

Revenues and Benefits



Operational Plan

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SECTION A PREFACE

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Rochford District Council has a statutory duty to administer and deliver Housing Benefits (HB) and Council Tax Benefits (CTB) and to act against fraud, under the general direction and guidance of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). HB consists of Rent Allowances payable to the tenants of private landlords and Housing Associations, and Rent Rebates, payable as credits against rent to council tenants. CTB provides financial assistance to council taxpayers, both tenants and owner/occupiers and is paid as a credit against council tax.
- 1.2 It also has a duty to collect Council Tax (CT) and National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) under the general direction of the Department for Communities and Local Government.
- 1.3 Generally, Rochford is a prosperous area but there are pockets of relative deprivation. Overall, the District has a population of 79,100 in an area of 65 square miles. 1.7% of this population comes from a mixed or ethnic minority background. Much of the district is rural in nature where difficulties with public transport are common. Approximately 86% of the District's 33,689 households are owner occupied, 8% live in social rented housing and 6% rent privately. The population is ageing with people living longer and a declining birth rate. This trend is higher than the national average with an increase of 30% forecast in those over 85 by 2011, compared to 3.4% in England and Wales and 8% for Essex.
- 1.4 The benefits case load for Rochford in May 2006 was as follows:

Council Tenant Rate Rebates	1107
Private Tenant Rent Allowances	1403
Council Tax Benefits	<u>2153</u>
	4663

The number of Council Tax dwellings at the end of June 2006 was 33,824

The number of business premises at the end of June 2006 was 1929

1.5 Funding

The cost of HB and CTB represents a substantial financial input into the economy of Rochford District. At £13.5m (2005/06) the overall sum paid in benefits far exceeds the cost of all the Council's other services put together and in terms of gross expenditure from Council Tax at £8.6m (2005/06) is equivalent to 157% of the Council's budget.

1.6 For operating the service, the Council receives an administration cost subsidy from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which approximates to 35% of the running costs, leaving 65% to be funded by the District Council. In 2005/06 the cost to the Council's budget, after allowing for central support, was £463,137.

1.7 The cost of administering the Council Tax and NNDR elements of the Revenues and Benefits service was approximately £613,000 for the financial year 2005/06, this administration cost is met from the General fund. However, for the same financial year £35 million was collected in Council Tax and £12 million in NNDR.

1.8 External inspection

The Revenues and Benefits service is subject to inspection by the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate (BFI). It is also subject to audit by the External Auditor and is a key element in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) under which the Government seeks to measure and improve the corporate performance and service delivery of local authorities.

2. Performance Standards

2.1 In 2005, the DWP and the BFI issued an amended version of the HB/CTB Performance Standards Framework. The Performance Standards (PS) cover the full picture of what makes an effective and secure housing benefit service. They are intended to facilitate an assessment of whether an authority provides a modern, customer-focused, efficient, effective, and secure HB and CTB service that is continuously seeking to improve. The PS has been divided into four functional areas, which consist of performance measures and enablers, which you need to achieve in order to reach an overall ranking assessment for the Benefits service. Each performance measure is weighted dependent on its importance to the overall service and in turn the performance measures are weighted higher in scoring terms in comparison to the enablers.

The four areas are split into the following:

- Claims Administration – 9 Performance Measures, 16 Enablers
- Security - 7 Performance Measures, 21 Enablers
- User Focus – 3 Performance Measures, 12 Enablers
- Resource Management – 0 Performance Measures, 16 Enablers

3. Status of the Operational Plan

- 3.1 The Operational Plan is a high level statement of the Council's aims and objectives linked to specific actions. It provides for identifying compliance and variation with the Performance Standards, the CPA and best practice including policy issues, priorities, key actions and objectives for the council. The plan identifies required inputs, risks and targets for performance monitoring in relation to corporate strategies as well as performance standards.
- 3.2 The Operational Plan is adopted by the Council as a primary statement of policy and commitment in relation to Revenues & Benefits.

SECTION B EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Operational Plan links the Council's vision for the Revenues & Benefits Service with the management processes and organisational procedures that will enable the Council to achieve its objectives. Ownership of the Plan is vested in Members, Management and Staff. It is a working document, kept under constant review but may only be varied with approval at the highest level of management.

The Council's vision for the future is a simple one that the Revenues & Benefits section has an integral role to play if the vision is to become a reality. The vision is:

“To make Rochford the place of choice in the County to live, work and visit”

To help achieve this vision the Council has adopted 6 corporate aims and 6 core values some of which can be delivered directly by relevant departments, whilst others including all the core values should be carried out by all departments and staff throughout the authority. The 6 aims are to:

- Provide quality, cost effective services;
- Work towards a safer and more caring community;
- Provide a green and sustainable environment;
- Encourage a thriving local economy;
- Improve the quality of life for people in the district;
- Maintain and enhance our local heritage

The Revenues & Benefits Service help to deliver the overall vision of the authority and in particular the first, fourth and fifth aim are of particular relevance to the section.

The core values are:

- Act with integrity
- Be open and transparent about what we do
- Respect others and treat people courteously and equally
- Be responsive to customer's needs and requests
- Always try and improve on what we do
- Work with others to improve what we do both directly and through partnership working

The 6 core values apply to and affect everything that the Revenues and Benefits Service is trying to achieve by its vision of "Working in partnership to deliver an excellent service" and, indeed, without these overarching aims and core values Revenues and Benefits' own vision and Customer Charter is meaningless.

The Council recognises that the Revenues and Benefits Service is passing through a period of modernisation and change as the welfare benefits scheme is adapted to meet the needs of customers and the priorities of Government. Service delivery must, likewise, be under constant review, always striving, in best value terms, for continual improvement.

Due to Rochford's geographical location and the nature of local government in Essex, the Council is open to partnership arrangements and will both investigate and welcome opportunities for working in partnership with other authorities or with the private sector.

However, we recognise that there is scope for service improvement within the Council itself, by working closer with other service sections like Housing Management and the Homelessness and Housing Advice Team to ensure that those in need of revenues and benefits advice are sign-posted to the services we offer. Procedures within these sections will be amended to ensure these links exist. Joint funding from DWP has permitted the Benefits Service to be rolled out to the Council's 12 sheltered housing schemes across the District, permitting those in rural areas to access the service more easily.

The service will ensure that we remain customer focussed, helping those who need assistance with housing costs and ensuring that there are no barriers to work.

We will work with partner organisations to promote a complementary service; in particular we have identified pockets of deprivation within the District and will work with the STAR Partnership to deliver a targeted Benefits take-up campaign in these areas to ensure that those entitled to help, receive it.

We are totally committed to the Housing Benefits Performance Standards, CIPFA Revenues Best Practice Model and the principles of best value.

The Standards and Targets set out in this document demonstrate how Rochford's Revenues & Benefits Service is at the hub of the community, injecting over £13m into the economy and ensuring that those most in need of help and assistance are provided with a first class service.

To support the 6 aims for the district, Rochford has also developed some key projects/service developments for 2006/07, and the Revenues and Benefits Service plays a major part in delivering some of them, reflected by separate targets and action plans later in this document.

The key aims the authority has identified this year that affect Revenues & Benefits are

- Continued improvement of the Benefit Service
- Work towards receiving Charter mark status for Revenues and Benefits

All of the Revenues & Benefits policies, procedures and targets in this document should relate back to the six principal aims or the two specific key aims for Revenues & Benefits.

SECTION C POLICY AND OBJECTIVES

The section's Policies and Objectives derive from the adopted key core values of the authority.

The following objectives and values link up to the core values in particular but are relevant to all the aims and core values that the authority stands for.

4. Primary Objectives – Service Provision

- 4.1 Communicating well internally and externally;
- 4.2 Working together to deliver one vision;
- 4.3 Leading and motivating staff to achieve their potential;
- 4.4 Effectively using resources to achieve our goals;
- 4.5 To continuously improve and develop ourselves as individuals and as an organisation to achieve our full potential;
- 4.6 Working together as a team to deliver our services;
- 4.7 Being responsive to customers and staff need

- 4.8 Consulting staff, our customers and partners;
- 4.9 Celebrating our successes.

