

REVENUES AND HOUSING BENEFITS PERFORMANCE 2014/15

Cabinet Member Cllr Peter Hare-Scott
Responsible Officer Head of Finance

Reason for Report: To report on Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates and Housing Benefit performance for 2014/15.

RECOMMENDATION(S): That the Report be noted.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: In line with good practice and value for money. Poor performing services can have a detrimental effect on the well being of the community.

Financial Implications: Maintaining a good in year collection rate for Council Tax and Business Rates is essential to cash flow management, to ensure that the Billing Authority meets all our own commitments and our commitments to precepting authorities. We must also ensure benefit payments are made in an accurate and timely manner to avoid loss of subsidy.

Legal Implications: No issues.

Risk Assessment: Low cash flow collection could result in the Authority not achieving its financial income targets. Poor performance and increased demand on the Benefit service could have significant impact on the income of the Authority.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The commentary below gives an overview of issues affecting the Revenues and Housing Benefits Services in 2014/15.

2.0 Overview

2.1 Although the economic outlook appears to be marginally improving, both the Revenues and Housing Benefits Teams are operating in challenging times, against a back drop of continuing welfare reforms, with the threat of significantly more to come and there is still the uncertainty of the precise roll-out and timings of how Universal Credit will be implemented.

2.2 After taking account of all of the above issues it is extremely positive to see such high levels of performance across both of these teams during 2014/15.

3.0 Revenues performance in 2014/15

- 3.1 The Council Tax team has performed well during 2014/15 and managed to achieve an overall collection rate of 97.8%, this is slightly better than the 2013/14 rate of 97.6%. The Revenues Team continue to perform well and have been re-located during the year to work more closely with our Customer First Team in order to progress some further operational changes to hopefully increase collection rates even further.
- 3.2 Business Rates achieved a collection rate of 99.0% which is well above the 2013/14 level of 98.4%.
- 3.3 Table 1 below gives Members an overview of the amount collected during the financial year for both Council Tax and Business Rates.

Table 1 – Collection of Council Tax and Business Rates as at 31 March 2015

Revenue Collection at 31/3/15	2013/14	Collection Rate	2014/15	Collection Rate
Council Tax Collected inc arrears	£42.10m	97.6%	£43.05m	97.8%
Council Tax net Arrears – from previous year	£1.686m		£1.766m	
Business Rates Collected inc arrears	£14.71m	98.4%	£15.10m	99.0%
Business rates net Arrears – from previous year	£0.347m		£0.223m	

4.0 Housing Benefit Performance in 2014/15

- 4.1 The Housing Benefit Team continues to perform well in terms of payment times and accuracy against national comparative data. This is particularly encouraging when taking account the continued pressures of additional welfare reform changes, the ongoing uncertainty surrounding implementation of the Universal Credit (UC) and dealing with the Local Welfare Assistance scheme.

Speed of Processing

- 4.2 The 2014/15 average time for processing new claims was 17.8 days and changes of circumstance (CoC) was 7.23 days. Both of these times are below national averages of 22 days and 11 days respectively.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YEAR
NEW	20.8	17	16	17.4	17.8
CoC	7.96	7.4	7.7	3.97	7.23

For information purposes processing times for Council Tax Reductions (CTR) were 15.4 days for new claims and 6.43 days for CoC's.

Caseload

- 4.3 The numbers of Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Reduction (CTR) claims have remained fairly static during the first 6 months of 2014/15.

14/15	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
HB	4,406	4,380	4,362	4,373
CTR	5,125	5,043	5,012	4,862

Total Housing Benefit paid to date

- 4.4 The table below shows the total sum of Housing Benefit paid during 2014/15.

14/15	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
£ million	5.3	9.9	14.4	19.1

Note – The above shown figures are cumulative.

Accuracy

- 4.5 The accuracy levels have remained relatively static throughout 2014/15 around the 97-98% level against a target of 99%. However, there was a marked deterioration to 93.9% during Q3, when the Team were operating with 4 vacant posts. The Team continue to perform well against a backdrop of constant welfare changes, uncertainty around the introduction of Universal Credit and the loss of 2 experienced team members to the DWP in May 2015.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 Both teams have continued to perform well despite the extra pressures being placed on them as a direct consequence of Central Government imposed legislation.

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Circulation of the Report: Cllr Peter Hare-Scott and Management Team