

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

16th June 2010

**BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT PLAN –
QUARTERLY MONITORING JANUARY TO MARCH 2010**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Michael Braley
Relevant Head of Service	Head of Finance and Resources
Non-Key Decision	

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. BACKGROUND

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

3.2 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.

4. KEY ISSUES

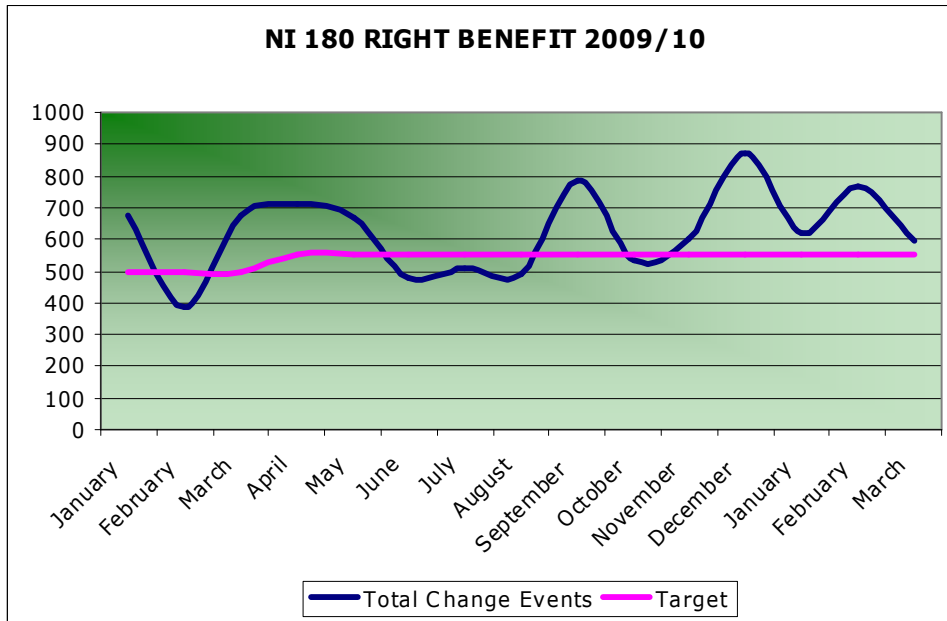
Claims Performance

4.1 There are two national Indicators for the Benefits Service.

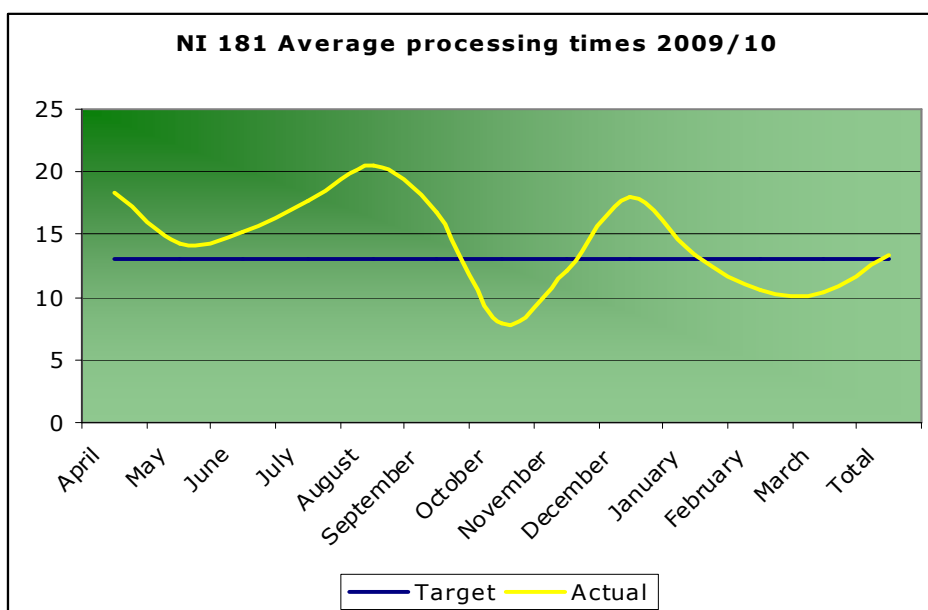
NI 180 Right Benefit – this measures the number of change events identified and actioned – a target of identifying 550 changes each month was set and the average for the quarter was 660 per month. Over the year a total of 7642 changes were identified. This being made up of 2807 reductions 2693 cancellations and 2142 increases, with an average per month of 637.

The DWP have grouped together authorities with a similar expected

number of changes and Redditch identified 1.84 changes per customer compared to the group average of 1.58 changes per customer.



4.2 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 average for the year was 13 days. The final quarter performance was 11 days, the table below compares local performance against national data. The national data is based on monthly DWP data extractions – unfortunately Redditch data was not included in the national figures and the data has been collated directly from the Benefit processing system.



