Benefits Services Improvement Plan

Ref	Action Area	Improvement	How	Who	When
R1	**Improve the management and collection of all Housing Benefit overpayments.**	Reduce the level of overpayments outstanding through proactive and structured management.			**31/01/2010**
R1a	Reviewing the roles and responsibilities for recovery.	Decide where HB debt recovery should take place.	PDT to help facilitate discussions.	D Taylor J Bough PDT	19/05/2009
R1b	Ensure that the resources needed are made available.	Ensure adequate resources are applied to recovery processes.	Depending upon outcome of R1a	D Taylor J Bough	19/06/2009
R1c	Reviewing debts and improving procedures for recovery, monitoring and management.	Review current debts and identify any write -off, update policy and procedures.	Review current debts, update recovery policy, puit in place monitoring arrangements.	D Taylor K Herbert S Maddox J Bough	30/12/09
R1d	Review the write off policies and procedure.	Introduce more streamlined and responsive procedure.	Write new procedure and review levels requiring further authorisation.	T Kristunas D Taylor J Bough D Riley	31/08/2009
R1e	Effective prevention work to reduce overpayments arising, particularly LA Error overpayment.	Appropriately maximise the Council's grant income. Link to current improvement plan.	Build on Think Lean NVQ processes – LA errors monitored weekly – additional staff to keep work up to date – ensure effective prioritisation is applied.	D Taylor K Herbert S Maddox S Knight	30/09/09
R1f	Improve information sent to customers so that underlying entitlement can be established.	Letters to customers request additional information to make it clear that by providing it they may be able to reduce overpayment.	Staff awareness and training. Review and re-word letters. Link to R8a	S Maddox C Coleman V Lewis	31/10/2009
R1g	Need for an embedded mechanism to ensure that all debtors already on the sundry debtors system can be identified if they reclaim benefit.	Automate where possible identification of Sundry debts where HB in payment.	Find out from System Administrator and/or IBS what is possible. Look at alternatives.	D Taylor V Lewis J Bough IBS	31/12/2009
R1h	Overall profile of the historic debt is not reported or regularly monitored.	Increase number of reports and monitoring.	Monthly reporting and monitoring of aged debt.	A Vernon S Maddox	30/09/09
R1i	Create a SMART plan to improve overpayment recovery.	Use SMART plans to improve recovery.		D Taylor	31/01/10
R2	**Increase income levels of the poorest parts of the community by adopting a Take-Up strategy.**	**Create Take-Up strategy**			**30/09/2009**
R2a	A description of roles and responsibilities.	Identify key roles to develop strategy.	PDT facilitating brainstorming exercise. Poverty Task Group.	D Taylor PDT	19/05/2009
R2b	Dates of activity and events agreed with partners and other	Annual plan with dates of activities.	Plan activities and dates.	D Taylor PDT PTG	31/07/2009

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	stakeholders.				
R2c	Better use of local demographic information to help identify potential areas of under-claiming.	Investigate IT solution to aid identification and improve understanding of the needs of people within the community.	Work with developer to map statistical data to local areas.	D Taylor	31/08/2009
R2d	Clear measures of effectiveness.	Define measure to monitor progress.	Links to R5b accuracy rate Measure Take-up rates.	D Taylor	30/06/09
R2e	Better targeting of resources and the maximisation of entitlement of benefit to vulnerable people.	Focus resources.	Link to R8b unsuccessful claims and R2c identify areas in most need to target input.		
R3	**Improve the accessibility of the Service.**				**31/10/2010**
R3a	Seek customer and internal and external stakeholders views for consideration in the design of the Service, to ensure it meets their needs.	Seek stakeholder involvement in Service design.	Range of focus groups, landlords, claimants, partners.	D Taylor	31/09/2009 >
R3b	Jointly working with public sector, voluntary and community organisations locally to improve the delivery of service		Poverty task group and other partners.		
R3c	Develop relationship with RSL's		Quarterly meetings to be arranged.	D Taylor	30/06/2009
R3d	Understanding and addressing the needs of disabled persons and vulnerable groups.		See R10f		30/11/2009
R3e	Promote the appointments system and home visits facility.		See R10b	D Taylor L Jones Benefits Officers Communications team	31/08/2009
R4	**Ensure challenging service standards and performance targets are in place, that are relevant to customers needs.**	Introduce clear Service standards and performance targets.	Service plans show continuous improvement and include service standards – make more available including on website.		**Interim 30/09/2009 Full 30/09/2010**
R4a	Develop service standards and performance targets through consultation with key stakeholders including customers, partners and Councillors.	Engage with customers and stakeholders to determine targets, or the processes by which success will be measured.	Web, news letter, focus meetings. Range of focus groups, landlords, claimants, partners. Links to R3a.	T Kristunas D Taylor	30/11/09

