

Revenue Services

Service Performance Plan 2006/07

Head of Service

Derek Baker
Head of Revenue Services

Tele: 01493 846202

E-mail db@great-yarmouth.gov.uk

Key contact points

Great Yarmouth Borough Council,
Trafalgar House, Hall Plain,
Great Yarmouth, Norfolk
NR30 2QG.

All general enquiries: 01493 846244
or 01493 846249
or 01493 846291

Overall Purpose

To maximise the collection of local taxes and miscellaneous credit income at minimum cost in accordance with statutory and local requirements whilst actively promoting benefits in qualifying cases.

To provide a modern, customer focused, efficient, effective and secure Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service in accordance with the National Performance Standards which helps claimants to live in decent housing and minimises barriers to work whilst protecting public funds by reducing fraud and error.

Key Functions of Service

To collect the Council Tax, Business rates and miscellaneous debts due to the Council as quickly as possible whilst retaining a sympathetic attitude to those who have difficulty paying on time.

To take the appropriate debt enforcement action in accordance with the Council's Debt Recovery Policy utilising the full range of available legal powers including operating the council's internal Bailiff service.

To calculate liabilities for taxpayers, consider appeals, award discounts, exemptions and reliefs and write-off bad debts.

To assess, award and review Housing and Council Tax benefit claims with a commitment to service delivery that:

- is speedy and accurate
- reduces the risk and level of fraud and error
- investigates potential fraud and takes punitive action where appropriate
- provides the resources required to deliver the intended service
- is accessible to everyone in the community
- ensures claimants receive the benefit to which they are entitled
- recovers overpayments
- encourages a strong culture of good performance within the organisation

To operate the Council's local scheme to give war pensioners and war widows additional benefits.

To deal with benefit appeals, discretionary housing payments and backdating requests within required timescales and to administer any other discretionary areas.

To operate the 'Verification Framework' to ensure benefit claims are correctly awarded and initiate cautions, penalties and prosecutions as necessary.

To seek to maximise personal income levels and help reduce poverty within the Borough.

To promote the take-up of housing benefits, council tax benefits and other welfare benefits.

To identify and recover where appropriate Housing and Council Tax Benefit overpayments

How the Service links to the Corporate Objectives

A healthy and actively involved community. Reducing inequalities, increasing prosperity and improving housing conditions

One of the Council's priorities is improving the Revenue and Benefits Service. The Benefits Service has an important role within the Borough's overall Social Strategy, in particular, helping to provide support to families and vulnerable people and increasing personal income, in order to reduce the current levels of deprivation and disadvantage in the Community.

The service has a major discretionary role to find people who are not claiming benefits to which they are entitled and to seek to maximise their entitlement to all welfare benefits.

A sensitive debt recovery policy is another important aspect of the Strategy which can help relieve financial hardship. The Appeals & Policy Manager is a member of the Financial Wellbeing Working Group of the Social Forum which helps to deliver the aims of the Social Strategy.

Outcomes of consultation exercises from 2005/6

In recognition of the impact that the service has on stakeholders two meetings of the Eastern Landlords Association were attended in order to discuss processing times for housing benefit claims. As a result it was agreed to give serious consideration to the designation of a Benefit Officer as a dedicated landlord liaison officer. It was also agreed that we would keep under review our landlord's information booklet that we originally produced at the request of landlords. Also regular liaison meetings were held with Job Centre Plus, the Pension Service and the Rent Officer Service.

Consultation Plans for 2006/07

Further meetings with the Eastern Landlords Association, Job Centre Plus, the Pension Service and the Rent Officer Service.

The statutory benefits claimant survey will commence during the Summer.

Achievements During 2005/06

A specialist Benefit Investigation team set up in April 2003 continues to be successful and has earned the Council a further £130,000 in reward payments from the Government's counter-fraud incentive scheme. This is as a result of taking positive action including sanctions and prosecutions in respect of fraudulent Housing and Council Tax Benefit claims. The team works in partnership with the Department for Works and Pensions Fraud Investigation Service and helps to fulfil the aims of the Council's Crime and Disorder Strategy.

