Rochford District Council
Our Vision

Rochford District Council's Revenues & Benefit Section is committed to

Working in partnership to deliver an excellent service

We will do this by

- Communicating well internally and externally

- Working together to deliver one vision

- Leading and motivating staff to achieve their potential

- Effectively using resources to achieve our goals

- To continuously improve and develop ourselves as individuals and as an organisation to achieve our full potential

- Working together as a team to deliver our services

- Being responsive to customers and staff needs

- Consulting staff, our customers and partners

- Celebrating our successes

Rochford District Council
Customer Charter

Making the Vision a reality

Our Customer Charter tells you how we want to meet our vision of an excellent service

Our Customer Charter tells you:

- **About the services we provide**
- **What you can expect from us**
- **What we expect from you**
- **What to do if something goes wrong**
- **How to contact us**

The services we provide:

The Revenues and Benefits Services include Council Tax billing and administration, National Non-Domestic Rates and Benefits administration.

The Council is committed to delivering a service of the highest quality. We cannot do this without your commitment as well. The following information sets out what service we will provide to you and what we need and expect in return.

What you can expect from us:

We will treat you as an individual by offering you a quality of service that seeks to meet your needs.
We will deal with you fairly and in a helpful, polite and friendly way

We will apologise and put things right quickly if we make a mistake.

When you contact us:

When you write to us we will aim to reply within a maximum of 5 working days if not sooner.

If you e-mail us, we will respond to you within a maximum of two working days from receipt of your request.

We will answer your correspondence as clearly as possible and covering all the points raised. If we cannot answer your question immediately we will ask for further information or tell you who to contact so that your question can be dealt with.

When you call us we will answer your call within 30 seconds.
If we cannot resolve your query immediately we will return your call within a maximum of 48 hours with the answer.

You can call us anytime from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and Saturday 9am to 12 noon and speak to a dedicated Customer Service Advisor. If you call after this time you can leave a message on our voicemail system and we will return your call within 24 hours of the offices opening.

When you come and see us at our Rochford Offices we will see you within 10 minutes of your arrival at reception.

If you have private and confidential information or wish to discuss something in complete privacy, we can offer you a private interview room, if one is available, or make an appointment for another time.

When we visit you our officers will carry formal identification and introduce themselves and if you wish to you can ring the offices to confirm we work for Rochford.

If you need special help we can do any of the following:

- We can visit you at your home if you have a disability, are elderly or are unable to get to the offices by any other means;
- We can arrange for an interpreter if your first language is not English;
- We can arrange for our forms and leaflets to be provided in Braille, large print, audio tape or in a different language;
- We have a hearing loop system that enables people whom are hard of hearing; to clearly hear what our customer advisor is telling them when they visit our offices;
- We have wheelchair access to our specially designed new reception area;

The Revenues and Benefits team will:

- Send bills and letters that are clear and accurate;
- Give you a choice of payment options;
- Give you a choice of how to contact us;
- Give at least 14 days notice of changes to instalments;
- Make special arrangements if you have problems paying your Council Tax or Business Rates;
- Offer you monetary advice from qualified advisors if you have problems with debt management;
- Take prompt action to recover outstanding Council Tax and Business Rates if arrangements to pay have not been made;
- Tell you how to claim for benefit and keep you informed how your claim is progressing regularly;
- Acknowledge your claim within 5 working days;
- Return any original documents sent to us within 2 working days;
- Assess your claim within 14 days of receiving the correct information;
- Help you understand how your benefit has been calculated;
- Give you advice on how to appeal if you disagree with our decision;
- Take all action necessary to prevent fraudulent claims being made;
- Recover overpayments of benefit quickly but fairly;

What we expect from you:

Treat us in the same way as you would like to be treated by us or other customers, and that you:-

- Provide all the necessary proof we require, in the required format , to be able to calculate your benefit entitlement or Council Tax discount as quickly as possible;
- Tell us immediately if you have any changes in your circumstance that may affect your Benefit entitlement or Council Tax discounts;
- Ensure that your payments are made on time;
- Pay back any overpayments of benefit as quickly as possible;
- Contact us immediately if you are having problems in making payments;
- Try and respond to our requests as soon as you possibly can;
- When contacting us by phone always have your account/reference number to hand;
- Be polite to us, we are here to help, abusive language or aggressive behaviour will not be tolerated.

What to do if something goes wrong

If you want to complain about the service or there is something we have failed to do, then please contact us immediately.

We treat all complaints very seriously and they are looked at by someone, who has not been involved with the process in detail. If they are serious complaints they can be referred to the Chief Executive for a decision to be made.

Rochford has a publicised complaints procedure and a complaints form that can be found on our website or at our main reception areas.

How to contact us

To contact the Revenues and Benefits section you can call us in the following numbers depending on the nature of your call:

Council Tax and Benefit enquiries   01702 318197

                                                                          01702 318198

Benefit Fraud Hotline   01702 318041

Recovery Section   01702 318019

If you wish to e-mail us   revenues&benefits@rochford.gov.uk

You can call in to Rochford offices   Monday to Thursday 8.30 – 5.00

                                                                         Friday 8.30 – 4.30

You can write to us at   Revenues and Benefits section

                                                                         Rochford District Council

                                                                         7 South Street

                                                                         Rochford

                                                                         Essex

                                                                         SS4 1BW

Rochford District Council

Revenues & Benefits Administration

OPERATIONAL PLAN

Version 1.0 November 2005

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Contents

SECTION A PREFACE

1.   Introduction

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.

