

Business Plan for Residents Advice & Shared Services - April 2012 to September 2013

1. Introduction

1.1 The Service's key responsibilities are:

- The delivery of centralised operational support services to directorates – Payments, Payroll, Pensions, Customer Accounts, HR Support, Income & Reconciliation, Property Management, Highways Operational & Business Support, Operational Support, Complaints Monitoring, Monitoring and Payment of Utility Bills
- The delivery of direct services – Council Tax, Business Rates, Benefits (including Fraud), Administration of Parking Fines, Blue Badge Administration, Help Centres & Contact Centre.

1.2 National Context

Reducing resources, delivery of value for money, transparency and the need to reduce back office costs.

Government proposals to reform welfare are likely to change the way in which support towards rent and council tax are provided in the next few years. This will mean that the Benefits Service will be required to adapt to meet the new legislation that is introduced and support residents in meeting these changes to national priorities – specifically the introduction of universal credit and localising Council Tax Benefits in 2013 / 2014

The introduction of a centralised Universal Credit from October 2013 will significantly change the way that Housing Benefit is to be administered by the Local Authority. Whilst Universal Credit is intended to be phased in over a four year period with the existing Housing benefit caseload, this will present new challenges to residents in accessing advice, and support relating to this new centrally administered benefit. Additionally the Local Authority will face a number of challenges relating to a service provision that is required and how it might support any Universal Credit delivery particularly with face to face transactions. The Government will continue to increase the level of Discretionary Housing Payment funds available to local authorities to enable them to support local residents in a much larger scale.

The dissolution of the national Social Fund is due from April 2013. This will see Local Authorities that are either a Unitary or County Council become responsible for the administration of Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants. Each Local Authority is free to choose what they do with the funding for the scheme, as it is not ring fenced, although the government would prefer that Local Authorities use the monies towards the intended purposes and align closely to the Discretionary Housing Payments processes.

The current system of collection of Business Rates by local authorities which is pooled centrally by government and redistributed to local authorities as part of formula grant will be changing. Government is proposing to repatriate business rates, allowing councils to keep a

greater proportion of the taxes raised locally. Therefore the intention is to introduce business rates retention from April 2013. In July 2011, proposals for business rates retention were produced as part of the Local Government Resource Review and 8 technical papers were produced in August 2011, providing more detail. A consultation by Government ran from 18th July 2011 on the proposals and on 19th December 2011 the Local Government Finance Bill was introduced which provides for the primary legislation for this to be introduced.

There are proposals by Government to give billing authorities greater discretion over the reliefs from Council Tax available in respect of second homes and some empty properties and other potential reforms of the Council Tax system including modernising arrangements for payment of council tax by instalments. Technical reforms of council tax consultation ran from October to December 2011 by Government and the Local Government Finance Bill provides for the primary legislation for changes to be introduced from April 2013.

With amendments made to the Department for Transport National Blue Badge scheme introduced from January 2012, administration of the application is completed through a national system. These reforms have led to a review of how the processing of the applications is administered within the Council to provide the most efficient means possible.

The Localising Support for Council Tax consultation by Government was issued in August 2011 and, as announced in the 2010 Spending Review, support for Council Tax will be localised from 2013 and expenditure reduced by 10%. Each billing authority must make a council tax reduction scheme by 31st January 2013 and those schemes must relate to financial year 2013/14.

The Government intends to introduce a Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) that will seek to centralise the current activities relating to Fraud Investigation work across a number of Welfare Benefits into one. The introduction of SFIS investigation processes is due to commence during 2013. However, the Government has announced that Local Authority Fraud staff will be retained under the Local Authority control until at least 2015, but in doing so may have to adopt the new SFIS investigation strategies once they become operational.

Within the administration of all areas of Residents Advice & Shared Services there are many Government returns to be completed and the teams also have to respond to government surveys to feed back information.

Teams provide information for annual benchmarking exercises so that a comparison on performance can be made against colleagues nationally. There is staff attendance at meetings of the benchmarking groups on a periodic basis to discuss procedures and processes within each authority with a view to ensuring that, against a background of best value and Value for Money, the authorities can understand each others procedures and to take on board best practice. There is also staff attendance at national and regional meetings and technical groups where there is the opportunity to give comment and feedback on legislative consultation processes and the interpretation of legislation.