5. Primary Objectives – Service Delivery

- 5.1 Reduce the average time for processing new claims to 24 days;
- 5.2 Increase recovery of housing benefit overpayments to 37%;
- 5.3 Obtain a Charter mark accreditation for the Revenues & Benefits Service;
- 5.4 Increase the level of Council Tax Collection;
- 5.5 Reduce the average time for processing benefit change of circumstances;
- 5.6 Increase the levels of fraud detection and increase fraud prevention;
- 5.7 Improve the training potential of staff;
- 5.8 Maximise the accuracy levels of benefits processing;
- 5.9 Maximise the take up of Direct Debit;
- 5.10 Consult our customers regularly about our service;
- 5.11 Achieve 100% of the new performance standards;
- 5.12 Continue to look for efficiency gains and saving by working in partnership;

6. Prioritising of Objectives

- 6.1 The Section's 12 service improvement objectives have not been prioritised in any particular order as some of the objectives are for continuous improvement over time without specific dates and targets, such as consulting our customers and partnership working, whereas other objectives have key milestone dates with specific completion dates, like the Housing Benefit Performance Standards. Each of the twelve objectives has a specific action plan with targets or has overall aims and objectives, which are clearly illustrated later in this document.

- 6.2 As well as these 12 service improvement objectives the section also has other objectives and planned activities which are important in themselves, as without these some of the key objectives and the vision for Rochford's Revenues and Benefits team will not be met.

7. Revenues & Benefits Service Values

- 7.1 A Revenues & Benefits Team that is determined and committed to achieve all its goals.
- 7.2 Commitment to the HB/CTB Performance Standards, to carry out service self-assessment to identify performance levels in all areas.
- 7.3 Commitment to the concept of Best Value and to the conduct of service reviews in accordance with best value principles.
- 7.4 Service improvement and constant maintenance of an improvement plan, which is reviewed annually.
- 7.5 A workforce that is well trained, motivated and rewarded for its success
- 7.6 A commitment to our vision and Customer Charter.

8. Compliance with Performance Standards

- 8.1 Management and operational activities are analysed against the national Performance Standards, supplemented by a set of locally determined aims and objectives.
- 8.2 Policies and procedures are being reviewed and developed to achieve all the HB/CTB Performance Standards over the 3-year period from 2005.
- 8.3 The Council will also seek to identify how the Revenues and Benefits Service complements the aims of wider strategies both internally and in partnership with our key stakeholders, as identified at paragraph 9.
- 8.4 Change will be managed through a step-change approach managed through a series of Improvement Plans and Action Plans. Improvement will take account of customers needs and views expressed through consultation and will be visible and apparent to service users and stakeholders.

9. Key Stakeholders

9.1 The key stakeholders in relation to Rochford's Revenues and Benefits service have been identified as follows:

- Benefit claimants and their dependants;
- The general public;
- Council tax payers;
- Occupiers of commercial properties;
- Private tenants and tenants of social landlords;
- Council tenants;
- Landlords;
- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP);
- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG);
- Local offices of DWP including Job Centre Plus and the Pensions Service;
- Fraud intelligence agencies and Specialist Units;
- Operational Intelligence Unit (OIU – DWP)
- Counter Fraud Investigation Service (CFIS – DWP)
- Investigation Officers in other authorities and public bodies;
- Benefits Fraud Inspectorate;
- Audit Commission;
- The Rent Service;
- Third Age Service (TAS) (Pension Service)
- The Appeals Tribunals service
- Housing Benefits Matching Service (HBMS)
- Other departments within the authority;
- Citizens Advice Bureau;
- Essex Revenues Managers;
- Essex Benefits Managers;
- Neighbouring authorities;
- Land Registry;
- Magistrates Court;
- County Court;
- Essex County Council;
- HM Revenue & Customs;
- Debt Recovery Organisations;
- Bailiffs & tracing agents.

10. Operational Policies

- 10.1 The Council's approach will be visible and apparent to customers and stakeholders by the demonstration of a structured approach to service delivery.
- 10.2 The Council will strive for efficiency savings and value-for-money improvements:
- By learning from good practice, best value and the HB/CTB Performance Standards -aiming to maximise income and using 'spend to save' techniques;
 - By using the latest technology to enhance performance and efficiency savings - bidding for funds to introduce technology on a cost share basis;
 - By working in partnership with neighbouring authorities, similar districts or the private sector to stop duplication and resolve capacity issues as well as finding efficiency savings.
- 10.3 Minimising or eliminating backlogs will be an operational priority:
- By prioritising work to prevent backlogs occurring - identifying early signs of backlogs and diverting resources to maintain service delivery;
 - Ensuring staff are trained, motivated and resourced to meet customer expectations - securing appropriate funding to ensure team members are suitably skilled and rewarded for effort.
- 10.4 The Council recognises the crucial role of training for staff and managers. It is committed to a comprehensive training programme for new staff, update training for existing employees and refresher training. Training needs are monitored as part of the staff appraisal process of individual Performance Development Reviews as well as the direct assessment of training needs by supervisors and managers. Training is provided by in-house provision, and by external training courses.
- 10.5 The Council's approach will be to set SMART targets - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

SECTION D STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

11. Strategy

- 11.1 The Council's framework for development of operational policies requires a comprehensive partnership approach involving Members, the Senior Management Team, Service Managers and operational staff.
- 11.2 Resource allocation is a matter of judgement for Members, advised by senior management, having due regard to competing demands on the Council's finances, but these decisions will be made through an informed approach based on policy, performance measures, and risk analysis.
- 11.3 The key actions required to achieve the Council's objectives are to be structured to a firm timetable.
- 11.4 Success will be measured by regard to Performance Standards, CIPFA's Best Practice model for Revenues and the quality of supporting evidence indicating the Council's level of attainment.
- 11.5 A key factor will be a Comprehensive Annual Performance Review.
- 11.6 Local targets and standards will be set, reviewed and monitored annually but may be subject to intermediate amendment and adjustment if new developments or new priorities require flexibility and are adopted with corporate approval.
- 11.7 Monitoring of performance and reporting variations against targets, together with any remedial actions, is a key function of operational management.

12. Comprehensive Annual Performance Review

- 12.1 To be undertaken annually each October based on the September quarter performance statistics. The review is to identify performance against the Performance Standards, Best Value Performance Indicators other local performance indicators.
- 12.2 The Annual Review is the opportunity for Members to review policy issues, including targets and standards, as well as performance. The timing is calculated to enable resource issues to be linked to the budgetary process for the next financial year.