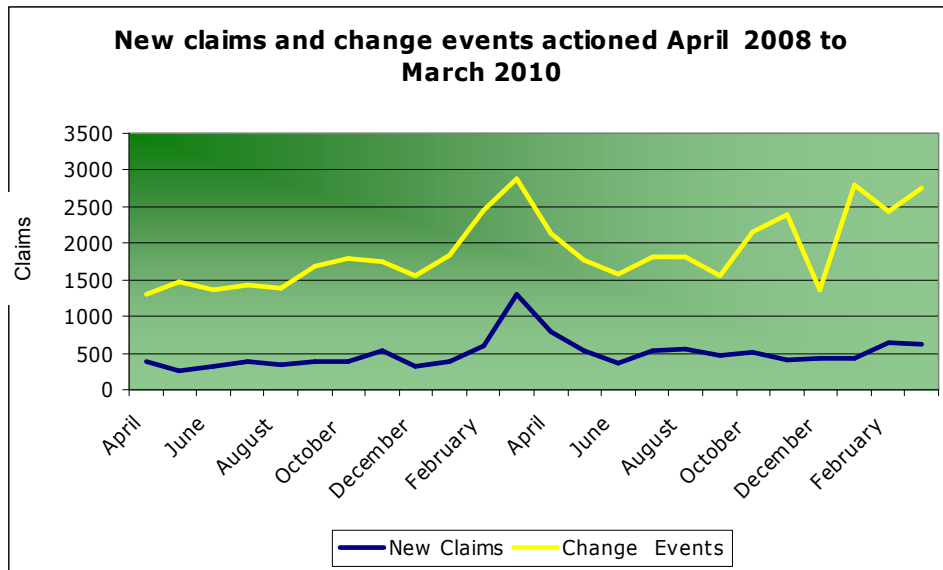
**2009/10
Average processing times**

	National Average*	RBC Quarter 4	RBC YTD
Combined	14	11	13
New claims	25	25	29
Change Events	11	9	10

National average as at end of Quarter 2 2009/10

Case-load and Claims received

- 4.3 The number of claims received increased in the quarter with 1194 new claim forms being received compared with 1017 in the previous quarter. The caseload also increased to 8117 up from 7831 at the end of the previous quarter. There were further increases in the numbers of new claims and change events processed. A total of 7978 change events were worked on in the quarter compared to 5913 in the previous quarter. 1676 new claims were decided compared to 1345 previously.



4.4 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 January and March 2010 93% of new claims were dealt with within 14 days of being able to make a decision.

4.5 Overpayment recovery

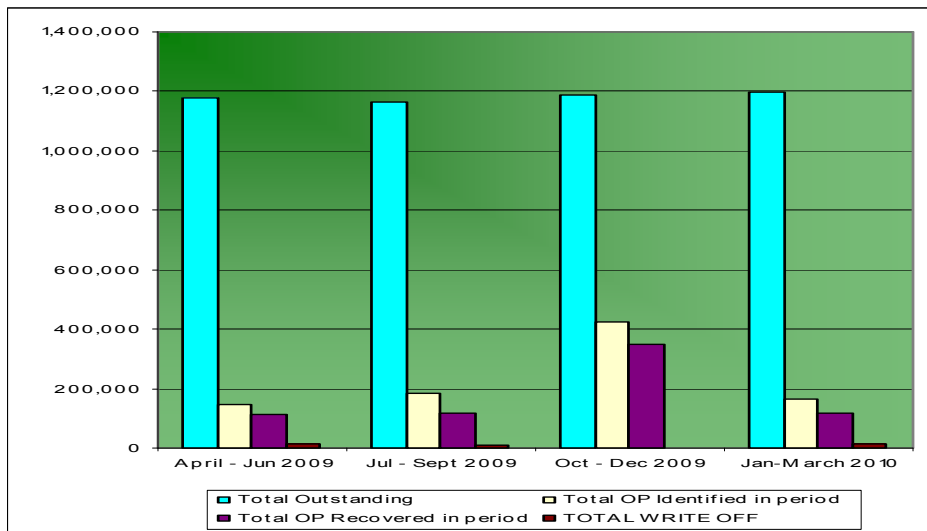
Outstanding overpayments at the beginning of the quarter increased to £1,197,616 but in the context of increasing claim numbers this may not be unexpected. New dedicated recovery post recruited and receiving training.

New overpayments totalling £166,215 were identified and £116,139 was recovered in the quarter.

