

## **HOUSING BENEFIT CUSTOMER SURVEY RESULTS**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Members to consider the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management which provides the full results of the biennial Housing Benefit Customer Survey.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 As stated in the interim committee report that was considered by Members of the Policy and Finance Committee on 14 January 2004, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) spends around £100 billion in welfare benefits of which Rochford will spend approximately £11.6 million for this financial year.
- 2.2 It is therefore important that the service provided by Rochford fully reflects the needs of the claimants of Rochford, both in terms of suitability and accessibility.
- 2.3 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), therefore require Rochford to survey a required amount of claimants in two different tranches in the year. The survey had to be carried out in September 2003 and January 2004 and must have a response of at least 625 different people.
- 2.4 The questions asked have been set by the ODPM and Rochford has not had any input into the type of questions asked. The full results must be analysed and returned to the ODPM in the form of a Best Value Performance Indicator by 31<sup>st</sup> May 2004.
- 2.5 The Revenue and Benefit Manager has already compiled all of the results and issued them to the ODPM at the time of drafting this report.

### **3 RESULTS**

- 3.1 Although the Revenue and Benefit team has suffered staff recruitment and retention problems over the last year, it has still managed to give a seamless service to its customer. This was achieved using a combination of overtime working and temporary contract staff. This allowed the Head of Service to maintain standards and output so as to leave customers generally unaffected. The results speak for themselves, with 88.4% of claimants that returned their survey being either "very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied" with the overall service. Only 5% were either "fairly dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with the service. Comparisons have also been made with the survey

undertaken in 2000/2001 (Appendix 1). These show a general trend of customers reporting higher levels of satisfaction across a whole range of service specific areas; the most significant of these being the overall satisfaction with the service and time taken to advise the customer of a successful claim.

- 3.2 Members of Finance and Procedures Overview and Scrutiny Committee have already considered a report to resolve the staff retention and recruitment problems. It is hoped that this overall satisfaction rate can improve by the time we have to carry out the survey again in 2005/6.
- 3.3 A full analysis of the results of the survey can be found at Appendix 2. This illustrates that there were no questions that received an overwhelming negative response. The Revenue and Benefit Manager is hoping to address one of the biggest criticisms by simplifying the claim form again. 25% of respondents stated that is where they wanted the most improvement.

#### **4 RISK ASSESSMENT**

##### **4.1 Strategic Risk**

The Council needs to demonstrate that as part of the Strategic Management of the Service the Customer remains the focal point of service delivery.

##### **4.2 Regulatory Risk**

The ODPM specifies the format and timing of the survey and expects compliance with regulations. Failure to carry out the survey and report findings back may lead to a withholding of benefit subsidy.

##### **4.3 Resource Risk**

The Council needs to constantly review the resources required to deliver a customer focussed service and to respond swiftly to changing demands on the service.

- 4.4 From the responses, there is some evidence that consideration ought to be given to giving access to the service beyond conventional opening hours, particularly to those 'in-work' claimants. This is an issue which ought to be addressed from a corporate standpoint and not in isolation from a single service point.

**RECOMMENDATION**

5.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

To note the survey results.

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Head of Revenue and Housing Management

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**Background Papers:**

Survey Results

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