1.1   It also has a duty to collect Council Tax (CT) and National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) under the general direction of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. If payments are made to the council in accordance to the terms given on the annual notification, Rochford has a duty to collect these amounts by recovering them through the local magistrates courts.

1.2   Generally, Rochford is a prosperous area but there are pockets of deprivation. Overall, the District has a population of 78,500 in an area of 65 square miles. Much of the district is rural in nature where the difficulties of transport and communication are common. Approximately 86% of the District's 32,000 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.

1.3   The benefits caseload in Rochford at the midpoint of 2005 was as follows:

Council Tenant Rate Rebates   1121

Private Tenant Rent Allowances 1267

Council Tax Benefits   <u>1986</u>
4374

The Council Tax caseload at the midpoint of 2005 was 33,580

The NNDR caseload at the midpoint of 2005 was 1940

1.5 **Funding**

The cost of HB and CTB represents a substantial financial input into the economy of Rochford District. At £12.8m (2004/05) 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 fro m Council Tax at 8.9m (2004/05) is equivalent to 143% of the council's budget.

1.6 For operating the service, the council receives an administration cost subsidy from the DWP, which approximates to 28% of the running costs, leaving 72% falling on the District Council. In 2004/05 the cost to the Council's budget, after allowing for central support, was £411,788.

1.7 The cost of administering the Council Tax and NNDR elements of the Revenues and Benefits service was approximately £724,000 for the financial year 2004/05. However, for the same financial year 32 million was collected in Council Tax and 18 million in NNDR.

1.7 In taking decisions on the allocation of funding and resources, the council is conscious of the need to provide appropriate rewards for effort by staff, both in relation to processing and counter-fraud, and to have proper regard for the requirements of staff recruitment and retention.

1.8 External inspection
The Revenues and Benefits service is subject to inspection by the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate. It is also subject to audit by the District 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 a uthorities.

2. Performance Standards

2.1 In 2005, the DWP and the BFI issued the amended version of the HB/CTB Performance Standards Framework. The Performance Standards (PS) cover the full picture of what makes up 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 have been divided into the four functional areas which are made up of performance measures and enablers to meet those measures. Each performance measure is weighted dependent on its importance to the overall service and in turn the performance measures are weighted higher than the 'enabler' questions. 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 - 16 Enabler

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 Rochford DC. 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.

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 Councils vision for the future is a simple one that the Revenues & Benefits section has an integral role to play if the vision is to be come 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 come up with 6 principal 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:

- 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 six aims clearly linked Revenues & Benefits to the overall vision of the authority and in particular the first, third and fourth aim are of particular relevance to the section.

The 6 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 customers 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 section are 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 & Benefits Service is passing through a period of modernisation and change as the 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 neighbouring authorities or with the private sector.

However, we recognise that there is much scope for service improvement within the council itself, by working closer with other service sections like Housing, Housing Advice and the Homelessness Team to ensure that those in need of revenues & 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 12 sheltered housing schemes across the District permitting those in rural areas to access the service more easily.

All training will focus on a 'CUSTOMER FIRST' philosophy, placing the claimant at the top of the 'Customer First' Service Support Triangle.

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 best value and encouraged that under the new Housing Benefits subsidy arrangements (effective from April 2004), subsidy payments will be directed towards high achieving local authorities. We feel that Rochford should fare well under these arrangements.

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 £12m into local life 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 come up with some key priorities and targets for 2005/ 06 and Revenues and Benefits are a major part of some of them which is reflected by separate targets and action plans later in this document.

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

- Overall, we will work to increase the number of statutory indicators in the two top quartiles nationally, by 5% year on year for the next two years.

- Roll out an electronic records management and workflow system across the authority from April 2005 for completion by March 2007.

The key targets the authority has this year for Revenues & Benefits are:

- Reduce the average time for processing new claims to 30 days

- Increase recovery of housing benefit overpayments to 55%

All of the Revenues & Benefits policies, procedures and targets in this document should relate either specifically such as the targets and priorities or will link back to the six principal aims, such as the Customer Charter which directly aims at achieving two of the principals.

SECTION C POLICY AND OBJECTIVES

The sections Policies and Objectives derive from the adopted key core values of the authority.

The following objectives and values link back up to the all of 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 needs

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 30 days;

5.2   Increase recovery of housing benefit overpayments to 55%;

5.3   Implement electronic records management and workflow system;

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

The Sections Primary 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, where as other objectives have key milestone dates with specific completion dates like the Electronic Records Management and 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.

As well as these twelve primary 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.   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 identity 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 around the national Performance Standards, supplemented by a set of locally determined aims and objectives.

