementing the outcomes of the boundary review changes and undertaking an interim polling places review. The new Senior Elections officer is in post and performing very well but will obviously need some time to fully learn the role.

Jane Hartnell, November 2016