



# Revenues and Benefits Service Plan 2008/09

**“To make Richmond upon Thames the greenest, safest and best  
educated borough in London and be an exemplar borough on  
sustainability”**

*The Council's vision as set out in the Corporate Plan*

## **1. Who we are and what we do**

The Revenues and Benefits Service employs approximately 100 staff and is primarily responsible for:

- the collection of over £110m Council Tax from over 80,000 properties;
- the collection of over £60m Business Rates from over 5,500 properties;
- the administration and payment of over £50m Housing Benefit [HB] and Council Tax Benefit [CTB] to more than 10,000 claimants;
- the processing of over £1,200m in payments and income;
- the administration of residual ex GLC and other mortgages and staff loans.

## **2. Requirements Placed On Us**

As one of the largest public facing services run by the Council it is essential that we offer high quality and effective performance. Amongst the most significant issues are:

- Prompt collection of both Council Tax and Business Rates is essential to the financial well being of the Council.
- The secure and efficient collection of a range of different income types by the Cashiers service is also vital to ensure that the Council is able to pay for and maintain all of its services.
- The accurate and timely provision of HB and CTB to customers is an essential service for over 10,000 of our residents. The quality of their lives, and indeed in many cases their ability to live and work in the borough is dependent on our service.
- The quality of our customer service is a highly visible way in which many people will judge the Council overall. Our services, and the way we deliver them matter to people.
- We are assessed annually by the Audit Commission and this feeds into the overall corporate assessment and it is essential that we continue to achieve the maximum rating possible as we have done in recent years.

## **3. How We Are Doing**

The service has traditionally performed well across all the main key performance indicators [KPIs] by which we are judged and the HB service has to date maintained the maximum CPA score. Complaint levels are traditionally low and surveys undertaken as part of our recent Chartermark application have all indicated a high level of customer satisfaction.

One of our key measures is the amount of correspondence and unprocessed benefit applications that we have outstanding at any one time. At peak times in the year this has been higher than we would have wanted and we are continuing to focus on new ways of working that will allow for resources to be used with maximum flexibility to address this.

An important finding from our customer surveys has been how important it is to them not to have queue when they come in to see us or call us. Whilst ultimately we are operating with finite resources and there is an element of managing expectations, we are also committed to addressing this through the flexible use of staffing to address peak work flows and the introduction of new ways of customers accessing our services such as the on line Council Tax and business rates system and improved automated telephone payment services.

## **4. Pressures for Change**

As with all Council services there are ever increasing pressures on the Revenues and Benefits service to increase both performance and efficiency. One of the key challenges facing us is the need to modernise some aspects of our service delivery in order to ensure that we continue to deliver high quality and cost effective services over the next few years, and there are a number of specific drivers for us:

- We need to modernise aspects of our working practices. This includes the need to embrace both home working and adopt a full work flow system.
- We must take advantage of the mobile technology that is now available. This will mean more opportunities to effectively take systems out into customer's homes, improving service levels and processing times.
- Customers increasingly expect a joined up response from the Council, and we need to look again at the way our service interacts with others, including the corporate contact centre.
- Recent mystery shopping exercises and the work done as part of our Chartermark application indicate that whilst we get most things right most of the time there is room for improvement and we need to respond to this challenge.
- Increasingly there are a number of different ways that Councils are beginning to provide services, and this is especially true in a very process orientated service such as ours. We need to respond positively to a range of potential challenges including that of partnership working with others, both other authorities and the private sector. This may include opportunities for shared service provision.
- The CPA regime for HB is being replaced with an Audit Commission led Benefits Service Inspection that will undoubtedly prove a harder test and will require far more preparation of we are to maintain our maximum score.

## 5. SERVICE OBJECTIVES

Corporate Plan Priority: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY						
Objective	Targets	Equalities Implications	Resource Implications	Risk	Responsibility	Efficiency savings
See Richmond Works objective in Delivering Value for Money below						
To implement new technologies, practices and initiatives to and promote energy efficiency.	<p>10% of all customers have registered for the on line service Target date 31.3.09</p> <p>Replacing customer hard copy notices/stationery by electronic means where appropriate Target date – throughout 08/09</p> <p>Continue to assist with British Gas initiatives which encourage residents to improve energy efficiencies in homes Target date – throughout 08/09</p>	That as service delivery becomes more technology driven the service improvements introduced are accessible for all	Within existing resources	See Risk Register risk no 4 and 9	EB	Reduction in stationery costs and fewer telephone and personal callers.