12.3 The Review will confirm standards and set challenging targets for the coming year, including the level of achievement to be targeted against and targets will be linked to corporate priorities as identified in the Corporate Plan. The diagram at *figure (i)* illustrates how Revenues and Benefits are at the hub of the Council’s wider responsibilities in relation to housing and related services:

Figure (i) Housing Benefit at the Hub of the Community Housing Environment

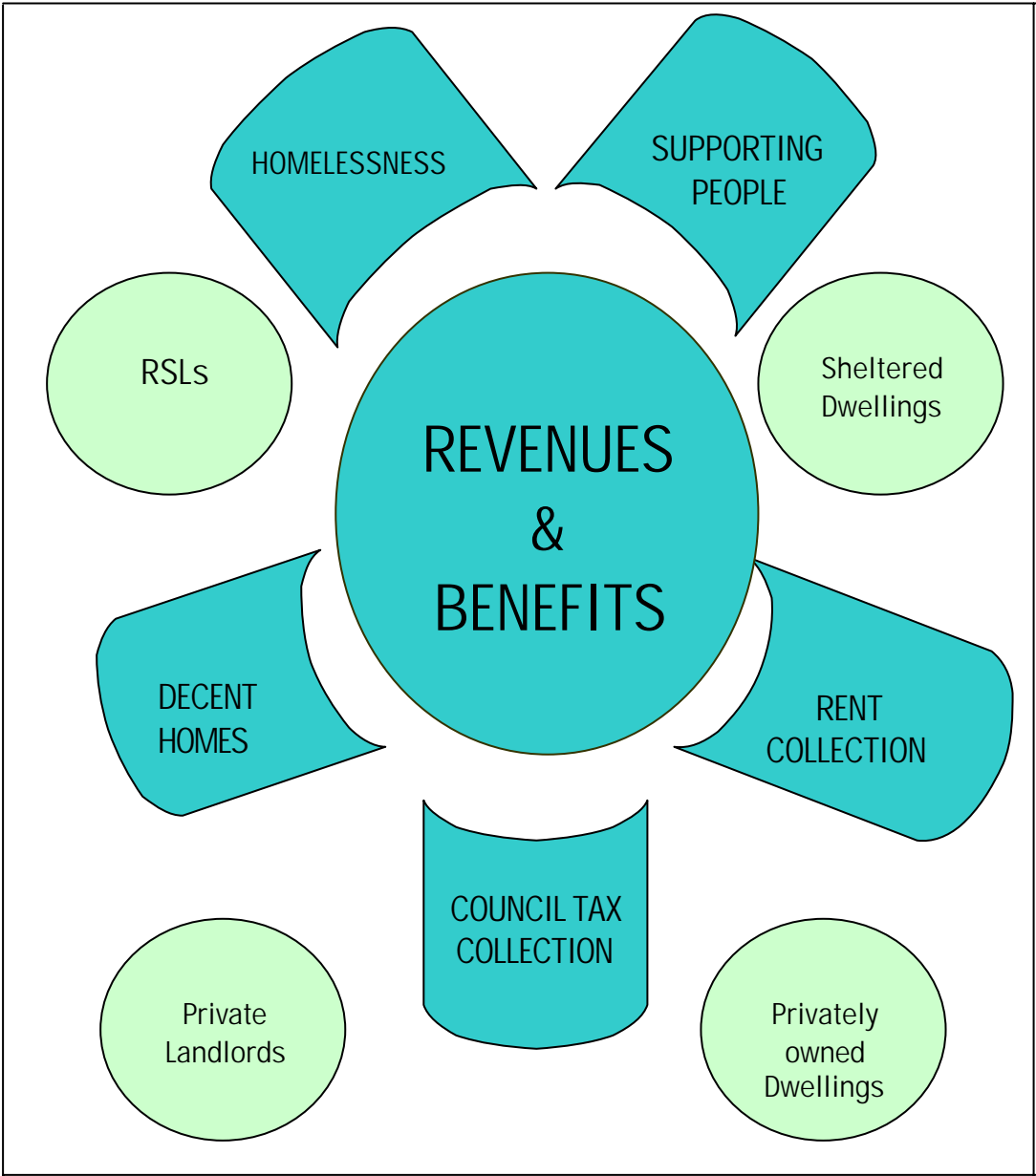


Figure (i)

- 12.4 The outcome of the Annual Performance Review will generate the requirements for any necessary Improvement Plans and Action Plans related to specific functional areas, including defined success factors with goals, timetables and milestones, together with monitoring arrangements.

13. Targets and Standards

- 13.1 Rochford's key objectives are that Revenues and Benefits should be delivered accurately and in a timely fashion. The priorities identified have been built upon by the adoption of the operational policies in paragraph 10 and are further defined as a set of twelve Targets and Standards to be implemented and monitored by a series of Policy Procedures, Action Plans or Improvement Plans.

- 13.2 Risks arising from the failure to attain any of the identified targets have been considered in relation to each of the twelve targets and contingency planning is included at paragraph 17.

13.3

i) Reduce the average time for processing new claims to 24 days

This forms part of the processing of claims Performance Standard but is more focussed on processing times and has been selected for special attention. It is considered essential that this key element is closely monitored to attain the Council's key objectives.

Current position (where we are now)

For the year 2006/07 Rochford has given a corporate target of processing of new claims in 24 days and although the first quarter demonstrates that we are not yet meeting this target, resources have been put in place to meet this target by the end of the year

Aims (where we want to be)

- New claims processing 24 days for 2006/07;
- New claims processing 20 days for 2007/08;
- New claims processing 18 days for 2008/09.

Step Change Process (How we will get there)

- Adoption of the Processing of Claims Improvement Plan
- The Plan to incorporate specific inputs of additional resources
- Weekly monitoring of management information to predict trends and types of caseload
- Contingencies in place in case performance starts to dip.

Risk Analysis

Risk

Claims not decided within 14-day rule.

Work backlogs arise.

Emergency cases arise.

Impact

Claimants and affected persons kept waiting for decisions.

Resource issues for council, hardship for claimants.

Staff diverted from primary tasks.

ii) Increase recovery of housing benefit overpayments to 37%

Current Position

After five months of analysis and Members agreeing new procedures in June 2006 the 3 year target set for this indicator has been revised downwards to incorporate some of the successes in fraud detection.

Aims

- Allocate appropriate resources by August 2006
- Achieve steady progress to 2nd quartile performance by 2008/09
- Percentage of overpayments recovered 37% by 2006/07;
- Percentage of overpayments recovered 40% by 2007/08;
- Percentage of overpayments recovered 42% by 2008/09.

Step Change Process

- To implement new procedures by August 2006
- To monitor bailiff on collection of overpayments

Risk Analysis

Risk

Overpayments not identified

Failure to link overpayment to other factors relating to that individual customer

Impact

Incorrect payment continues with loss of public funds.

Lack of joined-up service causing customer hardship.

Failure to collect overpayments Council Tax payers will have to meet deficit in subsidy payment.

iii) Obtain a Charter Mark accreditation for the Revenues & Benefits Service

Current Position

Investigating with Corporate Policy Manager requirements of achieving Charter Mark for Revenues and Benefits

Aims

- To achieve Charter Mark accreditation by January 2007

Step Change Process

- To obtain criteria for what is necessary to meet accreditation
- Allocate sufficient resources for the project
- Agree a project plan and timetable

Risk Analysis

Risk

Failure to prepare properly

Failure to allocate sufficient time

Insufficient resources

Impact

target dates will not be kept.

Exercise will be a waste of time and resource

Accreditation not achieved and morale suffers

iv) Increase the level of Council Tax collection

Current Position (Where we are now)

Current performance still very good but because political nature of Council Tax and its future. It is becoming difficult to maintain this level of performance

Aims (Where we want to be)

- To achieve Upper Quartile Performance.
- To continuously improve performance up to and beyond 99%.
- To look at more effective ways of collecting Council Tax quickly and efficiently.

Step Change Process (How we will get there)

- Regularly monitor performance against year on year collection figures.
- Monitor us against Essex authorities.
- Review our resources and move them around if collection starts to fall
- Regularly review our action plan

Risk Analysis

Risk

Impact

Loss of adequate resources

Nationally Council Tax
complacency grows

Collection rate suffers and
Pressure mounts on reserves
As above and staff receive most
animosity and reluctance
against trying to collect Council
Tax.

v) Reduce the average time for processing benefit change of circumstances

Current Position (Where we are now)

At the end of June our cumulative average for changes of circumstances was 28.39 days. However this should improve now resources have increased and the effects of the Comino implementation have eased.

Aims (Where we want to be)

- To meet upper quartile performance by end of 2008/09.

Step Change Process (How we will get there)

- Adoption of the changes of circumstances action plan.
- Weekly performance monitoring to monitor performance and accuracy in this area.
- Appropriate resources allocated if there is a downturn in performance or a peak in workload.

Risk Analysis

Risk

Claims not decided within 9 days

Backlogs occur

Complaints rise

Impact

claimants left waiting for
decisions and overpayments
occur.