8.2   Policies and procedures are being renewed 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 & benefits service compliments 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

The key stakeholders in relation to Rochford's 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);
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM);
- 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;
- Liaison with other neighbouring authorities;
- Land Registry;
- Magistrates Court;
- County Court;
- Essex County Council;
- 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 has been checked against the SMART approach and is considered to be in compliance with the defined tenets of being 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 Corporate Management Board, Service Managers and operational staff.

11.2   Resource allocation is a matter of judgement for Members, advised by corporate 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 Councils 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, Cipfa's best practice model for Revenues and 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.

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 the revenues & 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
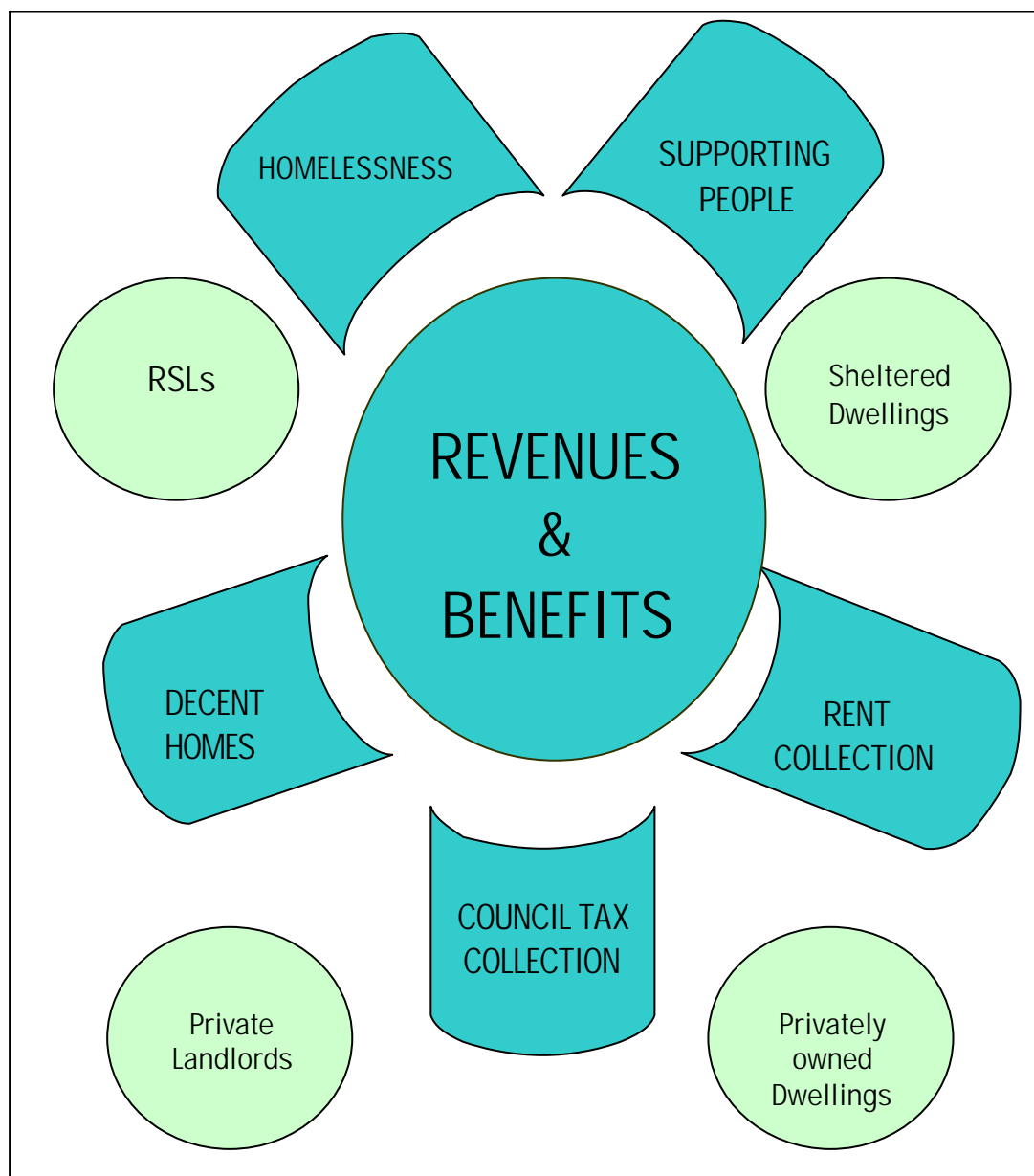

Figure   (i)

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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 & benefits should be delivered speedily and accurately 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 30 days

This forms part of the processing of claims PS 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
Although for the year 2005/06 Rochford has given a corporate target of processing of new claims in 30 days it appears half way during the year that the target will be met and exceeded

Aims
- New claims processing 30 days for 2005/06;
- New claims processing 25 days for 2006/07;
- New claims processing 22 days for 2007/08.