Discussions have taken place nationally on the sustainability and affordability of the current Local Government Pension Scheme. It is likely that the proposals contained within the Hutton Review will be implemented in the very near future – possibly for 2012/2013.

1.3 Local Context

The Revenues & Benefits Team continues to Chair and administer the Anti Poverty Group to address some of the issues connected with the economic downturn, bringing together members from various organisations across the Island to help residents maximise their income, create an increased awareness through signposting and providing debt advice assistance. This links into the Health & Wellbeing Board and Eco-Island themes and aims of tackling poverty and financial inclusion.

Through participation of the above group the Benefits Team will be assisting the Council with delivering strategies around Financial Inclusion, budgeting, Child Poverty and homeless prevention.

With the impending Business Rates Retention, Council Tax technical reforms, Localising support for Council Tax Scheme from 2013, the legislation will be passed during 2012. The impact of these reforms will lead to a greater burden on maximisation of collection of Council Tax and Business Rates.

The Localism Bill, which received Royal Assent on 15th November 2011, amended section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 allowing local authorities to reduce the business rates of any local ratepayer in any circumstances. Central Government will continue to part fund discretionary relief in the same circumstances and to the same degree as in previous years. However, local authorities are responsible for fully funding any other discounts granted. The changes came into force from April 2012 and therefore a review of the discretionary rate relief policy and an impact assessment will be undertaken.

The Localising Support for Council Tax will require a scheme to be in place by 31 January 2013 to replace Council Tax Benefit (CTB) from 1 April 2013. This will require the authority to devise a scheme with a 10% reduction to the grant monies provided for the current CTB scheme. Extensive modelling of the current CTB expenditure and options available to the Local Authority will be required to be presented to Members for formal consideration and approval of the adopted scheme to be administered having considered any impact assessment.

The introduction of the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) is due to be brought in from 2013. However, local authority Fraud staff are to be retained by the local authority until at least 2015 when the arrangements are to be reviewed. The SFIS arrangements may require the local authority fraud staff to adopt the national fraud processes which are being determined.

Wider Welfare Reform changes relating to Universal Credit will see significant changes to the way that Housing Benefit is administered by the local authority. Whilst the changes are to be introduced over a four year transitional period, there will be much to consider over the way that benefits are delivered and the continuing role that local authority benefit staff will have with other elements of welfare reforms such as increased administration of Discretionary Housing Payments, Social Fund changes with administration of Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants being passed to the local authority, and the potential for face to face Universal Credit enquiries being handled by the local authority.

The report on Isle of Wight Council Organisation; Future Shape and Direction agreed at Cabinet on 7 December 2010 sets out key principles and the framework for delivering council services over the next few years. For Residents Advice & Shared Services the overarching priority will be to further centralise and develop all transactional activities into a structure that more effectively and cost-efficiently serves the Council and, in so doing, to deliver budget savings through changed service provision underpinned by specific key principles of:

- The public will increasingly resolve their issues through the internet without the need for personal contact with Council staff. When they do need personal contact, we will resolve their issues at the first point of contact i.e. the Call Centre & the Help Centre;
- All areas of statutory duty to be subjected to robust challenge to ensure that the investment in resources is at the appropriate level, following a reasonable needs assessment, to ensure our responsibilities are met adequately;
- Central support services will be reduced on a pro-rata basis over time to reflect the changing shape and size of the organisation and, where appropriate, will be subject to market testing and / or joint working with other local authorities

All the above activities are carried out with due consideration being given to the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (which are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage/civil partnership; pregnancy/maternity; race; religion/belief; sex and sexual orientation) in accordance with the public sector duty in the exercise of its functions to give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct; advance the equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between people. For changes to strategy, policy or service delivery/redesign, an equality impact assessment will be undertaken.