R4b	Promote them to customers and regularly monitor performance against the standards and targets and report results to customers, senior managers and Councillors.	Make sure appropriate performance measures are reported to senior managers to ensure suitable decisions are made about the Service.	Web, news letter, focus meetings Decide what performance data is required and report on monthly basis. OSS and web plus newsletter.		30/11/09
R4c	Ensure that the Service has robust plans to deliver the standards and targets.		See R6b – Action Plans Monitor compliance of Service to corporate Customer Service Standards which are set out in the Customer Charter.	D Taylor K Herbert S Maddox S Knight	19/06/09
R4d	Ensure that the Service has the capacity to deliver them.		Three additional staff.		30/06/09
R4e	Greater clarity for both internal and external customers as to what the Service is aiming to achieve.		New service plan to clarify Service aims.	T Kristunas D Taylor	30/06/09
R4f	Greater transparency of performance will enable Councillors' challenge to be more effective which can help drive further improvement.		Regular performance information plus comparison.	T Kristunas D Taylor	31/12/09
R4g	Relate service costs directly to the outcomes and performance delivered, establishing whether improving value for money is being achieved.		Link to R11 Value for Money 100% subsidy received for LA errors for 2008/09 subject to audit. Link additional staff to improved PI times – take into account increased work load.	T Kristunas	31/03/10
R5	**Performance Improvement**				**31/10/2010**
R5a	Improve claim processing performance.		New staff recruited and initial training undertaken. Review best delivery method.	K Herbert	30/06/2009 30/06/2010
R5b	Improve accuracy rate to above average performance.	Improved training and monitoring. Last year accuracy was 99.09%.	New on-line manual. Increase level of checking.	K Herbert S Maddox S Knight	30/09/09
R5c	Improve Appeals performance in meeting its targets. The published target is to make a submission to the Tribunals Service within 28 days.		Analyse reasons for Appeals. Review resources. Leaflet to advise.	S Maddox C Coleman	31/01/2010
R5d	Introduce a clear and cohesive approach to delivering improvement for customers. Create detailed		2010 service and action plans to include Service user feedback. Post –Inspection Improvement		31/10/2010

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	improvement plans to manage and monitor improvement against key objectives, which have been informed by service users and stakeholders. Set realistic targets and milestones which support the aims of the Service and Council.		plan.		
R6	**Service Planning**				**31/12/09**
R6a	Develop specific aims for the Benefits Service.		New service plans sets out service aims	T Kristunas D Taylor	
R6b	Service Plan to be supported by a detailed action plan that identifies key activities, responsibilities and measures of success that can be recognised by customers. These should address problem areas and have specific and measurable targets, linked to staff objectives.		Allocate individual roles from service plan – link to appraisal. Write action plans as to how achieve service plan objectives.	D Taylor K Herbert S Maddox S Knight	19/06/2009
R6c	Involve staff in setting future priorities and objectives for the Service, to shape the immediate future of the Service.	It is intended that these issues will be addressed by the new performance management framework.	Plan for staff involvement in 2010/11 Service Plans.	T Kristunas D Taylor	01/11/2009
R6d	The Service should specifically acknowledge how it will support and contribute to the priorities of the Worcestershire LAA; reducing the proportion of children in poverty, increasing the number of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living and successful new claims generated for Pension Credit, Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance.		Service plans and action plans should specifically state link and targets where possible. Link to R2 – Take-Up strategy.	T Kristunas D Taylor	31/07/2009
R7	**Performance Management**				**31/03/2010**
R7a	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is not sufficiently involved in overseeing the management of performance. There should be a greater emphasis on		Improvement plan to be monitored by Council. Improved range and frequency of performance information available.		**31/12/09**

