

Executive Committee

No Specific Ward Relevance

10th March 2010

BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT PLAN – QUARTERLY MONITORING OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2009

(Report of the Head of Resources)

1. **Summary of Proposals**

To advise members on the performance of the Benefits Service during the third quarter and to provide an update on progress against the Benefits Service Improvement Plan

2. **Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that

subject to any comments, the report be noted,

3. **Financial, Legal, Policy, Risk and Climate Change / Carbon Management Implications**

Financial

3.1 There are no specific financial implications

Legal

3.2 There are no specific legal implications.

Policy

3.3 There are no specific policy implications

Risk

3.4 Without adequate performance monitoring arrangements there is a risk that the planned/required improvements in the Benefits Service will not be achieved. In addition without an effective recovery procedures for overallowed Housing Benefit the Council will forego the ability to pursue debt recovery procedures with a consequential loss of income to the Council.

Climate Change / Carbon Management

- 3.5 There are no specific sustainability / environmental / climate change implications.

Report

4. Background

- 4.1 The Benefits Service Improvement Plan was developed in response to the Audit Commission Inspection in February 2009.

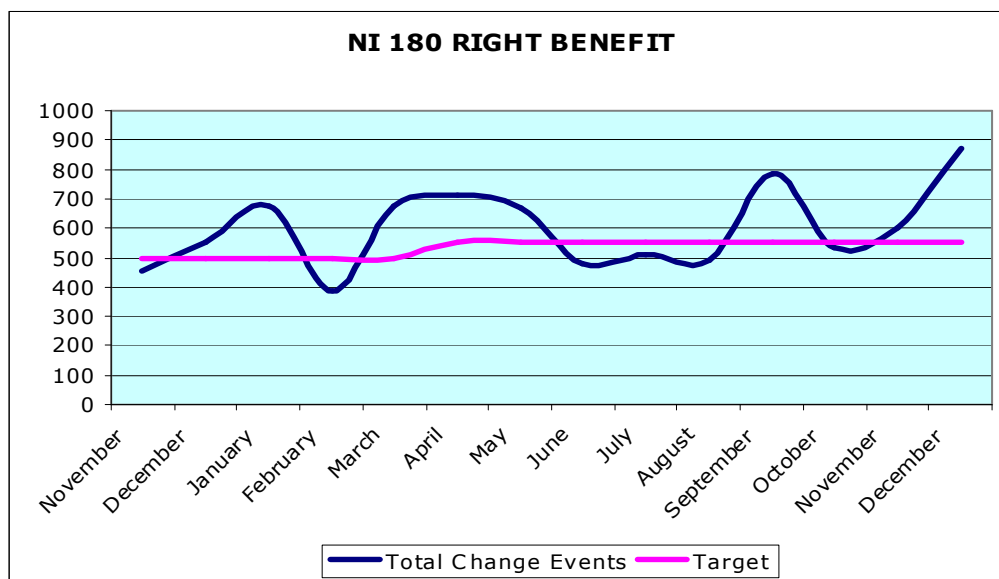
- 4.2 Work is progressing towards the aims of the improvement plan. The Performance Development Team (PDT) from the Department for Work and Pensions has been working with the Benefits Service to help implement the recommendations from the Audit Commission inspection. In particular they are looking at helping to improve overpayment recovery, devise a Take Up Strategy, improve access to the service and performance management.