2. Key Business Objectives

Number	Business Objective	Linking to Corporate Priority or Directorate Plan
1	Shared Services – to organise transactional activities into a structure that more effectively and cost-efficiently serves the Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in back office functions delivered through Shared Service Centre • Delivery of budget savings • Reduction in staffing pay costs
2	Customers – to improve service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all monies payable to our customers is paid promptly within service guidelines • Resolve customer issues at the first point of contact i.e. the Contact Centre & the Help Centre • Develop partnering opportunities with the CAB to assist with front line support • Reduce the number of complaints upheld • Work with suppliers to develop and automate processes which will reduce costs • Standardise contracts and leases to make it clear where the responsibility for costs lie
3	Income – to maximise the collection of income for the Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximise collection of all monies owed to the Council • Review service charges and rents to ensure that they represent the market rate • Ensure that operating costs are reviewed annually so costs for delivering services to schools and outside bodies are recovered.
4	Welfare Reforms & Localism Act – to guide and raise the awareness of residents, rate payers, council tax payers & stakeholders and to prepare the council for the impact of delivering welfare reforms and the collection of revenue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear information for our residents and stakeholders potentially impacted by the various welfare reforms • Consultation – Equality Impact Assessment – consider type of scheme to be delivered – consult major preceptors, other groups for broad consultation • Develop a Local Council Tax Support scheme to replace Council Tax Benefit for April 2013 • Develop and review discretionary relief schemes that seek to support residents and businesses to meet the changes from The Localism Bill and Welfare Reforms within the financial capabilities of the council.

3. Key Business Objectives Details:

Key Business Objective 1: Shared Services – to organise transactional activities into a structure that more effectively and cost- efficiently serves the Council.

Key Activities to support the objective	Success Factors by 30-9-2013 (or completion date of activity)
1. Continually review existing service processes to ensure that quality & cost-effectiveness is maintained & efficiency savings realised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIPFA Benchmarking annual performance & cost data • Achievement of annual efficiency savings targets
2. Support Job Evaluation Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in staff costs - ensure all transactional changes reflected in individual contracts and pay by April 2013.
3. Staff training and development to plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of staff able to administer basic activities across more than one discipline
4. Review of SAP, SRM, HR/Payroll, and Finance modules in order to identify any enhancements and/or reconfiguration required to meet any key issues or problems preventing effective operations, information provision and control.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System operating efficiently • Reduced duplication of work • Reduction in staff costs • Improved data quality

Risks

Lack of resource & key personnel to deliver current performance & the ability to continue to develop the service

Loss of systems & technology

Deterioration in the quality of data as the SSC model moves away from specialism

Performance Measures

Payroll – Percentage (%) of payslips where no errors that are attributable to the Payroll Section have occurred

Pensions – Percentage (%) of lump sum retirement grants paid within 5 days of receipt of required information

Pensions – Percentage (%) of pension estimates provided within 10 days

HR – Percentage (%) of contracts issued in 8 weeks (excluding schools) (cumulative)

HR – Percentage (%) of schools contracts issued in 8 weeks (cumulative)

Contact Centre – Percentage (%) of calls answered in person

Key Business Objective 2: Customers – to improve service delivery

Key Activities to support the objective	Success Factors by 30-9-2013 (or completion date of activity)
1. Resolve customer issues at the first point of contact for all services handled by Shared Service Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All personal customer contact through Help Centre & Contact Centre • Increased % of enquiries dealt with at first point of contact • Increased usage of CRM & 'message to service' option removed • Increase end to end processes available online
2. Monitor complaints to ensure learning outcomes are implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced LGO complaints upheld
3. Improve accessibility to information on line and over the telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in % of end to end processes on line • Increase in email usage to deliver responses to enquiries more quickly • Development of automated scripted responses to common enquires
4. Provide clear documentation for our customers - review and standardise contracts and leases to clearly define areas of responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete review by March 2013
5. Pay suppliers & staff promptly and accurately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIPFA Benchmarking performance data • % payslips where no errors have occurred

Risks
Loss of systems & technology
Failure to improve the overall customer's experience when contacting the Call Centre
Lack of resource & key personnel to deliver current performance levels to cover the customer demand in the Corporate Call Centre & the ability to continue to develop the service
Failing to improve the overall customer's experience when contacting the Isle of Wight Council through the Help Centre
Failure to embed the practice required for the new complaints procedure including the vexatious complainers
Failure to embed the practices which will ensure that we record learning from complaints for assessment purposes

Performance Measures
Percentage (%) of all enquiries resolved at first point of contact by Contact Centre
Percentage (%) of all enquiries resolved at first point of contact by Help Centre
Number of complaints upheld by the Ombudsman
Payroll – Percentage (%) of payslips where no errors that are attributable to the Payroll Section have occurred
Creditor payments – Percentage (%) of invoices paid within 20 days of receipt
Revenues & Benefits - Average number of working days to process new benefit claims
Revenues & Benefits - Average number of working days to process benefit change of circumstances
Revenues & Benefits - Number of sanctions per annum
Contact Centre - Average time taken to answer a call (in seconds)