The recovery rate for Housing Benefit overpayments is in the top grouping for the national Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI 79b)

The number of taxpayers paying by direct debit has again increased.

The computerised Document Management System was upgraded and a modern benefit and revenues IT system was successfully installed with the objective of improving service delivery.

The East Coast Revenues and Benefits Partnership was established with South Norfolk and Waveney District Councils and is designed to achieve sustainable service excellence and customer service through improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Revenue Services for the three authorities concerned.

Key Improvements Planned for 2006/07

To continue the development of the East Coast Revenues and Benefits Partnership with South Norfolk and Waveney District Councils which is designed to achieve sustainable service excellence and customer service through improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Revenue Services for the three authorities concerned

To submit a self assessment of the revised national Benefit Performance Standards to the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate by 31 May 2006.

To continue to develop the anti-fraud incentive scheme for benefits which also complement the Councils emerging Crime and Disorder strategy.

To seek to further increase the number of taxpayers paying by direct debit and streamline the process involved.

To seek to increase Council Tax Benefit take-up for pensioners

To consider the implications of the planned future nationwide introduction of the Local Housing Allowance for benefit claimants

To seek to complete 100% of staff appraisals for those employees eligible to receive one by 31 March 2007.

Equality

Racial Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out for Income and Debt Recovery, Counter Fraud and Prosecutions, Housing and Council Tax Benefits Overpayments and Discretionary Housing Payments. These will be reviewed and updated as required during 2006/7. In addition generic equality impact assessments will be carried out during 2006/7 covering age, disability and gender issues.

Performance Management

National Best Value Performance Indicators:

BVPI 9 Council Tax Collection

BVPI 10 National Non-Domestic Rate Collection

BVPI 78a Average time to process a new benefit claim

BVPI 78b Average time to process a benefit change in circumstances

BVPI 79 Percentage of benefit claims processed correctly

In order to improve performance to take the above performance indicators out of the bottom quartile nationally and into the second quartile during 2006/7 and into the top quartile during 2007/8 we will be taking the following positive action:

- the formation of our Revenue Services performance partnership with Kendric Ash , a specialist firm of performance managers, is designed

over the next two years to enable us to achieve sustainable service excellence across the Department

- a comprehensive review of the Departmental organisational structure will be carried out with the objective of implementing a revised structure during 2006/7 that will help to improve performance management
- individual section managers, supported by their team leaders, will be given specific responsibility for improving particular indicators
- an improved performance monitoring system will be used to more efficiently track performance against individual and team targets on a daily basis to enable management action to be taken in a timely and effective manner
- performance against the detailed Service Improvement Plan will be formally monitored and managed by managers holding weekly Business Review Meetings and monthly Departmental Management Meetings
- following the recent introduction of a modern IT system working practices are being reviewed and streamlined where appropriate
- a management development programme will be designed and delivered for all managers within the department to improve their skills in performance and employee management
- additional resources will be allocated to quality assurance checking for benefit claim processing

Sickness Performance Indicator

In order to reduce sickness absence to a level that will take it out of the bottom quartile nationally during 2006/7 absenteeism will be monitored even more closely. Managers through weekly Business Review Meetings and Departmental Management Meetings will ensure that the Council's revised Attendance & Health Policy is strictly followed. This will include ensuring that return to work interviews, referrals to the Counselling Service and Occupational Health and case reviews are carried out in a timely and effective manner. Section Managers as part of their annual Performance Development Review have agreed targets for reducing sickness absence within their teams.

Invoice Payment Performance Indicator

The process of paying undisputed invoices will be the subject of greater management attention to ensure that 100% of invoices are paid within 30 days. Accordingly managers through their weekly Business Review Meetings and monthly Departmental Management Meetings will review performance and initiate earlier remedial action where necessary.

Risk

Business Impact Analysis Maps have been completed for Benefits and Local Taxation in support of the Department's Business Continuity Plan. These will be reviewed during 2006/7 by the Council's corporate Risk Champions Group

and then centrally recorded on the Council's TEN risk management software. Risk assessments will continue to be carried out before any major projects are started and copies sent to Corporate Services for recording on the Council's Risk Register.