Resource issue for authority
and possible subsidy loss

Credibility and pressure on staff

vi) Increase the levels of fraud detection and increase fraud prevention

Current Position (Where we are now)

Close to compliance on all enablers and performance measures for Security. All procedures now in place

Aims (Where we want to be)

- To achieve all enablers and performance measure targets by end of 2006/07

- To have individual targets for fraud officers to overall sanction target.
- To deliver a cost-neutral service by March 2008.

Step Change Process (How we will get there)

- Adopt new improvement plan for 2006/07.
- Carry out an assessment of cost breakdown with Accountancy
- Undertake 'Spend to Save' initiatives.
- Carry out benchmarking exercise with similar Essex authorities

Risk Analysis

Risk

Fraud at too high a level
Individual cases not investigated
Poor quality investigations

Impact

Loss of public funds
Each is an opportunity for an overpayment to continue.
Inability to prosecute

vii) Improve the training potential of staff by achieving level 3 of career matrix

Current Position (Where we are now)

All appropriate staff have achieved level 2 of matrix. However current resources have been diverted to achieving Comino implementation and then 1 or 2 new entrants. Training policy and procedures now written

Aims (Where we want to be)

- Establish an ongoing training plan that is reviewed and monitored by senior management quarterly and is included in individual PDR's.
- All appropriate staff achieve level 3 of their matrix by end of 2006/07.

Step Change Process (How we will get there)

- Adopt the training policy and action plan for 2006/07 in the context of the Council's overall training and development plan.
- Ensure that this plan is regularly reviewed.
- Provide adequate resources in addition to training officer to meet key dates in action plan.

Risk Analysis

Risk

Training Officer not secured on long term contract
Training not kept up

Impact

No one to take on the action plan as insufficient resources.
Staff become de-motivated and accuracy levels diminish.

Training Officer not trained/
not given time to prepare

Training becomes weak and
the service suffers

viii) Maximise the accuracy levels of benefits processing

Current position

Rochford continues to maintain high accuracy levels of between 98 to 99%. However, because of the small amount of cases that are checked it is easy to randomly pick a bad sample that could mean we do not maintain high performance. Indeed to reach upper quartile you must maintain 99% or above performance all year.

Aims

- To achieve upper quartile performance for 2006/07 and beyond
- To monitor accuracy and quality assurance levels on a regular basis.
- Adhere to the new management information and monitoring policy document

Step Change Process

- Adoption of the Accuracy Improvement plan
- Adoption of the Policy and procedures for Management checking and monitoring policy.

Risk Analysis

Risk

No accuracy checking carried out

Impact

Errors occur, overpayments
Increase and subsidy loss
Training gaps not identified

ix) Maximise the take up of Direct Debit

Current Position

At the end of the first quarter of 2006/07 Rochford had a direct debit take up of 75% for Council Tax and 64% for NNDR

Aims

- To achieve 80% of Council Tax caseload on Direct Debit (DD) and 70% of NNDR caseload by 2007/08.
- To achieve the highest Direct Debit take up in Essex.

Step Change Process

- To promote Direct Debit as our preferred method of payment on all relevant forms and.
- Carry out at least annually targeted take up campaigns
- Identify all payers not on Direct Debit and promote benefits of paying by Direct Debit
- Adopt the Direct Debit Take up improvement plan.

Risk Analysis

Risk

People choose to pay by other methods of payment than Direct Debit.

Impact

Less budgetary control on payments we receive plus more costly to collect

x) **Consult our customers regularly about our service**

Current position

The service currently carries out regular surveys. It also participates in road shows, forums and various organised open days etc. It also produces regular newsletters and press releases. However these events are not always fully coordinated and sometimes lack corporate message and cohesion.

Aims

- Events will be carefully co-ordinated to achieve certain aims.
- Results of surveys and consultancy exercises will be analysed and results publicised.
- Areas of take up, diversity, information or awareness will be identified and plans put in place to rectify.

Step Change Process

- Incorporation and refinement of the Council's revised communications strategy to ensure the service is promoted in a more co-ordinated and corporate way.
- Improvement and action plan to be adopted
- Project and Publicity Officer to use corporate policy spreadsheet of key events etc
- Project and Publicity Officer to co-ordinate with corporate policy unit to ensure same message comes across and we don not duplicate work.

Risk Analysis

Risk

No structure to publicity or

Impact

Mixed message gets sent out

consultations	causing confusion
No analysis of information received	Customers never receive vital information and most deprived could suffer
No publicity	Our customers become apathetic

xi) Achieve 100% of the new performance standards

Current position (Where we are now)

On the 15th November 2005 Rochford had to submit its first self assessment against the new Housing Benefit Performance Standards. The self assessment was done with an external consultant scrutinising our evidence against the standards. Our self assessment score was 'Excellent' with over 75% of the standards obtained. However as at the end of March 2006 our overall assessment score has dipped slightly so the current overall score is "Good".

Aims (Where we want to be)

- To receive ratification of our excellent score and improve on all performance measures
- Achieve all the enablers with supporting evidence
- If our score is supported by the BFI share our best practice with other neighbouring authorities as part of best practice.

Step Change Process (How we will get there)

- Adopt the action plan to achieve all the Standards by 2006/07.
- Review and monitor our performance against the standards at least quarterly.
- Review the operational plan at least quarterly.
- Use our resources to achieve the standards that require more attention.

Risk Analysis

<u>Risk</u>	<u>Impact</u>
Insufficient resources to meet all enablers	Performance could dip in these areas
Rochford could become too focussed on weighted measures	Other less weighted areas could suffer
Rochford could become complacent now it has achieved 'Excellent'	performance will slowly slip and resources will be difficult to obtain

xii.

Partnership working and efficiency gains

Current position (Where we are now)

As part of the Council's aims for "Continued improvements to the Benefits Service" within the corporate business plan partnership working and looking for efficiency savings through this approach are always on the agenda in everything that is done by the section. To date Rochford currently works in partnership with Chelmsford on its NNDR where Chelmsford manage the day to day administration for Rochford. Capita Local Government Services currently manage a majority of the incoming calls for Revenues and Benefits and offer an extended opening hours service from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9 am until 12 noon on a Saturday. Rochford has also helped Castle Point Borough Council produce their Fraud Policies and Procedures in order to improve their service.

Rochford is now looking in some detail at possible partnership working with its neighbouring authorities in Essex who share a common IT system (Academy). This project involves senior management from Chelmsford and Maldon. The Council's work is being led by the Revenues & Benefits Manager who has been tasked with proposing recommendations for implementing partnership working and delivering efficiency savings over the next 18 months.

Aims (Where we want to be)

- To have explored all possible avenues for partnership where Rochford is either weak, lacks capacity or can find efficiency savings, or where it can offer benefits to other partners.
- Once areas of possible partnership are identified these to be pushed forward to ensure sharing of knowledge, or joint service provision in the appropriate areas.

Step Change Process (How we will get there)

- Adopt the Service Action Plan created.
- Develop the meetings with the authorities and prepare scoping documents.
- Allocate appropriate resources to carry out research and feasibility study.
- Prepare report to committee for possible changes if affect structure.

Risk Analysis

<u>Risk</u>	<u>Impact</u>
No political will to change	Resources looking at partnerships wasted
Staff feel vulnerable	Performance falls and staff leave
Authorities become possessive	Not genuine open partnership

SECTION E OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

14. Service Delivery Strategies

- 14.1 The organisation/staffing structure is set out later in this document. The approach adopted provides for a 'generic' organisation in which staff are responsible for local taxation administration as well as revenues & benefits assessments for a defined work group of residents.
- 14.2 Workload trends are monitored by operational management and prompt action is taken in response to day-to-day events and changing priorities.