	performance analysis against existing policies and obligations rather than future policy development. Increase the role of the Portfolio Holder in performance management and improvement planning.		Links to R7c.		
R7b	Improve Performance management arrangements at service level. Introduce staff performance appraisals and individual or team targets for processing staff. Measure productivity systematically. Embed new performance management.	The new performance management framework will embed a greater degree of accountability, as individuals are given personal appraisals, set measurable targets and have specific training needs identified.	Set individual targets and hold regular appraisals.	D Taylor K Herbert S Maddox S Knight	31/05/2009
R7c	Limited up to date management information is available to senior managers and Councillors to assess variations in performance, or make comparisons.		Decide who wants information and when – decide best way to access and distribute data.	T Kristunas D Taylor	31/12/09
R7d	Introduce regular reporting of current performance to customers against either the corporate Customer Service Standards or the Service targets.	Update figures on website – let OSS and Housing know performance.		D Taylor S Maddox L Jones J Bough	30/09/09
R7e	Ensure future demand and the potential impact of take-up campaigns and external economic circumstances are regularly evaluated to support future planning and resource management. Map demand to identify peaks and troughs to ensure adequate processes are in place to forecast future demand.		Monthly analysis of claim made data. Use external resources to identify local economic factors i.e. county website on unemployment changes. Resilience fund to respond to changes in work load. Identify work getting behind and have plan to improve.	D Taylor K Herbert S Maddox S Knight	31/03/10
R7f	There are not yet robust, formally adopted SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, resourced and time-based) plans in place to give clear structure to the delivery of improvement.		PDT to assist in outline of improvement plan. Improvement plan going to Council – action plans from Service plans.	T Kristunas D Taylor	30/06/09

R8	**Customer Information**				**30/05/2010**
R8a	Information provided is not easy for customers to understand and does not help claimants to provide all of the evidence required, leading to excessive appeals and reconsiderations. Customers are providing evidence after the decision date which is resulting in a change to the decision.		Review letters Consult with service users. Training issue in IBS.	D Taylor K Herbert S Maddox V Baldwin IBS	30/05/10
R8b	Increase understanding of the reasons for the high number of unsuccessful and defective (incomplete) claims.	Further detailed analysis to understand reasons.	IBS report to identify reasons.	D Taylor S Maddox V Lewis	31/12/2009
R9	**Customer led Improvement**				**31/10/2010**
R9a	The Service does not systematically measure customer satisfaction on an ongoing basis.		Introduce Customer satisfaction surveys – decide frequency and reporting method.	D Taylor	30/09/2009
R9b	The Service cannot clearly demonstrate that it has delivered significant improvements in outcomes for service users.		Compare processing times to show improvements.	T Kristunas D Taylor	31/05/10
R9c	Introduce a formal mechanism to use customer feedback as part of the service planning used to improve the Service. E.g. fast-tracking in One Stop Shop. The changes should clearly demonstrate what impact they have had.		Already undertaken one survey to find out customer preferences. Link customer responses to service changes – you said you wanted this – we introduced this.	D Taylor S Knight L Jones	31/10/09
R9d	A benefits realisation methodology should be applied to demonstrate Think Lean improvements are proportionate to the resources used and lead to comes for the customer as a direct result.	Increased data available to demonstrate improvements.	Gather data to support Think Lean improvements.	D Taylor K Jones	31/12/2009
R10	**Customer Access**				
R10a	Improve telephone access. Calls put on hold or not answered at all. Customer service staff struggle to get through quickly. There is no		Increase number of lines available when needed Look at alternative number for OSS.	D Taylor L Jones	28/02/10

