

## COUNCIL TAX IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN – BEST PRACTICE PROPOSALS

### 1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Members to consider the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on progress towards implementing the Council Tax Improvement Plan. This is the final progress report as all outstanding actions of the plan were due to be complete by the end of April 2006

### 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In July 2003 Members considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) setting out the findings of a Best Value Review of the Financial Services function. This report was considered in three parts:

Financial Management  
Housing Benefit  
Council Tax

- 2.2 This is the third year of the 3 year action plan to meet all of the standards of the Council Tax Improvement Plan which was adopted to accord with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy model for Service Delivery.

### 3 ACTION PLAN

- 3.1 A copy of the action plan is attached at Appendix 1. All outstanding items that were allocated to individual officers after the last progress report in October 2005 have now been actioned or will be complete by the beginning of April, which is the end of the three-year plan.

### 4 RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** to endorse the closure of the plan and use the 6 monthly update reports on the overall service improvement for Revenues & Benefits which is due July and January to monitor continuous improvement in the revenues area

Steve Clarkson

Head of Revenue & Housing Management

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**Background Papers:**

None

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## APPENDIX 1

The Revenue and Benefit Team have scored the Council Tax Service against the Institute of Public Finance Best Practice model and have identified the following areas where improvements can be made.

		Ranking 2005/6		Comments
<b>1.0 Compilation/Maintenance of the Valuation List</b>				
1.3	Schedules are processed automatically	M		Schedules have been processed on our test system and we will go live with this on 01/04/06.  CLOSE
<b>2.0 Billing</b>				
2.5	Bulk issues of bills, which achieve the minimum level of penetration are passed to the Royal Mail in walksort order	H		Walksort was set up on 6 <sup>th</sup> March 2006.  CLOSE
2.7	Proof of postage is obtained from the Royal Mail for the issue of all bills	H		EPRO- Electronic docketing system was set up 6 <sup>th</sup> March. This allows Royal mail to electronically send Rochford proof of postage for Annual Billing  CLOSE
<b>5.0 Reductions, Reliefs, Exemptions</b>				
5.4	Entitlement to single person discount is reviewed annually	M		Rochford District Matters (March copy) advertises the three-month amnesty period previously agreed. June 2006 first of yearly annual reviews to commence.  CLOSE

		Ranking 2005/6	Comments
<b>8.0</b>	<b>Pre Liability Order Recovery</b>		
8.9	The Authority has a written policy on the tracing of absconded debtors, which incorporates guidance upon information sources and when accounts should be ended	H	Policy now written and will be included in Revs & Bens Policy & Procedure Manual agreed at December 2005 Policy & Finance committee.  CLOSE
<b>10.0</b>	<b>Bailiff and External Agency Recovery (unless stated refers to both internal and external bailiffs)</b>		
10.1	External Bailiffs operate on a fee basis only (i.e. no commission)	L	Tendering process for new bailiff in progress new bailiff contract to commence from April 2006 and will be required to operate on a fee basis only  CLOSE
10.7	At least quarterly monitoring of the costs and benefits of the bailiff operation is undertaken.	M	Will commence once new bailiff contract implemented.  CLOSE
10.11	The Authority has a policy for the use of an external collection agency in the collection process, and this specifies which cases are appropriate for this type of action	M	Policy now written and will be included in Revs & Bens Policy & Procedure Manual agreed at December 2005 Policy & Finance committee.  CLOSE
10.14	Authorities have access to external bailiff's systems via a modem link in order to make enquiries	L	Included as part of tendering process and will commence from April 2006.  CLOSE

		Ranking	2005/6	Comments
10.15	Cases are transferred to external bailiffs electronically	L		Included as part of tendering process and will commence from April 2006.  CLOSE
<b>11.0 Committals</b>				
11.2	The Authority applies for charging orders prior to committal if these are appropriate	L		Policies updated to include when Charging Orders are appropriate and now will be applied for from March 2006  CLOSE
11.6	The Authority has a written policy on cases to be listed for committal and this specifies a minimum value below which it is considered uneconomic to pursue	M		Policy now written and will be included in Revs & Bens Policy & Procedure Manual agreed at December 2005 Policy & Finance committee.  CLOSE
<b>12.0 Write Offs</b>				
12.2	The billing Authority has a written policy on the write off of council tax accounts which specifies what action should be taken before a write off recommendation is made	M		Policy now written and will be included in Revs & Bens Policy & Procedure Manual agreed at December 2005 Policy & Finance committee.  CLOSE
12.7	Checks are made with other systems within the authority prior to debts being written off	M		Checks have been introduced from January 2006.  CLOSE
<b>14.0 Inspections</b>				
14.11	Inspectors wards/districts are rotated as part of the internal checking process	M		Commenced from December 2005.  CLOSE

		Ranking	2005/6	Comments
14.14	Inspectors carry out spot checks on cases with Single Person Discount.	L	•	Carried out as part of Fraud and Verification visiting programme and will increase after Single Person Discount amnesty June 2006.  CLOSE
<b>15.0 Staff</b>				
15.1	Monthly targets exist for quantity of work processed by individuals and teams	H		Crystal Reports currently being developed after going live on the Comino system in February to allow us to set targets and monitor work, teams and individuals. To commence target setting from April 2006 as part of the Personal Development Review process  CLOSE
15.2	At least monthly performance monitoring exists for quantity of work processed, for individual staff and teams	H		See 15.1
<b>16.0 Quality</b>				
16.3	5% of Bailiff visits should be checked ongoing by a suitably experienced officer & the results evaluated by that officer	L	•	Included as part of tendering process and will commence from April 2006.  CLOSE
16.7	The revenues division should have independent quality officers	L	•	Consideration for the expansion of Training Officer role when all team members are fully trained. Report to be made to next Policy & Finance Meeting.

		Ranking 2005/6	Comments
<b>18.0 Systems</b>			
18.21	The authority has a Document Management/Image system which is used to record incoming correspondence and is available to council tax staff	L	• Comino System went live on 1 <sup>st</sup> February 2006.  CLOSE
18.22	The Document Management /Image system provides a facility to direct and re-direct incoming work	L	• System directs and re-directs work from 1 <sup>st</sup> February 2006.  CLOSE
18.23	The Document Management/Image system provides management information on performance and productivity	L	• See 15.1