5. Key Issues

Claims Performance

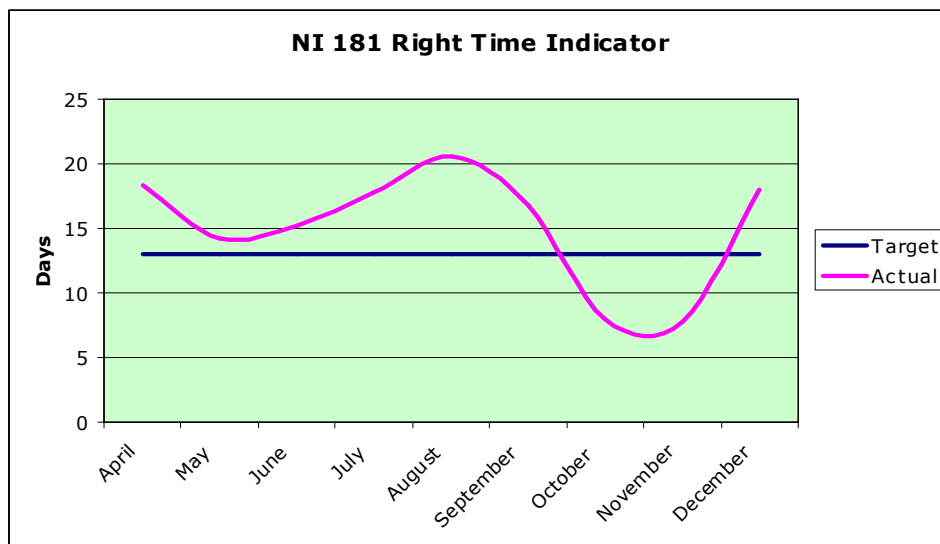
- 5.1. There are two national Indicators for the Benefits Service.

NI 180 Right Benefit – this measures the number of change events identified and actioned – a target of identifying 550 changes each month has been set and the service remains on track to meet this target.



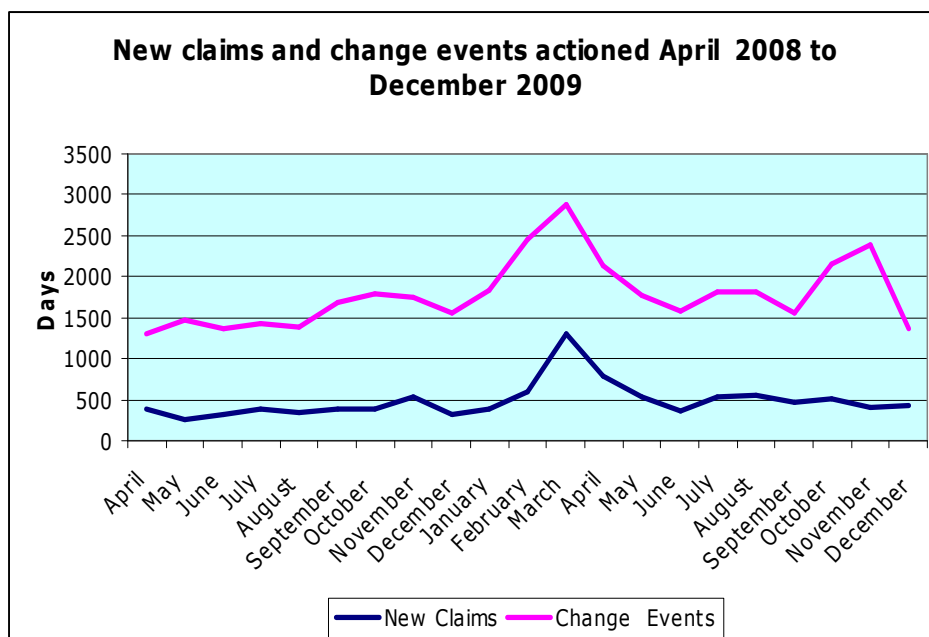
- 5.2 NI 181 – this is a measure of the average number of days taken to process new claims and changes in circumstances. An average of 13

days was set as a target and the year to date figure is 13 days. The third quarter figure of 9 days was helped by two bulk up rates to the system – one for the Council Tenant rent deduction and one for changes to how Child Benefit and Capital for pensioners are treated.



5.3 Case-load and Claims received

The number of claims received remained steady through the quarter with 1017 new claim forms being received compared with 1093 in the previous quarter. The caseload has remained steady at around 7800. There has however been an increase in the number of change events dealt with. A total of 5913 change events were worked on in the quarter compared to 5081 in the same quarter last year. The 5913 does not include the batch work mentioned previously – with these included the quarterly total would be 12236.