Corporate Plan Priority: TACKLING DISADVANTAGE AND PROMOTING EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY						
Objective	Targets	Equalities Implications	Resource Implications	Risk	Responsibility	Efficiency savings
To proactively support the work of the Directorate on integrating equalities policy and practice into our service	That service completes its programme of EINAs and that all staff attend Equalities training as appropriate Target date – throughout 08/09 To ensure that the actions within the Directorate Equalities Action Plan <a href="#">here</a> is delivered Target date – throughout 08/09 – per plan	That an effective EINA programme mitigates the impact of this	Within existing resources	See Risk Register risk no 7	MG/EB/EF	None specific
To ensure that all residents eligible for housing and council tax payments receive their correct entitlement promptly.	Average time for processing new claims 19 days Average time for processing notifications of change of circumstances 8 days Accuracy of benefit calculation 98% Target date – throughout 08/09	That targets apply equally to all groups in the community. That information on entitlement and application procedure is accessible to all groups.	Within existing resources	See Risk Register risk no 2,4,8 and 9	EB	None specific
To provide advice to	To meet with the 'Working	Information is in	Within existing	See Risk	EB	Could reduce

identified disadvantaged groups, particularly in the five disadvantaged areas in the borough, on Council Tax and Housing Benefits	Together' groups in each of the 5 areas and develop information material for residents in these areas explaining entitlements and application procedure Target date – by 31.7.08	accessible format for all residents	resources	Register risk no 7		council tax arrears
Increase financial inclusion for our residents	Increase by 50% the number of benefit customers that are being paid direct Target date –by 31.3.09	Advice and information must be accessible to all	Some funding from DWP for LHA	See Risk Register risk no 7	EB/AP/ST	Will reduce cost of paying benefit. BACS more efficient than cheques.

<b>Corporate Plan Priority: PROMOTING THE HEALTH, HOUSING AND WELL - BEING OF ALL RESIDENTS</b>						
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Equalities Implications</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Efficiency savings</b>
To continue to provide an excellent and improving Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit service	National Indicator [NI] I 180 Right Benefit Annual number of changes to benefit entitlement - 8,500  NI 181 Right Time Average time to process new claims and change events –	Provision of excellent benefits services will assist wide range of customers, including some of most vulnerable and those with highest needs	Within existing	See Risk Register risk no 2,4,8 and 9	EB/AP	n/as

	15 Target date –by 31.3.09					
To maintain a maximum score under the new AC inspection regime for HB	To complete a gap analysis for the new inspection criteria and develop an action Target date 31.5.08 Implement actions plan Target date 31.12.08 [dates provisional based on current understanding of inspection timescales]	Provision of excellent benefits services will assist wide range of customers, including some of most vulnerable and those with highest needs	Within existing	See Risk Register risk no 2,4,8 and 9	EB/AP	n/as

<b>Corporate Plan Priority: ACCESS TO SERVICES AND CUSTOMER CARE</b>						
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Equalities Implications</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Efficiency savings</b>
To improve our levels of customer service and satisfaction	To maintain Chartermark accreditation following annual review Target date –by 31.8.008  To integrate our service more closely with others, both internal and external to the council by transferring moving in and out of borough calls to be handled by corporate call centre and then assessing feasibility of transferring	That improvements apply to all groups in the community.	From within existing budgets	See Risk Register risk no 4,5 and 9	ME/EB/EF	Some will accrue from changes to way telephone calls are handled

	other types of calls Target date for address changes – 31.5.08					
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**Corporate Plan Priority: ENGAGING WITH CUSTOMERS AND THE COMMUNITY**

Objective	Targets	Equalities Implications	Resource Implications	Risk	Responsibility	Efficiency savings
To identify from users how the service could improve to meet their needs.	Carry out an exit survey of people who have called in person Target date –by 31.7.008  Continue with mystery shopping and improve any areas of weakness identified within 2 months of the results being made available  Target date – throughout 08/09	That all groups in the community are able to participate in surveys and are represented in mystery shopping so that any different standards in service delivery are identified	Within existing resources	See Risk Register risk no 7 and 9	EB	None specific

**Corporate Plan Priority: DELIVERING VALUE FOR MONEY**

Objective	Targets	Equalities Implications	Resource Implications	Risk	Responsibility	Efficiency savings
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<p>Achieve a minimum 3% efficiency saving in 2008/09 across our total budget by the modernisation of key elements of service delivery</p>	<p>A full workflow solution is procured and implemented Target date 31.12.08</p> <p>Mobile technology solutions are implemented for inspectors and verification officers Target date 30.9.08</p>	<p>That as service delivery becomes more technology driven the service improvements introduced are accessible for all</p>	<p>Will require funding from the ICT investment fund and other earmarked carry forwards within existing budgets. New revenue costs will need to be met from resultant efficiency savings within existing budgets,</p>	<p>See Risk Register risk no 4</p>	<p>MG/EB/AP</p>	<p>All of these measures should lead to significant efficiency savings, provided processes are changed sufficiently</p>
<p>To ensure that our service continues to provide vfm when compared to others</p>	<p>To participate in relevant benchmarking clubs Target date 30.9.08</p> <p>That all costs are demonstrated to be lower quartile and where they are not that a deliverable action plan is developed to achieve this Target date 31.12.08</p>	<p>The drive for high performance is not achieved at the expense of compromising on equalities issues</p>	<p>From within existing budgets</p>	<p>See Risk Register risk no 1, 4 and 9</p>	<p>EB/EF</p>	<p>Learning from others to reduce costs will yield efficiencies</p>