Step Change Process
- 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	Impact
Claims not decided within 14-day rule.	Claimants and affected persons kept waiting for decisions.
Work backlogs arise.	Resource issues for council, hardship for claimants.
Emergency cases arise.	Staff diverted from primary tasks.

ii) Increase recovery of housing benefit payments to 55%

Current Position (Where we are now)

Self-assessment shows discrepancies in firstly how this figure is calculated as since April 2005 this PI has 3 parts to it with point (i) being what is collected during a period against what is raised in that period and point (ii) being what is collected in a period against what is outstanding overall. Therefore point (i) we are running at a high percentage of 66% against the old original PI which is point (ii) currently at 21%.

The DWP have not made clear which one of these two we should be prioritising and what percentage is upper quartile. Added to the fact that Academy cannot assure us that what it is reporting is 100% accurate.

Aims (Where we want to be)
- Allocate appropriate resources by March 2006
- Achieve upper quartile in all three points of BVPI 79 by 2006/07

Step Change Process (How we will get there)
- To assure ourselves that Academy's management information on performance for this area is accurate.
- To seek advice from DWP where upper quartile is on these two indicators.
- To produce an Action Plan with resource decisions required by January 2006.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Impact
Overpayments not identified	Incorrect payment continues with loss of public funds.
Failure to link overpayment to other factors relating to that Individual customer	Lack of joined-up service causing customer hardship.

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

iii) Implement electronic records management and workflow system

<u>Current Position</u> (Where we are now)

Comino is a corporate document imaging system and is being introduced through the Prince 2 project management process. Planning has been implemented successfully earlier in 2005 and Revenues and Benefits are due to go live on 19th January 2006. Revenue & Benefits have a project team looking at how best to implement the process.

<u>Aims</u> (Where we want to be)
- To achieve full implementation by 30th January 2006
- To clear all paper files from the office by 1st April 2006
- To achieve quicker more efficient processing by start of year 2007/08.
- To maintain performance through 2006.

<u>Step Change Process</u> (How we will get there)
- To maintain the project team throughout the implementation process and beyond
- To ensure the Training Officer review all of our working practices to ensure they comply with Comino.
- To have regular review meetings after implementation to build on the system.
- To ensure that adequate resources are secured to help with implementation and transition onto Comino

Risk Analysis

Risk	*Impact*
Failure to prepare properly	Go live date may be delayed or Critical errors could occur.
Failure to carry out appropriate Training	errors occur accuracy suffers delays for customer and staff Morale suffers.
Insufficient resources	Performance suffers

iv) Increase the level of Council Tax collection

<u>Current Position</u> (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	Collection rate suffers and Pressure mounts on reserves
Nationally Council Tax Complacency grows	As above and staff receive most animosity and reluctance against trying to collect CTAX.

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

Current Position (Where we are now)
At the end of September our cumulative average for changes of circumstances was 22.86. However our current processing time is around 14 days so the cumulative figure should drop.

Aims (Where we want to be)
- To meet upper quartile performance by end of 2005/06.
- To maintain that figure during the implementation of Comino and beyond.

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	Impact
Claims not decided within 9 days	claimants left waiting for Decisions and overpayments occur.
Backlogs occur	resource issue for authority and possible subsidy loss
Complaints rise	Credibility and pressure mount 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 2005/06
- To have individual targets for fraud officers to overall sanction target.
- To deliver a cost-neutral service by March 2007.

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	Impact
Fraud at too high a level	Loss of public funds
Individual cases not investigated	Each is an opportunity for an overpayment to continue.
Poor quality investigations	Inability to prosecute

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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 2005/06 and 2006/07in 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	*Impact*
Training Officer not secured on long term contract	No one to take on the action plan as insufficient resources.
Training not kept up	Staff become de-motivated and accuracy levels diminish.
Training Officer not trained 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.

<u>Aims</u>

- To achieve upper quartile performance for 2005/06 and beyond
- To monitor accuracy and quality assurance levels on a regular basis.
- Adhere to the new management information and monitoring policy document

<u>Step Change Process</u>
- Adoption of the Accuracy Improvement plan
- Adoption of the Policy and procedures for Management checking and monitoring policy.

<u>Risk Analysis</u>

<u>*Risk*</u>	<u>*Impact*</u>
No accuracy checking carried out	Errors occur, overpayments Increase and subsidy loss Training gaps not identified

ix   Maximise the take up of Direct Debit

<u>Current Position</u>

At the end of the second quarter of 2005/06 Rochford had a direct debit take up of 73% for Council Tax and 67% for NNDR

<u>Aims</u>

- To achieve 70% of CTAX caseload on DD and 70% of NNDR caseload by 2007/08.
- To achieve the highest DD take up in Essex.

<u>Step Change Process</u>

- 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.

<u>Risk Analysis</u>

<u>*Risk*</u>	<u>*Impact*</u>
People choose to pay by other Methods of payment than DD	Less budgetary control on payments we receive plus more costly to collect

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

Current position
Rochford currently carries out regular surveys throughout the section. It also participates in roadshows, forums and various organised omen days etc. It also produces regular newsletters and press releases. However these events are not always coordinated in terms of delivering a more corporate message.