Key Business Objective 3: Income – to maximise the collection of income for the Council

Key Activities to support the objective	Success Factors by 31-9-2013 (or completion date of activity)
1. Review of all service charges and rents to reflect market value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent reviews determine that rents are market value • Balanced Budgets
2. Maximise collection of all debt payable to the Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of CIPFA Benchmarking annual collection statistics to maintain & improve performance against other authorities
3. Maximise Benefit Subsidy received from the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortfall of subsidy against benefit expenditure no greater than 4%

Risks
Lack of resource & key personnel to deliver current performance & the ability to continue to develop the service
Loss of systems & technology
Failure to improve the overall customer's experience when contacting the Call Centre
Failing to improve the overall customer's experience when contacting the Isle of Wight Council through the Help Centre
Failure to collect the amount set in the budget for Council Tax & Business Rates 2012/14

Performance Measures
Percentage (%) of Council Tax collected (cumulative)
Percentage (%) of NNDR collected (cumulative)
Revenues & Benefits – Percentage (%) of sundry debt collected for current financial year (cumulative)
Customer Accounts - Percentage (%) of Council Income allocated within 48 hours

Key Business Objective 4: Welfare Reforms & Localism Act – to guide and raise the awareness of residents, rate payers, council tax payers & stakeholders and to prepare the council for the impact of delivering welfare reforms and the collection of revenue.

Key Activities to support the objective	Success Factors by 30-9-2013 (or completion date of activity)
1. Provide clear information for our customers and stakeholders potentially impacted by the various welfare reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased usage of information available of iweight.com • Attendance at regular forums in which to provide updates such as; Landlord Forums, Housing Strategy Groups, Members, Anti Poverty Group, Other relevant Stakeholder events. • Targeted use of mail shots, and other publications to residents impacted by changes where deemed appropriate
2. Develop a Local Council Tax Support scheme to replace Council Tax Benefit for April 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LCTS scheme developed and in place by 31.1.13 • LCTS expenditure within the grant budget allocation to avoid budget deficit • Use of a modelling system tool to fully understand the different impacts being placed on residents to allow members to make informed decisions • Maintained expected level of Revenue collection and recovery of overpayments despite reductions to working age award levels • Consultation taken place with major preceptors & other groups • Equality Impact Assessment completed
3. Develop and review discretionary relief schemes that seek to support residents and businesses to meet the changes from The Localism Bill and Welfare Reforms within the financial capabilities of the council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement Social Fund Scheme introduced 1.4.13 • Expenditure of Grant funding from Social Fund within agreed funding limits • Replacement Social Fund scheme meets specific needs relating to access to Community Care Grants and Crisis Loan circumstances • Discretionary Housing Payment Policy introduced to reflect changes to the welfare reforms and that balance to the cash grant allocation • Review of the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy • Minimising the impact of administration and collection of Council Tax as a result of any changes made in relation to the “Technical reforms of council tax” i.e. powers to levy up to full

	<p>council tax on second homes, replacing Class A & C with discounts etc</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with various groups • Equality Impact Assessment completed
4. Determine and prepare for the introduction of the Single Fraud Investigation Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain high level of fraud detection levels on IW • Retained local authority fraud investigation knowledge
5. Explore opportunities to work with the Department for Works and Pensions in the delivery of Universal Credit and for Island Residents to access advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the ability for residents to access local advice and support • % of enquiries resolved at FPOC • Develop partnership opportunities between JCP and Local Authority Benefit Staff to retain experienced and knowledgeable staff to provide local advice • Selection by DWP to pilot a Universal Credit face to face delivery before the full introduction in October 2013

Risks
Lack of resource & key personnel to deliver current performance & the ability to continue to develop the service
Loss of systems & technology
Failure to collect the amount set in the budget for Council Tax & Business Rates 2012/14
Failing to improve the overall customer's experience when contacting the Isle of Wight Council through the Help Centre
Failure to provide a Local Council Tax Support Scheme to replace Council Tax Benefit from April 2013 which is affordable and will not result in the council ending up in a budget deficit
Project Risk Register for LCTB project

Performance Measures
Percentage (%) of Council Tax collected (cumulative)
Percentage (%) of NNDR collected (cumulative)
Percentage (%) of all enquiries resolved at first point of contact by Contact Centre
Percentage (%) of all enquiries resolved at first point of contact by Help Centre