<p>To review the Cashiers service</p>	<p>To ascertain potential for changes to front office, quantify savings that will arise and seek Member approval to make changes</p> <p>Target date 31.7.08</p>	<p>Important to protect interests of regular users of existing service</p>	<p>From within existing budgets</p>	<p>See Risk Register risk no 4 and 9</p>	<p>EF</p>	<p>To be quantified in review</p>
<p>To ensure that all data and information reported internally or externally (including performance indicators) is complete and accurate, in accordance with the Council's <a href="#">Data Quality Strategy</a></p>	<p>That all information reported is accurate and that any external or internal audit reports do not identify instances of poor data quality and that agreed verification procedures are followed in all cases.</p> <p>Carry out gap analysis and develop improvement plan</p> <p>Target date 31.7.08</p> <p>Implement improvement plan actions</p> <p>Target date 30.9.08</p>	<p>Essential to base service delivery on robust data</p>	<p>Within existing resources</p>	<p>See Risk Register risk no 6</p>	<p>EB/EF</p>	<p>None identified</p>

<b>Corporate Plan Priority: OUR EMPLOYEES</b>						
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Equalities Implications</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Efficiency savings</b>
To ensure that employees have the knowledge, skills and ability to deliver the service efficiently allowing for a reduction in temp staff employed	<p>All staff have an annual appraisal with a personal development plan. Target date by 30.6.08</p> <p>After adjusting for vacancy rate demands, three less "professional" temps employed Target date by 31.3.09</p>	Access to training for all staff should be equal and fair	Within existing resources	See Risk Register risk no 4	MG/EB/AP	Improved quality and speed of work
Support flexible working arrangements and facilitate home working.	All staff have some flexibility to match working life with that of home demands.	<p>No differences in way requests are dealt with.</p> <p>Some homes not suitable for home working which could produce inequalities</p>	Within existing resources	See Risk Register risk no 6	MG/EB/AP/FK	<p>Will reduce valuable office accommodation requirement</p> <p>Potential improvement in performance and reduction in sickness absence.</p>

## 6. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

New National Indicators for 2008 2009					
Number	Description	2006/07 Actual	2007/08 (Target)	2007/08 (Projection)	2008/9 Target
<b>NI 14 effective from 01/10/08</b>	Avoidable contact The proportion of customer contact that is of low or no value to customer. [to be measured as part of corporate exercise re this indicator]	n/a	n/a	n/a	25%
<b>NI 180</b>	Right Benefit Annual number of changes to benefit entitlement	n/a	n/a	n/a	8,500
<b>NI 181</b>	Right Time Average time to process new claims and change events	n/a	n/a	n/a	15
Local Performance Targets for 2008-2009					
		2006/07 Actual	2007/08 (Target)	2007/08 (Actual)	2008/9 Target
P1	Percentage of Council Tax collected	98.50%	98.50%	98.70%	98.70%
P2	Percentage of Business Rates collected	98.20%	98.60%	99.60%	99.60%
P3	Average time for processing new claims	27.4 days	28 days	19.13 days	19 days
P4	Average time for processing notifications of change of circumstances	8.6days	8days	6.61 days	6.5 days
P5	Percentage of new claims decided within 14 days of receiving all information	96.4days	94%	99.45%	99.5%

P6	Percentage of new claims outstanding over 50 days	4%	7%	1.70%	1.5%
P7	The amount of HB overpayments recovered during the period as a percentage of total amount of HB overpayments identified during the period	75.33%	75.00%	87.00%	75%
P8	The amount of HB overpayments recovered during the period as a percentage of total amount of HB overpayment debt outstanding at the start of the period plus amount of HB overpayments identified during the period	28.56%	50.00%	26.83%	30%
P9	The amount of HB overpayments written off during the period as a percentage of total amount of HB overpayment debt outstanding at the start of the period plus amount of HB overpayments identified during the period	3.97%	5.00%	3.46%	4%
P10	Number of Fraud investigations per 1000	36.27	20	17.27	20
P11	Number of successful sanctions per 1,000 caseload	7.37	6	3.71	4.5
P12	Pre assessments 10 % verified Post assessments 10 % verified	n/a	n/a	n/a	98% accurate 98% accurate
P13	Percentage of applications for reconsiderations actioned and notified within 4 weeks	76.02%	75.00%	81.10%	83%
P14	Percentage of appeals submitted to the Tribunals Service in 4 weeks	69.09%	68.00%	70.28%	73%
P15	Percentage of appeals submitted to the Tribunals Service (including those in P14) in 3 months	98.18%	98.00%	100.00%	100%
P16	Percentage of abandoned calls to Revenues and Benefits	n/a	n/a	n/a	9.5%

P17	Average wait time in Customer Advice Team queue before being answered				90seconds
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