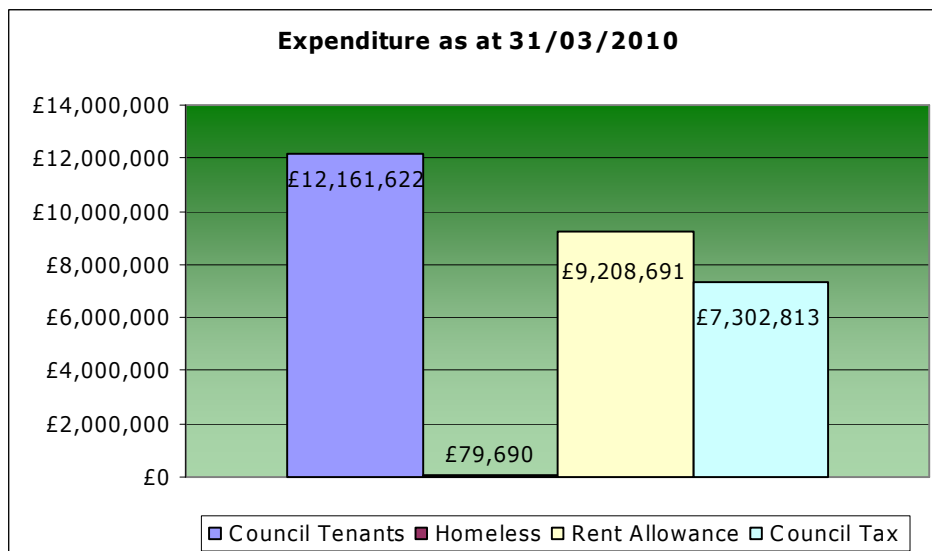
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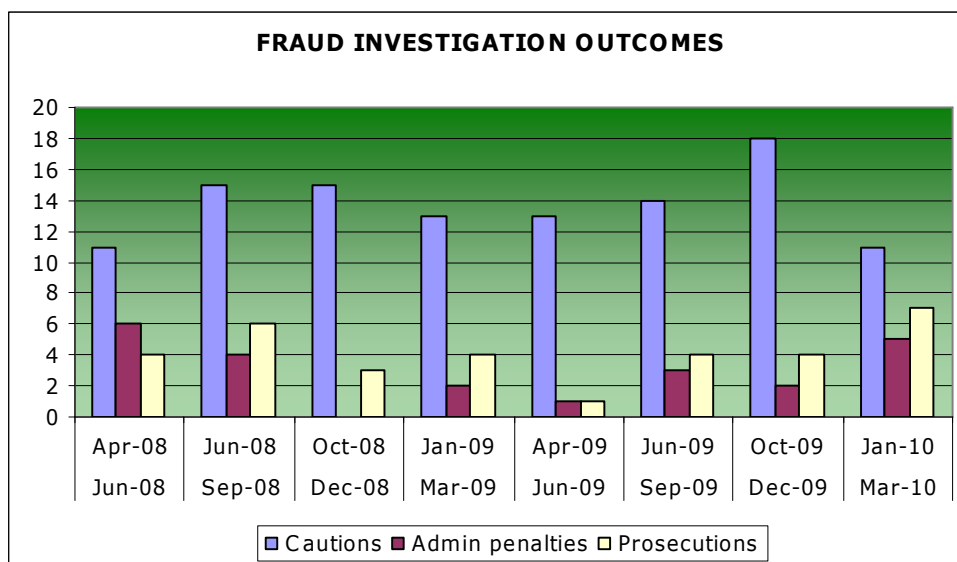
- 4.6 Full subsidy should be payable on Local Authority Error overpayments as they remained below threshold. Only £85,052 or 0.31% of qualifying expenditure has been treated as Local Authority error. Total expenditure on Benefit payments increased by about £1.5 million compared to the previous year ending at £28,752,816.



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).

4.7 Counter Fraud work

In the quarter 295 cases where fraud was suspected were referred to the Investigations team, and 11 Cautions and 5 Administration penalties were issued. 7 cases were identified as being suitable for prosecution.



Improvement plan

- 4.8 Work is progressing towards the aims of the improvement plan. The Performance Development Team (PDT) from the Department of Work and Pensions worked with the Benefits Service to help implement the recommendations from the Audit Commission inspection. In particular the main areas to be improved are the management and collection of overpaid Housing Benefit, adopting a Take-Up strategy, accessibility of the service and setting challenging service standards and performance targets.
- 4.9 The overpayment recovery process has been mapped and a new Overpayments Officer appointed.
- 4.10 A Take-Up strategy has been created to help local people maximise their income. Consultation has taken 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.
- 4.11 Service users have been asked their views on aspects of service provision and the service is working closer with voluntary and community organisations.

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4.12 Service standards set, monitored and reported to customers – available from web site and from Customer Service Centre.

4.13 Detailed training plan developed to show objective of training and how effectiveness measured.

4.14 The latest position regarding the Benefits Improvement Plan has been included at Appendix 1.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific financial implications.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific legal implications.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific policy implications

8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

Enterprising Community
Safe
Well Managed Organisation

9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

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 over allowed Housing Benefit the Council will forego the ability to pursue debt recovery procedures with a consequential loss of income to the Council.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

None identified

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

None identified

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12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

None identified

13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

None Identified

14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

None

15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

None identified

16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

None identified

17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

None identified

18. LESSONS LEARNT

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

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Benefits Service has worked with stakeholders to identify key service improvements and has undertaken a range of stakeholder engagements.

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20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	No
Chief Executive	Yes
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	Yes
Executive Director – Leisure, Cultural, Environmental and Community Services	Yes
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	Yes
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	Yes
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Resources	Yes
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	No
Corporate Procurement Team	No

21. WARDS AFFECTED

Not ward specific.

22. APPENDICES

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

23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Audit Commission inspection report.

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