

## **REVENUES AND HOUSING BENEFITS PERFORMANCE 2015/16**

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

**Reason for Report:** To report on Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates and Housing Benefit performance for 2015/16.

**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 2015/16.

### **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 all of the tranches of 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 2015/16.

### 3.0 Revenues performance in 2015/16

- 3.1 The Council Tax team has successfully achieved a collection rate level which is back up to the pre 2013 figures. This has seen an improved collection rate of 98.1%, which is up 0.3% on the 2014/15 level of 97.8%. The Revenues Team continue to perform well and are still focusing on more electronic processes to further streamline operations, these measures include e-billing and increasing direct debit customers.
- 3.2 The Business Rate collection rate improved by 0.1% to 99.1% from the 2014/15 level of 99.0%. This again reflects excellent performance by the Team.
- 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**

	2014/15	Collection Rate	2015/16	Collection Rate
<b>Council Tax Collected inc arrears</b>	£43.1m	97.8%	£45.3m	98.1%
<b>Council Tax net Arrears – from previous year</b>	£1.766m		£1.702m	
<b>Business Rates Collected inc arrears</b>	£15.1m	99.0%	£15.9m	99.1%
<b>Business rates net Arrears – from previous year</b>	£0.223m		£0.287m	

### 4.0 Housing Benefit Performance in 2015/16

- 4.1 The Housing Benefit Team continues to perform well in terms of payment times 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), dealing with the Local Welfare Assistance scheme and the loss of 2 experienced officers who specialised in Fraud who were transferred to the DWP.

## Speed of Processing

- 4.2 The 2015/16 average time for processing new claims was 14.8 days and changes of circumstance (CoC) was 7.83 days. Both of these times are below national averages of 23 days and 10 days respectively. This places our processing performance in the top quartile nationally.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YEAR
NEW	14.5	17.9	14.6	12.8	14.8
CoC	13.1	12.6	8.7	3.6	7.83

For information purposes processing times for Council Tax Reductions (CTR) were 17 days for new claims and 8 days for CoC's.

## Caseload

- 4.3 The numbers of Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Reduction (CTR) claims have both fallen slightly from the levels experienced in 2014/15.

15/16	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
HB	4,373	4,274	4,225	4,228
CTR	4,946	4,840	4,781	4,795

## Total Housing Benefit paid to date

- 4.4 The table below shows the total sum of Housing Benefit paid during 2015/16.

14/15	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
£ million	5.3	9.9	14.3	19.0

Note – The above shown figures are cumulative.

## 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