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	systematic monitoring of abandoned calls.		Monitor and respond to abandoned calls.	K Jones	
R10b	The appointments system in the Benefits Service is not operating effectively and it is difficult for users of the One Stop Shop to meet face to face with benefits assessors.		Review arrangements with OSS. New claim process to be delivered mostly by Benefit Officers.	D Taylor L Jones	31/08/2009
R10c	Leaflets and forms are not readily available in the One Stop Shops. Customers have to request them.	Consider making more leaflets available in OSS.	Review leaflet arrangements in OSS – consider alternatives.	D Taylor L Jones	31/08/2009
R10d	Benefits Service has not yet identified its hard to reach groups.	The Corporate Community Forum could be used to establish how well it is reaching these groups and identify ways to improve engagement with them.	Work with partner organisations to identify hard to reach groups.	D Taylor	31/07/10
R10e	The Service has not formally assessed whether all users have fair and equal access to the Service and its policies.	Complete equalities impact assessments as part of a three year rolling programme across the Council.	E-claim form to capture ethnicity.	D Taylor	31/03/2009
R10f	Some vulnerable claimants are receiving a slower service than other claimants.	Undertake further analysis to identify and understand the demographics and performance trends of its case load.	Sample check claims to see why any delay – compare to other claims	D Taylor	30/11/2009
R11	**Value for Money**				**31/03/2010**
R11a	Demonstrate improved outcomes that have arisen from actively exploring opportunities to work in partnership to deliver financial efficiencies.	Improved performance against cost of service. Increase recovery of overpaid HB. 100% subsidy for LA errors	Bromsgrove SS Training	T Kristunas D Taylor	31/03/10
R11b	The Benefits Services' net cost per head of population is lower than average and satisfaction is higher than average, but processing times are slow when compared to its statistical nearest neighbours.		Compare costs and satisfaction and performance.	T Kristunas D Taylor	31/01/2010
R11c	Compare costs to other services, calculate unit costs and seek to evaluate cost effectiveness.		Further develop County Group comparison.	D Taylor	30/06/2009
R11d	Create robust proposals for				

	delivering efficiency savings. Identify areas for efficiency savings that are cash-able and sustainable.				
R11e	Future investment proposals should demonstrate an awareness of linking improvement in performance value for money.	Link investment to improved performance and value for money.	Additional £40,000 – show what has been achieved – increased caseload but improved performance.	T Kristunas D Taylor	31/12/2009
R12	**Training**				**31/12/2009**
R12a	Develop a training plan that gives clear details of the cost of training, what the objective of the training is, or how its effectiveness will be determined. Create a transparent and prioritised system for identifying individuals who need particular training.		New training plan for all Benefits staff to include costs and desired outcomes. Formalise method of identifying individual training needs – link to new performance management framework.	K Herbert S Maddox S Knight	31/12/2009
R13	**System and System Reports**				**30/06/2010**
R13a	Improve data assurance in the process for compiling the performance indicators.		Review monitoring procedures and resources allocated. Increased checking of claim data.	D Taylor S Maddox	31/03/2010
R13b	Improve HB/CTB Subsidy Claim processes. Introduce testing of software releases and regular testing of claim accuracy during the year to ensure that subsidy calculation is accurate.		IBS consultancy day on subsidy. Regular testing of claim.	D Taylor I Sprott	06/05/2009 30/09/2009
R13c	IBS and Anite are not being used to best effect.	Have the ability to easily produce management information to monitor productivity and manage workloads.	Liaise with IBS and other IBS sites to learn best practice – build on links with Wyre Forest.	V Lewis D Taylor IBS Anite	30/06/2010

