



# Executive Committee

No Direct Ward Relevance

10 June 2009

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## Benefits Services – Improvement Plan

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(Report of the Head of Financial, Revenues and Benefits Services)

### 1. Summary of Proposals

To seek Member approval of an Improvement Plan for the Benefits Service that will respond to the recommendations made by the Audit Commission.

### 2. Recommendations

**The Committee is asked to RECOMMEND that**

**the Benefit Services Improvement Plan be implemented**

### 3. Financial, Legal, Policy, Risk and Sustainability Implications

#### Financial

- 3.1 Additional resources have been allocated to the service. £40,000 from the 2009/10 revenue bids and an additional £54,757 towards administration costs from the Department of Work and Pensions. These resources reflect the increased workload within the Benefits Service due to the economic downturn and an underlying increase in claims.

#### Legal

- 3.2 None identified.

#### Policy

- 3.3 There are no specific policy implications.

#### Risk

- 3.4 The Audit Commission have advised that they will re-inspect the Benefits Service within 24 months of the original inspection in February 2009. If the proposed improvements are not in place by this time there is a risk that the second report leads to a recommendation that the Department of Work and Pensions are asked to intervene

### Sustainability / Environmental

3.5 None identified.

### **Report**

#### **4. Background**

In February 2009 the Audit Commission carried out an inspection of the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Service. The Service was assessed against published key lines of enquiry inspection and found to be providing a poor service and with uncertain prospects for improvement. The report identified several weaknesses and made recommendations on how to improve the Service. These recommendations form the basis of the Service Improvement Plan. The report also suggested the Performance Development Team from the Department of Work and Pensions be used to help deliver the required improvements.

#### **5. Key Issues**

The key issues identified in the Audit Commission Inspection Report have been detailed in the Improvement Plan as Action Areas. The draft Improvement Plan is attached as Appendix 1.

#### **6. Other Implications**

Asset Management - None.

Community Safety - None.

Human Resources - Additional staff resources have been engaged.

Social Exclusion - Failure to address some of the issues raised by the inspection may impact upon social exclusion.

#### **7. Lessons Learnt**

These are detailed in the Improvement Plan.

#### **8. Background Papers**

Benefits Inspection – Audit Commission Report April 2009.

**9. Consultation**

This report has been prepared in consultation with relevant Borough Council Officers.

**10. Author of Report**

The author of this report is Teresa Kristunas (Head of Financial, Revenues and Benefits Services), who can be contacted on extension 3295 (e-mail:teresa.kristunas@redditchbc.gov.uk ) for more information.

**11. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Benefits Service - Business Improvement Plan.