Aims

- Events will be carefully co ordinated to achieve certain aims.
- Results of surveys and consultancy exercises will be analysed through a computer spreadsheet 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	*Impact*
No structure to publicity or Consultancy	Mixed message gets sent out 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 we were only just in the 'Excellent' score bracket and still need to improve on some performance measures and achieve 13 enablers

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 top 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

Risk	Impact
Insufficient resources to meet all enablers	Performance could dip in these areas
Rochford could become to 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 wi ll be difficult to obtain

xii. **Partnership working and efficiency gains**

Current position (Where we are now)

As one of the two key objectives for Revenues and Benefits 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 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 system in Academy. This project involves senior management from Chelmsford, Colchester and Maldon, It is being led by the Head of Revenues & Housing Management and he has been tasked with coming up with some recommendations for possible partnerships and 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, strong, lacks capacity or can find efficiency savings.
- Once areas of possible partnership found, pushed forward to sharing of knowledge, staff or full-blown merger of authorities 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

Risk	*Impact*
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   Office organisation is set out at 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.

14.3   The culture of the service is to undergo renewal with the new approach to service delivery that will put the customers and stakeholders at the top of the organisational structure as shown in paragraph 13.3 (under Target xii).

15.   Operational Management

15.1   Administration of the revenues & benefits schemes 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 deals with revenues & benefits as a whole. 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 section have to manage over the next couple of years. The Revenues and Benefit Manager should review this document quarterly reporting back to senior management and members as and when necessary if items or dates change.

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
- Consultancy & 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 ODPM 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 November 2005, 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

10.35

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

	Level of Compliance with Target or Standard	Improvement Plan Prepared or Status *Yes/No/Target date*
i) Reduce the average time for assessing new claims to 30 days	High Level	YES
ii) Increase recovery of housing benefit overpayments to 55%	Average	YES
iii) Implement electronic records management and workflow system	Good	YES
iv) Increase the level of Council Tax collection	High Level	YES
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	YES
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	YES
ix) Maximise the take up of Direct Debit	Good	YES
x) Consult our customers regularly about our service	High Level	YES
xi) Achieve 100% of the new performance standards	High Level	YES
xii) Continue to look for efficiency gains and saving by woking in partnership	High Level	YES

18.3 Rochford is committed to service improvement, this plan providing a formal structure to facilitate the improvement process. This document will be regularly updated as necessary. Observations and comments from staff and stakeholders are welcomed and should be sent to the Head of Revenue and Housing Management or to the Revenue and Benefit Manager.

IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Processing new claims	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Notes	Progress Monitoring Date
Introduce 2nd HB cheque Run	May 06	Assistant Manager (Business Support) Senior Benefit Officer	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Arrange with AM(BS) introduction of 2nd cheque run during wk to pick up first and urgent payments	March 06
Ensure that all pre assessment is carried out within 2 working days of receipt of claim	April 06	All assessment staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		February 06
Introduce 14 day telephone reminders	May 06	All assessment staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		April 06
Monitor accuracy of all dates used in assessing claims	April 06	All senior staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		February 06
Ensure that BVPI 78a continues to be met	March 07	All assessment staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		Quarterly

Overpayments	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Notes	Progress Monitoring Date
Out of hours contact with debtors either by visit or telephone	June 06	Overpayments Officer	Assistant manager (Benefits)		May 06
Set up procedures to obtain attachments of earnings through courts	May 06	Overpayments Officer	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		March 06
Review likely effectiveness of other recovery methods – Bankruptcy, Charging Orders	July 06	Overpayments Officer	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		June 06
Review current contract with debt collector/appoint new one.	July 06	Overpayments Officer Rev's and Ben's Manager	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		June 06
Establish working arrangements with neighbouring authorities for recovery from benefit	Aug 06	Overpayments Officer Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		May 06
Ensure that BVPI 79b is met	March 07	Overpayments Officer	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		Quarterly

SLA with Debt Management	**July 06**	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		May 06

Comino Rollout and Project Plan Timeline 2005-2007

Start	End	Action(s)	Notes
December 2005	January 2006	• Indexer's Training • Weeding • Document Types [in-going and out-going] complete • System testing	Staff offered overtime to conduct weeding.
Early January 2006	Mid January 2006	• Revenues and Benefits' Indexer's "Refresher" Training • Document Types [in-going and out-going] complete • System testing "Project Team" solely Comino based (until end Jan) • Staff / Management Training • Weeding (O/T) • Document Types / Process testing • Clearance of backlog (O/T) • New temporary staff start • Review/tweaking of System • System testing • Live System enabled	System will be ready for use. Weeding of paper files to continue on overtime. Potential for compulsory overtime. Temporary staff to attack backlog. Overtime available for permanent assessment staff. Staff feedback / consensus implemented into the system.
19th January 2006	29th January 2006	• All normal work suspended • "Pending" scanned in / indexed • Outstanding current work scanned in / indexed	Skeleton staff to ensure a public service remains. All other staff (with the exception of temporary) to be employed on preparation for 30th January 2006
30th January 2006	-	• Project Team Floor walking (for 1 week) • All new work in scanned and indexed at source • "Unscanned" paperwork (pending etc) scanned in • System fully used for all Revs and Bens areas • Revenues and Benefits' Indexers to index all Revenues and Benefits' post	Project Team immediately on hand to deal with staff questions. "Mop up" of any missed pending / current work