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R1	**Improve the management and collection of all Housing Benefit overpayments.**			**Finish** **31/01/2010**
R1a	Review the roles and responsibilities for recovery.	PDT to help facilitate discussions around current arrangements and future options.		19/05/09
R1aa	Analyse options – examine pros and cons.	Decide on preferred future arrangements.		
R1ab	Write report to propose preferred option seeking approval to change if required.			
R1ac	Set date for proposed change and plan for change.	Allow time to make arrangements. Check adequate seating arrangements. Check access to Debtor module		
R1b	Ensure that the resources needed are made available.	Depending upon outcome of R1a determine if adequate resources are available – any other staff to be used.		19/06/2009
R1ba		Is there a need for temporary resources to reduce old overpayments – set target reduction if used.		
R1bb				
R1bc				
R1c	Reviewing debts and improving procedures for recovery, monitoring and management.	PDT to offer guidance on best practice on recovery		
	Review debts	Look at aged debt analysis and reason for overpayment.		
	Look at all methods of recovery	Analyse success of different methods of recovery.		
	Write new procedures	Build upon draft procedure already in development – add to on-line procedure manual.		
	Management	Look at targets and outcomes -		
	Monitoring regime	Report on performance more frequently.		
R1d	Review the write off policies and procedure.	Analyse current problems – decide on how process can be improved.		31/08/2009
R1e	Effective prevention work to reduce overpayments arising, particularly LA Error overpayment.	Build upon existing outline plan		
R1f	Improve information sent to customers so that underlying entitlement can be established.	Letters to customers request additional information to make it clear that by providing it they may be able to reduce overpayment. Staff awareness and training. Review and re-word letters. Link to R8a		31/10/2009
R1g	Need for an embedded mechanism	Determine what current practice is.		31/12/2009

	to ensure that all debtors already on the sundry debtors system can be identified if they reclaim benefit.			
R1ga	Alternatives	Determine what other options are already available within IBS.		
R1gb	Check other sites	Determine if other users have similar problem or if they have solution.		
R1gc	Software enhancement	Determine if other developments are possible via IBS and at what cost.		
R1h	Overall profile of the historic debt is not reported or regularly monitored.	New IBS report to report on aged debt in future release – use PTC scheduler to ensure report run regularly – monitor output.		
R1i	Create a SMART plan to improve overpayment recovery.	Use SMART plans to improve recovery.		

R2	**Increase income levels of the poorest parts of the community by adopting a Take-Up strategy.**			**30/09/2009**
R2a	A description of roles and responsibilities.	Identify key roles to develop strategy. PDT facilitating brainstorming exercise.		19/05/2009
	Internal	Link to trailblazer initiatives.		
	External	Poverty Task Group.		
R2b	Dates of activity and events agreed with partners and other stakeholders.	Plan activities and dates.		31/07/2009
R2c	Better use of local demographic information to help identify potential areas of under-claiming.	Investigate IT solution to aid identification and improve understanding of the needs of people within the community. Work with developer to map statistical data to local areas.	D Taylor	31/08/2009
R2d	Clear measures of effectiveness.	Links to R5b accuracy rate Measure Take-up rates.		
R2e	Better targeting of resources and the maximisation of entitlement of benefit to vulnerable people.	Link to R8b unsuccessful claims and R2c identify areas in most need to target input.		
R3	**Improve the accessibility of the Service.**			**31/10/2010**
R3a	Seek customer and internal and external stakeholders views for consideration in the design of the Service, to ensure it meets their	Seek stakeholder involvement in Service design.	D Taylor	31/09/2009 >

	needs.			
R3aa	Identify stakeholders.	Range of focus groups, landlords, claimants, partners.		
R3ab	Consult.	Build upon initial customer survey to support service objectives.		
R3ac	Review.	Include where possible findings in future service plans.		
R3b	Jointly working with public sector, voluntary and community organisations locally to improve the delivery of service	Poverty task group and other partners.		
R3c	The relationships with RSLs are underdeveloped with limited regular liaison.	Develop relationship with RSL's	D Taylor	30/06/2009
	Identify relevant landlords.	Quarterly meetings to be arranged.		
	Formalise relationship.	Encourage landlords to sign up to existing SLA with Redditch Co-Op.		
	Review and report.	Share findings / improvements		
R3d	Understanding and addressing the needs of disabled persons and vulnerable groups.			30/11/2009
		See R10f		
		See R10b		
R3e	Promote the appointments system and home visits facility.	Complete Think Lean new claim revised process where Benefit Officers complete claim form with customers to ensure as much as information as possible is collected in one visit.	D Taylor L Jones Benefits Officers Communications team	31/08/2009
		Advertise and promote new service.		
		Advertise home visit – define who can expect home visit		
R4	**Ensure challenging service standards and performance targets are in place, that are relevant to customers needs.**	Introduce clear Service standards and performance targets. Service plans show continuous improvement and include service standards – make more available including on website.		**Interim 30/09/2009 Full 30/09/2010**
R4a	Develop service standards and performance targets through consultation with key stakeholders including customers, partners and Councillors.	Engage with customers and stakeholders to determine targets, or the processes by which success will be measured. Links to R3a.		