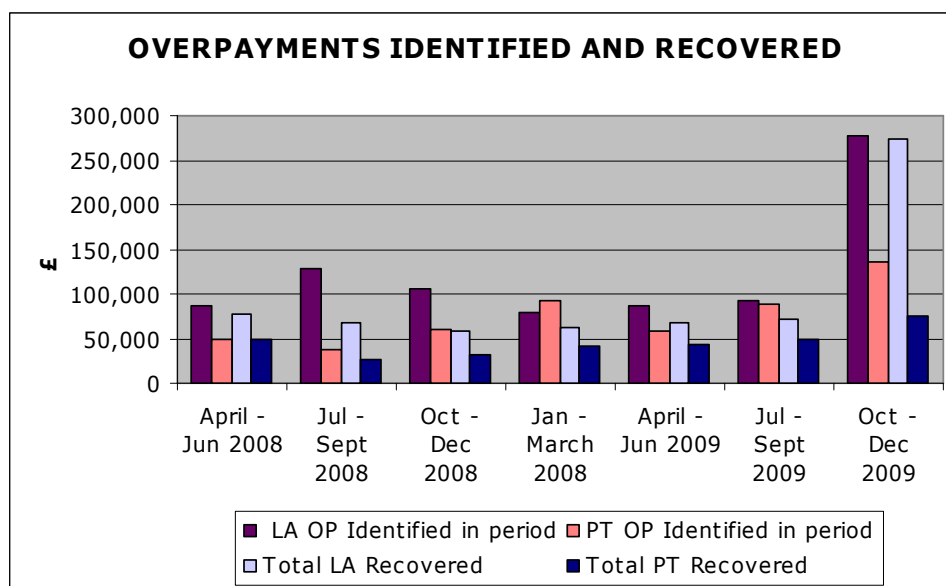


5.4. Local Indicators

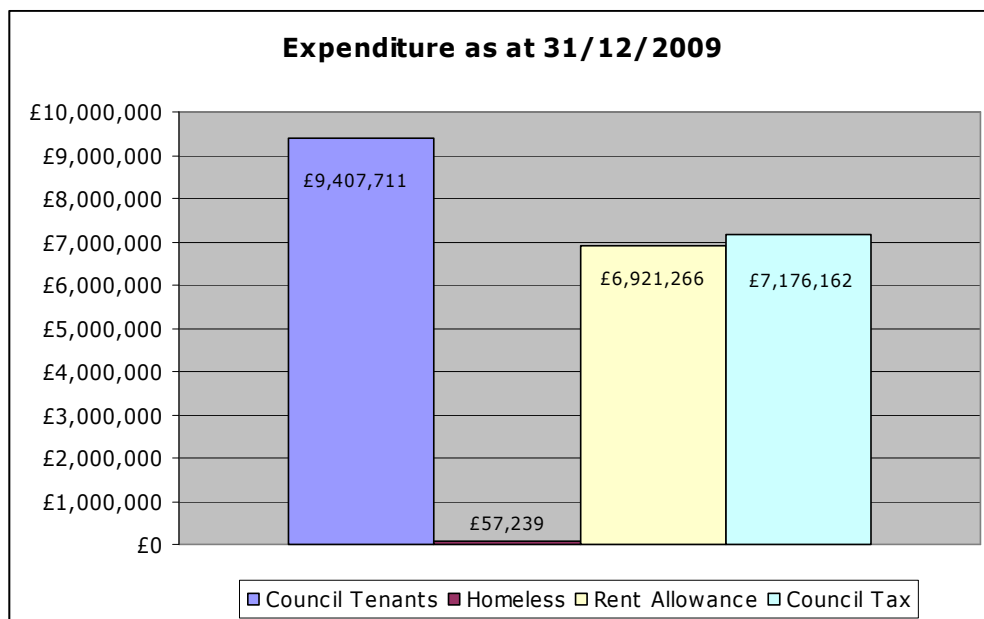
The Benefits Services also monitors a range of other performance data including the percentage of claims decided within 14 days. The current year target is to decide 85% of claims within 14 days. Between October and December 2009 89% of new claims and change events were dealt with within 14 days of being able to make a decision

5.5 Overpayment recovery

Outstanding overpayments at the beginning of the quarter increased to £1,182,766 up from £1,166,218 at the beginning of the previous quarter and both the value of overpayments identified and the amount of overpayments recovered increased.