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February 2006	March 2006	• Fraud files prior to 1st April 2004 destroyed • "Transitional" fraud files back-scanned upon closure (block) • Assessment of Recovery paper files	Once main area is implemented, concentrate on Recovery / Fraud areas.
February 2006	February 2007	• When any work is actioned, any paper file weeded and sent to scanning.	Destruction and back scanning of paperwork is linked to on-going action avoiding high volumes of scanning / indexing over a short period of time.
March 2006	May 2006	• Revenues and Benefits' Indexers to commence skill sharing with Central Services' staff	Revenues and Benefits' Indexers will be skilled and experienced, allowing sharing of skills with other staff with confidence.
March 2006	March 2006	• Temporary staff leave • Restore pre-Comino position performance	Familiarisation with Comino will result in a return to improved performance.
April 2006	May 2006	• Remaining investigation files / Recovery work scanned onto Comino • Early April 2006 – Staff meeting on Usability of System • Late April 2006 - Manager's review of System / Considerations of enhancements • Indexer's Training Plan Stage 1 and 2 commences for Post Room Indexing Staff • Stage 2 training to be conducted for appropriate Revenues and Benefits' staff • Capita staff training	Revenues and Benefits Indexers to "back scan" Recovery / Fraud documents. First review of system functionality with staff and management. Stage 1 training to commence last march/early April – flexibility required due to end of year / uprating
May 2006	June 2006	• No "paper" fraud investigations remain • Investigate counter-scanners • Analysis of data held on Comino • Indexer's Training Plan Stage 3/4/5 commences for Post Room Indexing Staff	Commence feasibility study of counter-scanners.
July 2006	August 2006	• Review of Revenues and Benefits' Indexers' position • Further staff consultation on system use • Recommendations to be implemented into the system	2nd system review and implement findings where appropriate. Consider Revenues and Benefits' Indexers' positions in line with Corporate goals.
September 2006	November 2006	• Review of "General Filing" – purge on remaining paper filing to migrate to Comino	Consider development of Comino's "Central Filing" feature to incorporate all other paper files held within the offices.

December 2006	December 2006	• "Paperless" day-to-day office state	With the exception of a few outstanding paper benefit files, day-to-day working on benefits and council tax and related work should be "paperless".
January 2007	February 2007	• Full 1 year evaluation of system • Investigate use of "contact manager" (ready for full corporate go-live)	Fully evaluate system's use and future use and potential to evolve.
February 2007	March 2007	• Mop-up back-scanning of any remaining Benefit files	Clear any remaining benefit files and back scan.
February 2007	On-going	• Quarterly review system • Investigate/test enhancements • Fully adopt corporate standards	Continue to review and test enhancements to the system and develop it "Corporately".

Council Tax collection	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Notes	Progress Monitoring Date
Monitor collection rates on a monthly basis	Jan 06	Assistant Manager (Business Support)	Assistant Manager (Revenues**)**		Dec 06
Phone reminder on arrangement cases	March 06	All recovery team	Assistant Manager (Revenues)	Where a payment on an arrangement is overdue we will telephone the customer to prompt payment/detect problems at early stage	Feb 06
Consideration of issuing reminders earlier	April 06	Recovery & Enforcement Officer	Assistant Manager (Revenues)	Instalments due on 1st of each month but reminders not currently issued until the beginning of the following month	March 06
Arrange one to one appointment/visit prior to issue of Committal Summons	May 06	Recovery & Enforcement Officer	Assistant Manager (Revenues)	To attempt payment arrangement or details for attachment of earnings/benefit. Will free up Court time/staff resources	April 06
How to Pay/debt advice leaflets to be sent with reminders	Feb 06	All recovery team	Assistant Manager (Revenues)	Currently only sent at later stage of recovery	Jan 06
Review payment option for Standing Order	June 06	Assistant Manager (Business Support) Recovery & enforcement Officer	Assistant Manager (Revenues)	Consider standing order over 12 months with variable dates as with direct debit	April 06

Direct Debit take up Campaign	Sept 06	Publicity Officer/revs & bens staff	Assistant Manager (Revenues)/ Publicity Officer		June 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

Changes of Circumstances	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Notes	Progress Monitoring Date
Produce a specific Change of Circumstances form.	June 06	Assistant manager (Benefits Officer) Training Officer	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		May 06
Monitor system generated statistics	April 06	All senior staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		Feb 06
Comino to report on age, type and volume of outstanding work	July 06	Assistant Manager (Benefits) Assistant Manager (Business Support)	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Reports to be produced to enable monitoring of outstanding work and allocation of resources accordingly.	June 06
Ensure that BVPI 78b is met	March 07	All assessment staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		Quarterly
Ensure changes that result overpayments are prioritised	April 06	All assessment Staff	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		March 06
Consider electronic transfer of changes from Housing Associations	Aug 06	Assistant Manager (Business Support) Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Assistant Manager (Benefits)		July 06