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R4aa	Identify stakeholders	Look at who should be consulted – internal and external.		31/07/09
R4ab	Decide most effective way to consult.	Range of focus groups, landlords, claimants, partners. Web or news letter?		31/07/09
R4ac	Arrangements	Plan for periodic consultation by preferred methods.		31/08/09
R4ad	Consultation process	Ask stakeholders about what levels of performance and standard of service they expect.		30/09/09
R4ae	Findings	Consider findings from consultation.		31/10/09
R4af	Use of information	Service and performance standards informed by consultation.		30/11/09
R4b	Promote and regularly monitor performance against standards and targets. Report results.	Make sure appropriate performance measures are reported to senior managers to ensure suitable decisions are made about the Service.	T Kristunas D Taylor	
R4ba	Promote to agreed time-scales.	Web, news letter, focus meetings		
R4bb	Report to agreed parties.	Decide what performance data is required and report on monthly basis. OSS and web plus newsletter.		
R4c	Ensure that the Service has robust plans to deliver the standards and targets.	See R6b – Action Plans Monitor compliance of Service to corporate Customer Service Standards which are set out in the Customer Charter.	D Taylor	
R4d	Ensure that the Service has the capacity to deliver them.	Three additional staff recruited with temporary agency staff to cover training period.		30/06/09
		Review allocation of resources – are right people in right posts.	D Taylor	30/09/09
		Any other resource issues – training, IT accommodation.		
		Risk assessment – other work which may impact on service.		
R4e	Greater clarity for both internal and external customers as to what the Service is aiming to achieve.	New service plan to clarify Service aims.	T Kristunas D Taylor	30/06/09
R4f	Councillors' challenge to help drive further improvement.	Regular performance information plus comparison. Link to R4bb.	T Kristunas D Taylor	31/12/09
R4e	Relate service costs directly to outcomes and performance.	Link to R11 Value for Money 100% subsidy received for LA errors for 2008/09 subject to audit. Link additional staff to improved PI times – take into account increased work load.	T Kristunas	31/03/10

R5	**Performance Improvement**			**31/10/2010**
R5a	Improve claim processing performance.	New staff recruited.	K Herbert S Maddox	30/05/2009
R5aa		Complete initial training programme.	K Herbert P Smith	30/06/10

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R5ab		Identify further training requirements.	K Herbert S Maddox	31/07/09
R5ac		Look at alternative ways of distributing work.		30/05/10
R5b	Improve accuracy rate to above average performance.	Improved training and monitoring. Last year accuracy was 99.09%New on-line manual. Increase level of checking..	K Herbert S Maddox S Knight	30/09/09
R5c	Improve Appeals performance in meeting its targets. The published target is to make a submission to the Tribunals Service within 28 days.	Analyse reasons for Appeals. Review resources. Leaflet to advise.	S Maddox C Coleman	31/01/2010
R5d	Introduce a clear and cohesive approach to delivering improvement for customers. Create detailed improvement plans to manage and monitor improvement against key objectives, which have been informed by service users and stakeholders. Set realistic targets and milestones which support the aims of the Service and Council.	2010 service and action plans to include Service user feedback. Post –Inspection Improvement plan.	T Kristunas D Taylor	31/10/2010