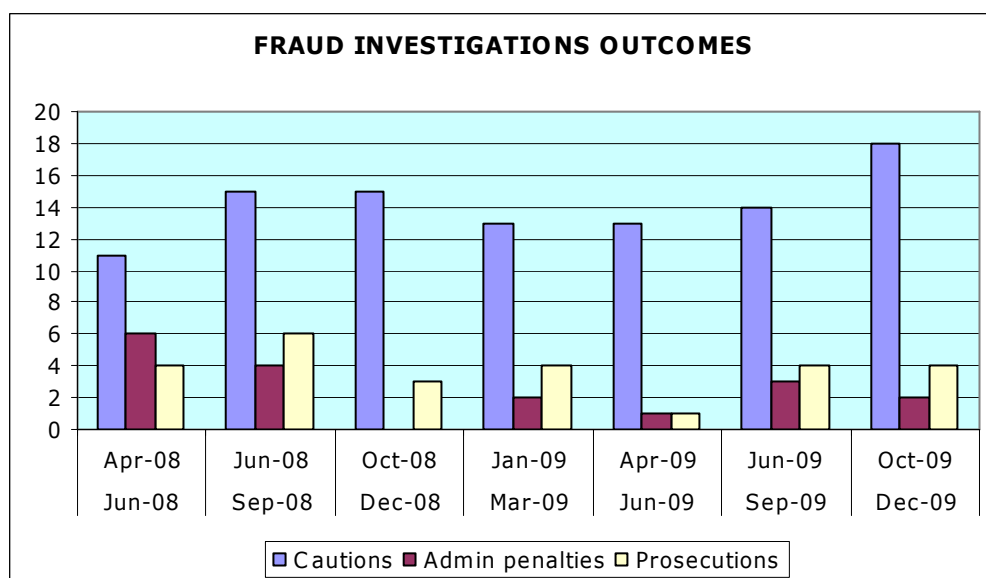


5.6 Local Authority Error overpayments continued to remain below the financial threshold and remain on target to receive 100% subsidy again. Only £62,817 or 0.28% of qualifying expenditure has been treated as Local Authority error in the first three quarters of the year out of £23,562,378 expenditure. Local Authorities receive a grant to cover all overpayments attributed to Local Authority delay or error as long as the total does not exceed 0.48% of qualifying expenditure (qualifying expenditure in this case being expenditure which qualifies for 100% subsidy).



5.7. Counter Fraud work

In the quarter 263 cases where fraud was suspected were referred to the Investigations team, and 18 Cautions and 2 Administration penalties were issued. 4 cases were successfully prosecuted and a further 5 cases were identified as being suitable for prosecution.



5.8 Appeals

A target of sending a written response to all appeal requests within 20 working days has been set and currently 83% of appeals have had this target met.

6 Improvement plan

- 6.1 Work is progressing towards the aims of the improvement plan. The Performance Development Team (PDT) from the Department of Work and Pensions has been working with the Benefits Service to help implement the recommendations from the Audit Commission inspection. In particular they have helped by looking at the overpayment recovery processes, assisted with the creation of a Take Up strategy, and worked with Officers to improve access to the service and performance management.
- 6.2 The overpayment recovery process has been mapped and a new Overpayments Officer will shortly be appointed.
- 6.3 A draft Take-Up strategy has been prepared to help local people maximise their income. Consultation is taking place with stakeholders such as the Job Centre Plus, Age Concern and Citizens Advice Bureau. Various activities and events are scheduled to promote take-up.
- 6.4 Service users have been asked their views on aspects of service provision and the service is working closer with voluntary and community organisations.
- 6.5 Service standards set, monitored and reported to customers – available from web site and from Customer Service Centre.
- 6.6 Detailed training plan developed to show objective of training and how effectiveness measured.
- 6.7 The latest position regarding the Benefits Improvement Plan has been included at Appendix 1.

7. Other Implications

Asset Management	-	None identified
Community Safety	-	None identified
Health	-	None identified
Human Resources	-	None identified
Social Exclusion	-	None identified
Environment / Sustainability	-	???

8. **Lessons Learnt**

The Performance Development Team are as useful source of learning for the Benefits Service

9. **Background Papers**

Audit Commission inspection report.

10. **Consultation**

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

11. **Author of Report**

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

12. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Position Statement – Benefits Service Improvement Plan as at January 2010

Appendix 2 - Redditch take up strategy