Risk Management including health & safety issues will continue to be a standing agenda item for Departmental Management Team meetings.

Health & Safety hazard reviews will be carried out at least once a year for all offices within the Department and the relevant management checklists produced and passed to the Council's Health & Safety Advisor.

Child Protection Policy

Managers will be briefed to ensure that staff follow the Council's Child Protection Policy particularly visiting officers who may come into contact with young people. Visiting Officers and other front line staff will be trained during 2006/7 to respond to and report allegations or concerns about possible cases of abuse in accordance with the policy.

Asset Management Planning

We will continue to seek to make the most effective use of the office accommodation allocated to the Department. We will also investigate mobile and home working as opportunities arise.

Workforce Planning

	2005/6	2006/7	Difference + / -	2008/9 Estimate
Number of FTE Staff	61	60	1	55

Reason(s) for the difference between the 2006/7 and 2005/6 figures:

It is anticipated that one Assistant Processing Officer post, grade B, will transfer to the Council's Customer Services Department.

Reason(s) for the 2008/9 estimated figure:

A comprehensive review of the Departmental organisational structure is to be carried out during 2006/7 in order to improve service provision. The results of this review together with planned efficiency savings are currently expected to lead to a reduction of five posts by 2008/9.

The three Workforce Development priorities in this service for the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2009 are:

- 1 Developing the organisation – improving internal communications
- 2 Developing Workforce Skills and Capacity – improving manager's skills
- 3 Resourcing local government – working in partnership

The following action will be taken within this service to ensure that these priorities are addressed:

1 A Departmental internal staff communications group will be established during 2006/7. The group will be chaired by the Head of Revenue services and will comprise of employees representing a cross section of the service. It will meet regularly to discuss current issues and will provide another mechanism for generating ideas for service improvement.

2 During 2006/7 a customised management development programme will be designed and delivered to Divisional and Section managers within the Department. The programme is intended to equip managers with the skills necessary to improve performance within their teams.

3 The establishment of the East Coast Revenues and Benefits Partnership with South Norfolk and Waveney District Councils is designed to achieve sustainable service excellence and customer service through improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Revenue Services for the three authorities concerned. Collaborating on a series projects, utilising the same computer system and sharing and developing staff will help to achieve this aim.

Financial Summary

Revenue Budget	2005/06 Original Budget £	2005/06 Revised Budget £	2006/07 Budget £	Changes between Original 2005/06 and 2006/07 £	Projected 2007/08 Budget £	Projected 2008/09 Budget £
Employees	1,634,500	1,774,700	1,406,100	(228,400)	1,406,100	1,406,100
Premises	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transport	19,900	19,100	19,300	(600)	19,300	19,300
Supplies & services	307,000	541,500	534,800	227,800	534,800	534,800
Grants/contributions	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transfer payments	28,690,600	30,940,500	31,874,700	3,184,100	31,874,700	31,874,700
Support services	1,169,300	787,300	901,500	(267,800)	901,500	901,500
Capital charges	1,500	600	0	(1,500)	0	0
Gross expenditure	31,822,800	34,063,700	34,736,400	2,913,600	34,736,400	34,736,400
Less recharges	492,600	80,700	27,000	465,600	27,000	27,000
	31,330,200	33,983,000	34,709,400	3,379,200	34,709,400	34,709,400
Income	29,678,000	32,576,500	33,179,000	(3,501,000)	33,179,000	33,179,000
Net Expenditure	1,652,200	1,406,500	1,530,400	121,800	1,530,400	1,530,400

Explanation of Budget Changes between Original 2005/06 and 2006/07

Employee costs decreased due to 13.5 FTE posts transferring to Customer Services, IBS costs and Department of Work funding, recharges and support services decreased due to staff transfers.

Explanation of Budget Changes between 2006/07 and 2007/08

No changes

Explanation of Budget Changes between 2006/07 and 2007/08

No changes