Counter-Fraud Improvement Plan	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Step-change required	Progress Monitoring Date
1 Issue counter-fraud publicity with every Council Tax Bill Issue to increase fraud awareness / increase external fraud referrals	30/09/05	Assistant Manager (Revenues); Assistant Manager (Fraud);	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	• 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 • Agree a timetable for implementation	01/07/06 and 03/01/07
2 Amend standard benefit notification letters to increase fraud awareness / increase external fraud referrals	30/09/05	Assistant Manager (Benefits); Assistant Manager (Fraud);	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	As above	01/07/06 and 03/01/07
3 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	01/07/06
4 Monthly One-2-One with Investigation Staff	01/04/06	Assistant Manager (Fraud) Investigation Officer	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	Agree times and locations for monthly one-to-ones in advance	01/07/06
5 Targeted Review of Benefit Caseload / Review of Fraud Data	01/10/06	Assistant Manager (Fraud) Business Support	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	• Collate any current analysis (national and local) • Request reporting from the Business Support Manager on reported changes of	01/07/06 and 03/01/07

		Manager Assistant Manager (Benefits)		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 action	
6 Set formally agreed dates for Quarterly Review Sessions with the Revenues and Benefits Manager	01/07/06	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	Revenues and Benefits Manager	Agree times and locations for quarterly meetings in advance	01/04/06 and 01/10/06
7 Introduce "Compliance" to counter-fraud work through increased use of Visiting Officers	30/09/06	Assistant Manager (Fraud) Visiting Officer	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	• 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)	01/07/06 and 03/01/07

Training action plan	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	Leve1 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

Training action plan	Trainee(s)	Implementation date	Completion date	Resources needed	Officer responsibility	Progress monitoring date
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

Training action plan	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

Improve accuracy levels	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Notes	Progress Monitoring Date
Introduce 4% check on all decisions prior to notification/payment being issued	June 06	All Senior Officers	Senior Benefits Officer	Identify decisions via Academy/Comino All officers work to be checked at least once every 2 weeks All types of decisions to be checked	May 06
100% post training checks	April 06	All Senior Officers	Senior Benefits Officer		Feb 06
Delegate stats 128 checking to more experienced assessment staff	April 06	Experienced Assessment Officers Senior Benefits Officer	Senior Benefits Officer		Feb 06
Ensure that results of checking are relayed to training officer to inform future training arrangements	July 06	All Senior Officers	Senior Benefits Officer		May 06
Introduction of Skillwise	Aug 06	Assistant Manager (Business Support) Training Officer	Senior Benefits Officer		June 06
Ensure that BVPI 79a is met	March 07	All Senior Staff	Senior Benefits Officer		Quarterly

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Direct Debit take up	Completion Date	Resources needed	Officer Responsibility	Progress Monitoring Date	Communication with Stakeholders	Report to Members
Design/create DD Flyer	March 2006	Publisher	VJC	Feb 2006	Redlin	
Update website with new flyer	April 2006	RDC Web	VJC	March 2006	Webmaster	
Run report on academy to identify all those who do not pay by DD and send flyer	February 2006	Academy	VJC	Feb 2006	Business Support	
Look at the basic bank accounts that may be available for customers	May 2006	Web	VJC	April 2006	Local banks	
Identify incentives to assist take up i.e. offer more payment dates etc	August 2006		VJC	June 2006		
Set targets arrange monitoring of results	October 2006	Academy	VJC	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 & Benefits	January 2006	RBM & PPO	Rev & Bens Manager	January 2006	Yes	
Consult stakeholders re policy including Corporate Policy unit	March 2006	PPO	Rev & Bens Manager	February 2006	Yes	
Final procedure and action plan produced	April 2006	RBM	Rev & Bens Manager	March 2006		Yes
Corporate Policy spreadsheet to be adopted to analyse information	June 2006	PPO	Project & Publicity Officer	May 2006		
Liaison to commence with Corporate policy unit	July 2006	PPO	Project & Publicity Officer	June 2006		
Publicity of all methods of consultation and programme of events	August 2006	PPO	Project & Publicity Officer	July 2006	Yes	
Quarterly analysis of information received to commence	October 2006	RBM & PPO	Rev & Bens Manager	September 2006	Yes	Yes
Members bulletin to receive information quarterly	December 2006	PPO	Project & Publicity Officer	November 2006		
Review policy, procedure and action plan	January 2006	RBM & PPO	Rev & Bens Manager	December 2006		Yes

Achieve 100% of the HBPS Performance Measure or Enabler	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)	Training Officer Asst Manager (Benefits) & Asst Manager (Fraud)	**April 2006 – Benefits,** Identify a recording mechanism for accuracy checks to allow analysis, develop system reporting to report claimant, LA and Fraud errors. **Fraud,** commence regular work checks as recommended performance standards. Identify a recording mechanism for checks to allow analysis. Analyse the above, with intervention and fraud results to provide an indication of the level of fraud and error within RDC. Use this analysis for staff training an target setting for 2006/07	March 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.	Project & Publicity Officer	Overpayments Officer, Asst Manager (Bens)	**February 2006** Procedures to be reviewed and evidence gathered as policy now amended from 1st October 2005.	January 2006
E20 – Fraud referrals	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	Training Officer & Asst Manager (Fraud)	**January 2006** Induction programme for new entrants to be created and refresher training for existing staff.	December 2005
E30 – The LA Anti-Fraud & Corruption Policy	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	Assistant Manager (Fraud) & Revenues &	**December 2005** No current corporate policy available new one to be drafted for approval in January's	December 2005