15. Operational Management

- 15.1 Administration of the revenues & benefits service requires that local authorities carry out checking procedures on all parts of the revenue & benefit calculation process. This is to ensure that all cases are dealt with in accordance to the regulations and that the Council is using best practice in the way it delivers services. It is a requirement that authorities use management information to assist with checking, predict trends in Council Tax and Benefits, predict peaks and troughs in workloads and help management to allocate resources.
- 15.2 The *Policy and Procedures for Management checking, monitoring and information* document that has been compiled and adopted, defines the policy, strategy and performance targets for Management checks carried out by Rochford District Council. It also demonstrates the management reporting mechanisms currently in use.
- 15.3 The policy is to be used in conjunction with the operational procedures and guidance maintained by the Revenues & Benefits Service and has been drafted to take into account all current prevailing legislation, corporate policy and best practice.
- 15.4 The final action plan later in this document is to monitor all twelve of the business improvement plans and other key milestones that Rochford's Revenues & Benefits service have to manage over the next couple of years. The Revenues and Benefit Manager will review this document quarterly

reporting back to senior management and Members as and when necessary if changes are required.

16. Operational Procedures

16.1 Written Policies & Procedures are provided for each of the following areas:

- Customer Charter
- Operational procedures
- Management checking, monitoring and information
- Customer Services
- Training & Development
- Complaints
- Recovery
- Overpayments
- Appeals
- Landlords
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Benefits Administration
- Revenues Administration
- Fraud Administration
- Consultation & take up policy

16.2 Where Action Plans are formulated in respect of any of the above areas, these are linked to the written procedures as appropriate.

17. Contingency Planning

17.1 The Risk Analysis exercise undertaken in conjunction with the setting of Targets and Standards produces risks and events that may be classified as

i) Specific to Rochford:

- loss of key staff;
- failure of ICT systems;
- surge in claims;
- deterioration in performance;
- loss or reduction in local funding.

ii) Events of a broader or national nature, such as:

- major changes in the revenues & benefits scheme;
- multi-tasking burn-out of staff;
- changes in DWP or DCLG administration, direction and guidance;
- increase in claims due to economic downturn.

- 17.2 The Contingency Plan details the Council's approach to service failures, overload and to peaks and troughs. This includes the willingness of the Council to recruit additional resources in emergency situations, including the use of agency staff and the use of the private sector.
- 17.3 Contingency planning is developed taking account of the need to inter-react with other corporate policies and requirements, for example:
- ICT recovery plan
 - Corporate debt and overpayment policies
 - Write-off policy, etc

SECTION F SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

18. Planned Service Improvement

- 18.1 As at March 2006, Self-Assessment against Performance Standards shows the change and improvement requirements that are shown below. The detailed assessments are recorded and for Improvement Planning, needs are categorised in one of the following classifications:

Target met	Fully Compliant with PS or local target
High Level	High level of compliance with PS or local target
Good	Above average compliance with room to improve
Average	Clear need to improve
Poor	Weaknesses required to be addressed

18.2 The most recent self-assessment has produced the following results:

	Level of Compliance with Target or Standard	Improvement Plan Prepared or Status <i>Yes/No/Target date</i>
i) Reduce the average time for assessing new claims to 30 days	Target Met	YES
ii) Increase recovery of housing benefit overpayments to 55%	Average	YES
iii) Obtain Charter mark accreditation	Average	YES
iv) Increase the level of Council Tax collection	High Level	NO
v) Reduce the average time for processing benefit change of circumstances	Good	YES
vi) Increase the levels of fraud detection and increase fraud prevention	High Level	NO
vii) Improve the training potential of staff by achieving level 3 of career matrix	Good	YES
viii) Maximise the accuracy levels of benefits processing	High Level	NO
ix) Maximise the take up of Direct Debit	Good	NO
x) Consult our customers regularly about our service	High Level	NO
xi) Achieve 100% of the new performance standards	High Level	YES
xii) Continue to look for efficiency gains and saving by working in partnership	High Level	YES

- 18.3 The Council is committed to service improvement, this plan providing a formal structure to facilitate the improvement process. This document will be regularly updated as necessary at least every 6 months. Observations and comments from staff and stakeholders are welcomed and should be sent to the Head of Community Services or to the Revenue and Benefit Manager.

IMPROVEMENT PLANS

<u>Processing new claims</u>	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Notes	Progress Monitoring Date
Introduce 2 nd HB cheque Run	September 06	Assistant Manager (Business Support) Senior Benefit Officer	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Arrange with BSU to introduce 2 nd cheque to pick up 1 st and urgent payments.	Aug 06
Introduce 14 day telephone reminders	July 06	All assessment staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	If all necessary information not provided after 14 days customer is to be telephoned to remind them as well as written to	July 06
Ensure that all pre assessment is carried out within 2 working days of receipt of claim	Ongoing	All assessment staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		Ongoing
Monitor level of performance of team.	Ongoing	All senior staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Monitor current performance against targets and forecast level to ensure that any remedial action can be taken as quickly as possible	

<u>Overpayments</u>	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Notes	Progress Monitoring Date
Out of hours contact with debtors either by visit or telephone	November 06	Overpayments Officer	Assistant manager (Benefits)	Possibility of this work being carried out as part of the Bailiff or Capita contract	September 06
Review effectiveness of other recovery methods – Bankruptcy, Charging Orders	December 06	Overpayments Officer	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Consider likely effectiveness of previously unused methods and impact on training needs, resources etc	November 06
Review current debt information agency performance	October 06	Overpayments Officer Rev's and Ben's Manager	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		September 06
Establish arrangements with neighbouring LA's for recovery of debt's from benefit	November 06	Overpayments Officer Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		October 06
SLA with Debt Management	September 06	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		July 06

<u>Charter mark for Revenues & Benefits</u>	Completion date	Resources needed	Officer responsibility	Notes	Progress monitoring date
Meet with Corporate Policy Manager to discuss the Revenues and Benefits responsibilities towards Charter Mark and agree timescale for the project	30/06/06	Project & Publicity Officer	Project & Publicity Officer	E-mailed Corporate Policy Manager 12/06/2006 with initial questions, will set up meeting once on response.	15/06/06
Create a project plan with set target dates	30/07/06	Project & Publicity Officer & Revenues & Benefits Manager	Revenues & Benefits Manager		17/07/06
Attend Charter Mark Training courses levels 1 and 2	01/09/06	Project & Publicity Officer	Project & Publicity Officer	To further understand the objectives of the scheme and how to assess our performance as a local authority	14/08/06
Assess current score against the scheme. Identify areas of weakness and adjust action plan	01/10/06	Corporate Policy Manager, Project & Publicity Officer	Project & Publicity Officer	Using tool on Charter mark website	04/09/06
Create an indexing system to record evidence collated	01/10/06	Corporate Policy Manager, Project & Publicity Officer	Project & Publicity Officer		04/09/06
Carry out staff briefing with staff	01/10/06	Revenues & Benefits Manager	Revenues & Benefits Manager	To gain staffs commitment and understanding of Charter mark process	04/09/06
Prepare and Collate evidence for submission	01/11/06	Project & Publicity Officer	Revenues & Benefits Manager		16/10/06
Choose Assessment Bodies for certification	01/12/06	Corporate Policy Manager, Revenues & Benefits Manager	Corporate Policy Manager	Choose from one of the following assessment bodies: CMAS Centre for Assessment EMQC,SGS	30/11/06

Submit application for Charter Mark	01/01/07	Corporate Manager Policy	Corporate Manager Policy		15/12/06
Once accredited arrange publicity campaign for Revenues and Benefits	01/03/06	Project & Publicity Officer	Project & Publicity Officer		When award obtained

