
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 interim results of the biennial Housing Benefit Customer Survey.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) spends around £100 billion a year on welfare benefits. This represents more than a quarter of Central Government expenditure. Some benefits are directly administered by the DWP through Jobcentre Plus. In the case of Housing Benefit, DWP are responsible for policy, regulations and rates of benefit, while Local Authorities are responsible for the delivery of the Benefit Service. In Rochford this translates to a budget of £11.2 million (around 1.4 times the Council's net budget).
- 2.2 It is therefore important that the Service fully reflects the needs of those it serves, both in terms of suitability and accessibility.
- 2.3 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) specify the regularity and content of the customer based surveys and the level of statistical sample required for an authority of Rochford's size. This year we were looking for a target response from at least 625 service users. In order to achieve a reasonable spread of claimants and for the avoidance of 'seasonal' claims the survey is conducted in two tranches (September and January).
- 2.4 At the time of drafting this report, over 400 respondents had returned their survey form so the targeted response is already 64% achieved.

3 RESULTS

- 3.1 The overall results will not be available until March 2004 but the emerging picture is a pleasing one with around 90% of respondents expressing that they are 'fairly satisfied or 'very satisfied' with the service; only 4% expressing that they are fairly dissatisfied and no respondents expressing 'very dissatisfied'. The final results will be reported to this Committee on 7 April 2004.

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 undertake the survey, report the results or complete regulatory returns could lead to the withholding of subsidy.

4.3 **Resource Risk**

The Council needs to constantly review the resources required to delivery a customer focussed service, to plan ahead for regulatory change (such as tax and pension credits in 2003/04) and to assess the need for staff training and recruitment.

- 4.4 Housing Benefit Fraud is high on the ODPM agenda and is a high risk area under constant scrutiny by the Council's own Fraud Team, Internal Audit and the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate .

5 **RECOMMENDATION**

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

- (1) to note the Interim Survey results
- (2) to receive a full report in April 2004.

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Background Papers:

None

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