		Benefits Manager	committee.	
E34 – The LA has in place systems to ensure that only lawful requests are sent to DWP for Inland Revenue information.	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	**December 2005** Not currently done as DWP will refuse insufficient requests. **Clarify what DWP require to meet this enabler before** Introducing a formal checking procedure for all DWP intelligence requests prior to issue (and amend forms as necessary)	December 2005
E36 - The LA always checks the DWP's database and Police 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.	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	Assistant Manager (Fraud)	<u>**December 2005:**</u> **Clarify what DWP require to meet this enabler first** <u>**January 2006:**</u> If necessary, arrange access protocol with SOLP and/or local police to have access to required information.	December 2005
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>**April 2006:**</u> Rochford is part of the special interest group set up by Academy (our system provider) which are currently looking at all relevant letter templates. However, progress is slow and Rochford will as an interim produce leaflets and amend any templates that have significant failings. A review of all letters will need to be carried out by a qualified officer.	March 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 email	Revenues & Benefits Manager	Senior Benefits Officer and Training Officer	**April 2006** Once the Comino Electronic records Management System is introduced, Rochford will be able to accurately set individual targets for staff monitor these and use as part of training and PDR	March 2006

and the LA monitors performance against the targets.			process	
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)	**February 2006** Rent Service & JCP are not assisting with review. Meeting to be arranged to discuss issues and guidance taken on how best improve our monitoring an liaison.	February 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 Service (CPS) or Procurator Fiscal in Scotland.	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	<u>**February 2006:**</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 <u>**March 2006:**</u> Put in place formalised and documented working arrangements with appropriate "other organisations" after SLA issues in E45 have been resolved.	February 2006 February 2006
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	Revenues & Benefits Manager	Revenues & Benefits Manager and Financial Services Manager	<u>**June 2006:**</u> 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, Colchester and Maldon. Financial Services Manager to review the costs of the service with details how these	May 2006

potential over or under spends or efficiency objectives and there is an audit trail on the costs and adjustments.			costs are made up.	
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	**June 2006:** Audit section to either carry out a computer audit or seek evidence from other authorities who have carried out such an audit on Academy.	May 2006
E63 - The LA carries out a check which includes a sample case check, on its quarterly performance measure data to validate user input before submitting it to DWP.	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	**March 2006:** **Clarify what DWP require to meet this enabler first** **Checks to commence from last quarter 2005/2006**	March 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
Define Service Delivery Model possible and report to Committee	31/03/06	SJC	SJC	15/03/06	
Identify barriers to project progressing	31/03/06	SJC	SJC	15/03/06	
Provide solutions to barriers	30/06/06	SJC/SL/VC	SJC/SL/VC	15/06/06	
Authorities to sign up to common delivery model and seek Member agreement to progress to next stage	31/07/06	SJC/SL	SJC/SL	15/07/06	

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
1. Processing of claims	1			Asst Manager (Benefits)		April 2006	No	No
2. Overpayments	1			Asst Manager (Benefits)		April 2006	No	No
3. electronic records management	1			Asst Manager (Fraud)		April 2006	Yes	No
4. Council Tax collection	1			Asst Manager (Revenues)		April 2006	No	No
5. Changes of circumstances	2			Asst Manager (Benefits)		April 2006	No	No
6. Fraud detection	2			Asst Manager (Fraud)		April 2006	No	No
7. Training	3			Training Officer		April 2006	Yes	No
8. Accuracy	1			Senior Officer (quality)		April 2006	No	No
9. Direct Debit	3			Project & Publicity Officer		April 2006	Yes	No
10. Consultation	3			Revenues & Benefits Manager		April 2006	Yes	No
11. Performance standards	2			Revenues & Benefits Manager		April 2006	Yes	Yes
12. Partnership working	2			Head of Revenues & Housing Management			Yes	Yes

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

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│ Corporate Management Board and Designated Corporate Director  │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              │
               ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
               │ Head of Revenue and Housing Management │
               └──────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐  ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Training Officer /      │──│ Revenues and     │──│ Project and Publicity│
│ Quality Control         │  │ Benefits Manager │  │ Officer             │
└─────────────────────────┘  └──────────────────┘  └─────────────────────┘
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Business Support Manager	Assistant Manager (Revenues)	Assistant Manager (Benefits)	Assistant Manager (Fraud)
Business Support ICT	Revenues and Local Taxation Recovery	Benefits Administration and claim processing Benefits Assessment	Counter-Fraud Investigations Intervention Visiting CTAX/NNDR Inspections

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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	Pending	Claire Malcolm
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	Pending	Pam Shepherd
Consultancy & take up	Pending	Scott Logan

These policy and procedure documents are available, together with the overall Operational Plan, through the Service Head and section manager.