<u>Council Tax collection</u>	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Notes	Progress Monitoring Date
Monitor collection rates on a monthly basis	Ongoing	Assistant Manager (Business Support)	Assistant Manager (Revenues)	Comm. November 2005	Ongoing
Consideration of issuing reminders earlier	April 06	Recovery & Enforcement Officer	Assistant Manager (Revenues)	Reminders have now been brought forward to be in same month	Ongoing
Arrange one to one appointment/visit prior to issue of Committal Summons	June 06	Recovery & Enforcement Officer	Assistant Manager (Revenues)	Once Pre-committal letter changed it will include details about one to one appointment	July 06
How to Pay/debt advice leaflets to be sent with reminders	July 06	All recovery team	Assistant Manager (Revenues)	To be issued from July reminders for all recovery documents	July 06
Review payment option for Standing Order	August 06	Assistant Manager (Business Support) Recovery & enforcement Officer	Assistant Manager (Revenues)	Consider standing order over 12 months with variable dates as with direct debit	July 06
Direct Debit take up Campaign	Sept 06	Publicity Officer/revs & bens staff	Assistant Manager (Revenues)/ Publicity Officer		August 06
Review post liability recovery procedures	Sept 06	Recovery & Enforcement Officer	Assistant Manager (Revenues)	To look at tailoring options eg bankruptcy/ charging orders in appropriate cases	July 06
Out of Hours telephone contact with debtors	Sept 06	Recovery Team	Assistant Manager (Revenues)		July 06

<u>Changes of Circumstances</u>	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Notes	Progress Monitoring Date
Monitor type and volume of work being received	March 07	All senior staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Identify trends and allocate resources accordingly	Weekly from February 2007
Monitor accuracy of all dates input in assessing changes	Ongoing	All senior staff	All senior staff	Ensure that data is accurate so that BVPI figures are reported correctly	Weekly
Produce a specific Change of Circumstances form.	December 06	Assistant Manager (Benefits Officer) Training Officer	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Ensure that data for changes are more easily obtained	October 06
Review advice included in award letters about reporting changes	September 06	All senior staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		August 06

Counter-Fraud Improvement Plan	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Step-change required	Progress Monitoring Date
Issue counter-fraud publicity with every Council Tax Bill Issue to increase fraud awareness / increase external fraud referrals	01/04/07	Assistant Manager (Revenues); Assistant Manager (Fraud); Project & Publicity Officer Corporate Communications Officer	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with Revenues and Benefits' Assistant Managers to discuss the above Agree on literature to be inserted with Council Tax Bills / paragraph inserted into standard letters Amendment to existing procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree a timetable for implementation 	01/11/06 and 01/01/07
Amend standard benefit notification letters to increase fraud awareness / increase external fraud referrals	30/12/06	Assistant Manager (Benefits); Assistant Manager (Fraud); Business Support Manager	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	As above	01/10/06 and 03/01/07
Commence Fraud Investigation Checks ¹ to progress investigation work faster	01/04/06	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	Implement the checks in the Investigation Procedure	Commenced May 2006
Monthly One-2-One with Investigation Staff	01/08/06	Assistant Manager (Fraud) Investigation Officer	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	Agree times and locations for monthly one-to-ones in advance	01/07/06
Targeted Review of Benefit Caseload / Review of Fraud Data	01/10/06	Assistant Manager (Fraud) Business Support Manager Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collate any current analysis (national and local) Request reporting from the Business Support Manager on reported changes of circumstances Group the reported changes of circumstances (e.g. by area, by reported change) Compare the findings with national and other local analysis Prepare a report on findings and recommendations to the Revenues and Benefits Manager for further 	01/09/06 and 03/01/07

				action	
Set formally agreed dates for Quarterly Review Sessions with the Revenues and Benefits Manager	01/09/06	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Agree times and locations for quarterly meetings in advance	01/10/06
Introduce "Compliance" to counter-fraud work through increased use of Visiting Officers	30/09/06	Assistant Manager (Fraud) Visiting Officer	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree a timescale to implement postal interventions to reduce the number of visit interventions required (with Assistant Manager (Benefits)) • Conduct a training needs analysis on Visiting Officers • Identify suitable case types for Visiting Officer action • Train Visiting Officers in investigative basics (e.g. legislation) • Train Visiting Officers in conducting basic investigative work (e.g. process) 	01/09/06 Completed Completed Completed

<u>Training action plan</u>	Trainee(s)	Implementation date	Completion date	Resources needed	Officer responsibility	Progress monitoring date
New entrant training programme	4 new staff	September 2004	October 2004	TO & officers as mentors	Training Officer	October 2004
Appeals	All staff	September 2004	October 2004	TO	Training Officer	October 2004
Verification	All staff	September 2004	November 2004	TO & Asst Mngr (Bens)	Training Officer	October 2004
Interventions	All staff	September 2004	November 2004	TO & Asst Mngr (Fraud)	Training Officer & Asst Mngr (Fraud)	October 2004
Academy System Training	All staff	September 2004	November 2004	TO & Business Support	Training Officer	October 2004
Overpayments	Overpayments Officer	September 2004	November 2004	TO	Training Officer	October 2004
Recovery	2 Recovery Officers	September 2004	November 2004	TO & Senior Recovery Officer	Training Officer	October 2004
Fraud (PINS)	2 Fraud Officers	September 2004	January 2005	TO & Fraud Mgr	TO & Fraud Mgr	December 2004
Legislation update	All staff	October 2004	December 2004	TO	Training Officer	November 2004
Generic Programme (HB)	CTAX staff	October 2004	January 2005	TO & 3 Officers as mentors	TO & Asst Mngr (Bens)	December 2004
April changes	All staff	December 2004	January 2005	TO	Training Officer	December 2004
Level 2 HB	Staff at level 1	December 2004	April 2005	TO & 3 R & B Assts	TO & Asst Mngr (Bens)	February 2005
Level 1 & 2 CTAX	All HB staff	December 2004	April 2005	TO, Asst Mngr (Revs), R & B Asst	TO & Asst Mngr (Revs)	February 2005
Academy System Training	Level 1 & 2 staff	December 2004	April 2005	TO & Business Support	Training Officer	February 2005
Direct Debit Training	Assessment staff	December 2004	July 2005	TO & R & B Asst	Training Officer	June 2005

Refund training	Assessment staff	December 2004	July 2005	TO, Asst Mngr (Revs)	Training Officer	June 2005
Legislation update	All staff	December 2004	July 2005	TO & Senior Officer	Training Officer	June 2005
Development training	All staff	December 2004	December 2005	TO & external consultants	Training Officer	November 2005
Legislation update	All staff	December 2004	December 2005	TO & Senior Officer	Training Officer	November 2005
Verification update	All staff	January 2006	February 2006	Training Officer	Training Officer	February 2006
Comino	All staff	January 2006	March 2006	TO & Project team	Project Manager	March 2006
April Changes	All staff	April 2006	May 2006	Training Officer	Training Officer	May 2006
Appeals	All staff	April 2006	May 2006	TO & Asst Mngr (Bens)	TO & Asst Mngr (Bens)	May 2006
Customer Focus	Counter staff	April 2006	May 2006	Training Officer	Training Officer	May 2006
Legislation update	All staff	April 2006	May 2006	Training Officer	Training Officer	May 2006
Development Re-evaluation	All staff	May 2006	June 2006	TO & RBM	TO & RBM	June 2006
Comino update	All staff	May 2006	June 2006	Training Officer	Training Officer	June 2006
Induction	New recruits	May 2006	June 2006	Training Officer	Training Officer	June 2006
New entrant programme	New recruits	May 2006	June 2006	Training Officer	Training Officer	June 2006
Welfare/Visits	Welfare/Visits	June 2006	July 2006	TO & RBM	TO & RBM	July 2006
Level 1 & 2 (HB & CTAX)	Level 1 staff	June 2006	July 2006	Training Officer	Training Officer	July 2006
Interventions	All Staff	July 2006	September 2006	TO & Senior Officer	Training Officer	August 2006
WIB's	All assessment staff	July 2006	September 2006	TO & Senior Officer	Training Officer	August 2006

<u>Training action plan</u>	Trainee(s)	Implementation date	Completion date	Resources needed	Officer responsibility	Progress monitoring date
Level 3 (HB)	Level 1 & 2 staff	September 2006	December 2006	Training Officer	Training Officer	November 2006
Legislation update	All staff	September 2006	December 2006	Training Officer	Training Officer	November 2006
Self Employed	All staff	September 2006	December 2006	Training Officer	Training Officer	November 2006
Underlying entitlement	All assessment staff	September 2006	December 2006	Training Officer	Training Officer	November 2006
CTAX/Debt recovery	Recovery team	October 2006	January 2007	TO & Senior Recovery Officer	TO & Senior Recovery Officer	December 2006
HB/Debt recovery	Recovery team	October 2006	January 2007	TO & Senior Recovery Officer	TO & Senior Recovery Officer	December 2006
Level 3 CTAX	Level 1 & 2 staff	December 2006	January 2007	TO, Asst Mngr (Revs)	Training Officer	January 2007
Development Re-evaluation	All staff	January 2007	March 2007	TO & RBM	TO & RBM	February 2007
Comino Review	All staff	May 2007	July 2007	Training Officer	Training Officer	June 2007
NVQ verifier	TO/Senior staff	June 2007	December 2007	TO & RBM	TO & RBM	August 2007
NVQ Assessor	TO/Senior staff	September 2007	December 2007	TO & RBM	TO & RBM	August 2007
NVQ Programme	TO/Senior staff	January 2008	March 2008	TO & RBM	TO & RBM	February 2008
Legislation update	All staff	January 2008	March 2008	Training Officer	Training Officer	February 2008
Management review	Managers	April 2008	September 2008	TO & HR	TO & HR	July 2008

<u>Improve accuracy levels</u>	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Notes	Progress Monitoring Date
Introduce 4% check on all decisions prior to notification/payment being issued	August 06	All Senior Officers	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Identify all decisions made via Academy All officers work to be checked at least once every 2 weeks All types of decisions to be checked	July 06
100% post training checks	Ongoing	All Senior Officers	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		Ongoing
Introduction of Skillwise	September 06	Training Officer	Training Officer		August 06
Monitor 100% of work carried out by agency staff for a minimum of 5 working days after they start	April 07	All Senior Staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		January 07
Monitor work carried out by call centre and information they provide	November 06	All Senior Staff	Assistant Managers (Revs & Bens)		October 06

<u>Direct Debit take up</u>	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Progress Monitoring Date	Communication with Stakeholders	Report to Members
Design/create DD Flyer	August 2006	Publisher	Project & Publicity Officer	July 2006	CDS, MWL Print, Image Data & St Ives	
Update website with new flyer	August 2006	RDC Web	Project & Publicity Officer	July 2006	Webmaster	
Run report on Academy to identify all those who do not pay by DD and send flyer	September 2006	Academy & Business Support Unit	Project & Publicity Officer	August 2006	Business Support Unit	
Identify incentives to assist take up i.e. offer more payment dates etc	August 2006		Project & Publicity Officer	June 2006		
Set targets arrange monitoring of results	October 2006	Academy	Revenues & Benefits Manager	Sept 2006	Business Support	

Customer consultation	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Progress Monitoring Date	Communication with Stakeholders	Report to Members
Draft a policy and procedure for Revenues and Benefits	September 2006	RBM & PPO	Rev & Bens Manager	August 2006	Yes	
Consult stakeholders re policy including Corporate Policy unit	June 2006	PPO	Rev & Bens Manager	June 2006	Yes	
Final procedure and action plan produced	October 2006	RBM	Rev & Bens Manager	September 2006		Yes
Corporate Policy Spreadsheet to be adopted to analyse information	March 2007	PPO	Project & Publicity Officer	February 2007		
Liaison to commence with Corporate policy unit	June 2006	PPO	Project & Publicity Officer	July 2006		
Publicity of all methods of consultation and programme of events	October 2006	PPO	Project & Publicity Officer	September 2006	Yes	
Quarterly analysis of information received to commence	March 2007	RBM & PPO	Rev & Bens Manager	February 2007	Yes	Yes
Members bulletin to receive information quarterly	March 2007	PPO	Project & Publicity Officer	February 2007		
Review policy, procedure and action plan	April 2007	RBM & PPO	Rev & Bens Manager	March 2007		Yes

<u>Achieve 100% of the HBPS</u> <u>Performance Measure</u> <u>or Enabler</u>	Officer responsibility	Resources needed	Target date and how to be achieved	Progress Monitoring Date
E10 – Using quality checks to improve performance and reduce error	Asst Manager (Benefits) & Asst Manager (Fraud)	Revenues & Benefits Manager Assistant Manager (Benefits) and Assistant Manager (Fraud) Training Officer	<u>By October 2006</u> (1) Benefits – (a) identify a recording mechanism for accuracy checks to allow analysis (b) develop system reporting to report claimant, LA and fraud errors (2) Fraud – (a) commence regular work checks as recommended by performance standards (b) identify a recording mechanism for checks to allow analysis (3) Both – (a) Analyse the above, with intervention and fraud results to provide an indication of the level of fraud and error within RDC (b) Training Officer to use this analysis for staff training and target setting for 2007/2008	September 2006
E13 – The final overpaid amount, taking into account any underlying entitlement to benefit and unpaid or returned cheques is calculated, on average, within a period of 14 days following the date the LA receives sufficient information.	Asst Manager (Benefits)	Overpayments Officer, Asst Manager (Bens)	<u>1st July 2006:</u> Procedures now changed and being worked on as part of overpayment procedural changes	June 2006
E20 – Fraud referrals	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	Training Officer & Asst Manager (Fraud)	<u>August 2006:</u> Arrange with training officer to create induction package for new Revs and Bens' entrants <u>July 2006:</u> Arrange for refresher fraud awareness training for Central Services staff and Capita staff. To coincide with Electronic Records management training	July 2006
E36 - The LA always checks the DWP's database and Police	Assistant Manager	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	<u>August 2006:</u> Clarify what DWP require to meet this	

National Computer (PNC) or SOL P (as per HB/CTB Security Manual) for previous benefit fraud sanctions and convictions before issuing a caution or penalty.	(Fraud)		enabler first <u>August 2006:</u> If necessary, arrange access protocol with SOLP and/or local police to have access to required information	July 2006
E41 - Decisions on claims are notified promptly to customers and if relevant third parties and are written concisely, with the reader in mind and in the right tone. Letters state the decision clearly, do not contain jargon and explain technical terms such as non-dependant. Overpayment decisions are notified to the person(s) affected within 14 days of the final calculation.	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Assistant Manager (Benefits) and Technical Officer (Benefits)	<u>November 2006:</u> Rochford is part of the special interest group set up by Academy (our system provider) which has completed its work and we are awaiting new templates from them to test.	August 2006
E42 - Employees have been set and are achieving targets, which as a minimum reflect corporate customer service targets for dealing with enquiries, made by telephone, in person, by letter or e-mail and the LA monitors performance against the targets.	Revenues & Benefits Manager	Senior Benefits Officer and Training Officer	<u>August 2006</u> Awaiting for Crystal reports from Comino to be developed so we can monitor performance and set targets more accurately	July 2006
E45 - The LA monitors and reviews all its SLAs in accordance with the arrangements set out in each SLA, with action taken to improve effectiveness and security as indicated by the monitoring report.	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	<u>September 2006</u> Meetings have now taken place with JCP and Rent Service new arrangements are now being put in place.	August 2006
E46 - The LA maintains regular contact, supported by formalised and documented working arrangements if considered appropriate, with other organisations, for example RSLs, CAB, Police, Crown Prosecution	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	<u>Ongoing:</u> Assistant Manager (Benefits) and Assistant Manager (Fraud) to have ascertained appropriate "other organisations" and identified potential Benefits and Fraud shared interests with particular organisations.	Ongoing

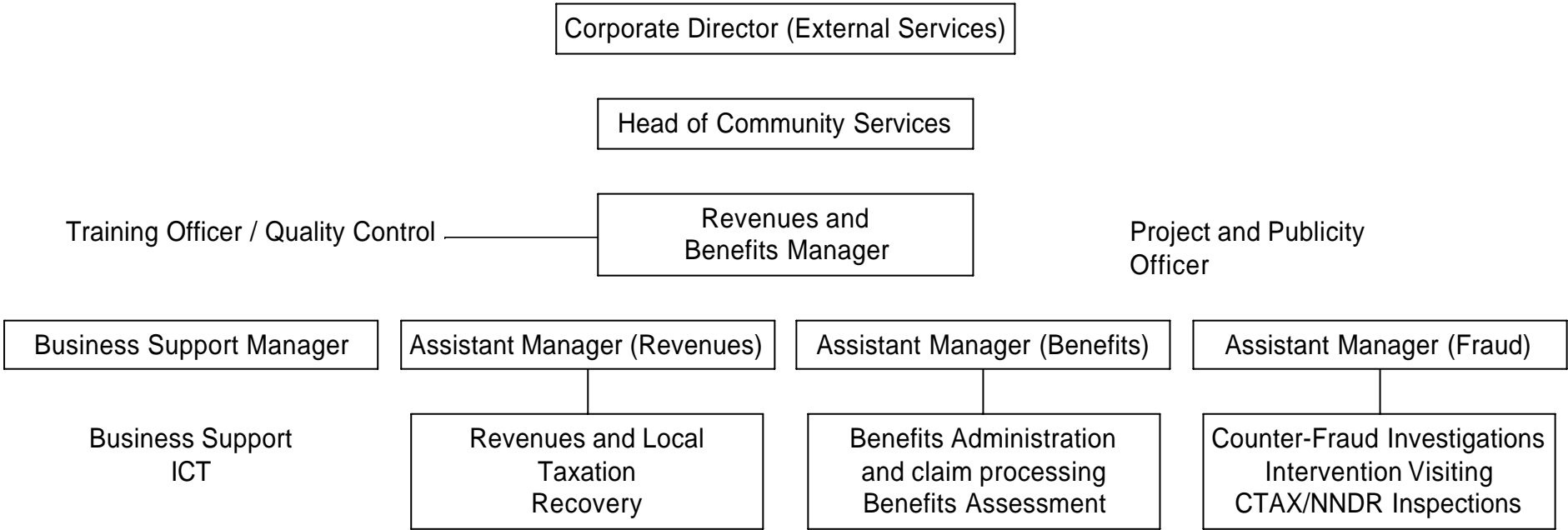
Service (CPS) or Procurator Fiscal in Scotland.				
E57 - The LA operates a costing structure that provides an assessment for the Benefit Service's overall cost, including counter fraud work, and shows the relationship between cost and the level of service provided. Costs are monitored, reviewed and adjusted in the light of potential over or under spends or efficiency objectives and there is an audit trail on the costs and adjustments.	Revenues & Benefits Manager	Revenues & Benefits Manager and Financial Services Manager	<p><u>December 2006:</u></p> <p>R & B Manager to approach CIPFA Revenues consortium about inclusion in benchmarking scheme and to include it as part of its joint working programme with Chelmsford and Maldon.</p> <p>Financial Services Manager to review the costs of the service with details how these costs are made up.</p>	October 2006
E59 - The IT systems support all aspects of paying and accounting for benefit, including counter fraud and debt recovery, and interfaces effectively with other relevant IT systems. They provide accurate management and statistical information and enable production of ad hoc management information and exception reports.	Revenues & Benefits Manager	Revenues & Benefits Manager and Internal Audit	<p><u>August 2006:</u></p> <p>Audit section to either carry out a computer audit or seek evidence from other authorities who have carried out such an audit on Academy.</p> <p>Audit & Process Review Manager meeting with all Essex counterparts in June to discuss this issue</p>	July 2006

Partnership working & efficiency gains	Completion date	Resources needed	Officer responsibility	Progress monitoring date	Report to Members
Draft Action (Plan for consideration of various opportunities)	10/12/04	SJC/SL	SJC/SL	01/11/05	
Raise staff awareness of proposals	11/01/05	SL	SL	12/12/05	
Organise Essex revenue Officers meeting to discuss joint working and Gershon efficiencies	11/01/05	SJC/SL	SJC/SL	12/12/05	
Joint meeting with Essex LA Chief Execs and Liberata	27/01/05	PW/SJC	PW/SJC	28/12/05	
Feed budget for facilitation/option appraisal into ODPM capacity bid	30/03/05	SJC	SJC	28/02/06	07/04/05
Further decision of Essex Chief Execs around potential partnerships – decide on close working for Chelmsford, Rochford and Maldon	30/05/05	PW/SJC	PW/SJC	29/04/06	
Await decision on ODPM capacity bid of £35k	15/07/05	PW	PW	15/06/05	07/07/05
Scoping exercise with advice from Anglian Revenues Consortium	27/07/05	SJC	SJC	20/06/2005	
Collect data from three collaborating authorities	30/09/05	SJC/SL/VC /LK	SJC/SL/VC/LK	20/09/2005	07/12/05
Agree scope of partnership & communications protocol	01/02/06	SJC/SL	SJC	28/02/06	
Agree potential structure and draft timetable	30/03/06	SJC/SL	SJC	01/03/06	
Costs Benefits Analysis	Ongoing	Financial Services/ Project team	SL	Ongoing	
Communication with Staff, Unions and relevant stakeholders	01/05/06	SL	SL	20/05/06	
Find the IT solutions to partnership	30/08/06	Training Officer	SL	01/06/06	
Commence aligning of procedures	01/08/06	ALL	SL	30/09/06	
Seek government funding & Support	20/08/06	Project Team	SL	01/08/06	
Finding & Recommendations to SMT	01/10/06	SL	SL	15/09/06	
Report to Members on recommendations to committee for further progress	07/12/06	SL	SL	15/11/06	

MONITORING THE OPERATIONAL PLAN

TARGET or Action Plan	Priority (1 highest, 3 lowest)	Full Compliant/ milestone date	Resources needed	Lead Officer Responsibility	Step-change required overall	Progress Monitoring Date	Communication with Stakeholders	Report to Members
Processing of claims	1			Asst Manager (Benefits)		December 2006	No	No
Overpayments	1			Asst Manager (Benefits)		December 2006	No	Yes
Charter mark accreditation	3			Project & Publicity Officer		December 2006	Yes	No
Council Tax collection	1			Asst Manager (Revenues)		December 2006	No	No
Changes of circumstances	1			Asst Manager (Benefits)		December 2006	No	No
Fraud detection	2			Asst Manager (Fraud)		December 2006	No	No
Training	3			Training Officer		December 2006	Yes	No
Accuracy	2			Senior Officer (quality)		December 2006	No	No
Direct Debit	3			Project & Publicity Officer		December 2006	Yes	No
Consultation	3			Revenues & Benefits Manager		December 2006	Yes	No
Performance standards	2			Revenues & Benefits Manager		December 2006	Yes	Yes
Partnership working	2			Head of Community Services		December 2006	Yes	Yes

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Policy documents, Office procedures and instructions have been, or are to be, compiled for each of the functional areas set out below, the status and date of the procedure notes being as follows:

Policy/Procedure	Document Status	If not issued, responsible officer(s)
Operational Plan	Issued	
Policy and Procedures for Management Checking, monitoring and information	Issued	
Contingency Plan	Issued	
Overpayments Procedure	Issued	
Recovery administration	Issued	
Customer Services	Issued	
Customer Complaints and Comments	Issued	
Appeals Procedures	Issued	
Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)	Issued	
Fraud policies & procedures	Issued	
Anti Fraud & Corruption policy & Investigation policy	Issued	
Benefits Administration	Issued	
Training & Development policy	Issued	
Landlords Policy	Issued	
Revenues Administration	Issued	
Consultation& take up	Pending	Scott Logan/Zandra Neeld