

Key Objective WM8:

To produce and deliver on an Improvement Plan for the Benefits Service that delivers a Benefits Service that is responsive to customer needs

Monthly Progress Update

Owner : Head of Finance, Revenues & Benefits

Date: March 2010

	Programmed dates
	On target
	One month behind
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25.1 (R1)	Improve the management and collection of all Housing Benefit overpayments. Approval to combine recovery of overpaid HB in the HB section with the creation of a new post dedicated to this role. Ongoing Performance Development Team support to develop procedures. Target date January 2010 for transfer of debts from Income Recovery.														
R1a	Reviewing the roles and responsibilities for recovery.	David Taylor/ Jane Bough													COMPLETE
R1b	Ensure that the resources needed are made available.	David Taylor/ Jane Bough													COMPLETE Overpayment officer post in place.
R1c	Reviewing debts and improving procedures for recovery, monitoring and management.	David Taylor/ Jane Bough													Three month extension requested to complete improved procedures.

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R1d	Review the write off policies and procedure.	David Riley													Ongoing process expanded from revenues only review to encompass all services. Draft policy being prepared.
R1e	Effective prevention work to reduce overpayments arising, particularly LA Error overpayment.	David Taylor													COMPLETE Weekly measures in place to monitor with monthly reporting.
R1f	Improve information sent to customers so that underlying entitlement can be established.	Sandra Maddox													COMPLETE Customer letter updated, reminder to staff made, new overpayment post to check that all debtors have had underlying entitlement applied. Leaflet issued in all cases where underlying entitlement can be calculated.

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R1g	Need for an embedded mechanism to ensure that all debtors already on the sundry debtors system can be identified if they reclaim benefit.	Vicki Lewis David Taylor													Partially Complete - Report already written to identify invoices where HB reclaimed. Will become embedded when the debts are transferred.
R1h	Overall profile of the historic debt is not reported or regularly monitored.	Mandy Vernon/ Sandra Maddox													As above will be complete once post in place and debts transferred.
R1i	Create a SMART plan to improve overpayment recovery.	David Taylor													Smart plan to be finalised when post in place. With new post there will be more than double the resources devoted to recovery of these debts. Officer began w/c 22 nd March 2010
25.2 (R2)	Increase income levels of the poorest parts of the community by adopting a Take-Up Strategy. Stakeholders identified and roles defined, work ongoing with Performance Development Team to develop strategy to include dates in respect of activities and event.														

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R2a	Compile a description of roles and responsibilities to introduce Take-Up Strategy.	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas													COMPLETE
R2b	Dates of activity and events agreed with partners and other stakeholders.	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas													COMPLETE Strategy includes target dates for activities and events.
R2c	Better use of local demographic information to help identify potential areas of under-claiming.	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas													COMPLETE
R2d	Clear measures of effectiveness.	David Taylor													COMPLETE Included in strategy.
R2e	Better targeting of resources and the maximisation of entitlement of benefit to vulnerable people.	David Taylor													COMPLETE Income Maximisation Posts now in place. Using data maps to target certain areas for take-up work.
25.3 (R3)	Improve the accessibility of the Service. Benefits appointments system and visits to be promoted in Redditch Matters and posters. Registered Social landlords advised of appointments system and home visits. Area to be identified in One Stop Shop for Benefit promotion.														

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R3a	Seek customer and internal and external stakeholders' views for consideration in the design of the Service, to ensure it meets their needs.	David Taylor													COMPLETE Income Maximisation Group and RSL views sought. Customer survey complete for quarter. Staff and other internal stakeholders have been consulted.
R3b	Jointly working with public sector, voluntary and community organisations locally to improve the delivery of service	David Taylor													COMPLETE Closer working with Age Concern agreed – Income Maximisation posts to work from Age Concern offices part of the week to help complete DLA and AA forms. Accommodation problems prevent this from happening currently with CAB but other closer working to be investigated – i.e. e-mail referrals for debt advice.

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R3c	Develop relationship with Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) including verification.	David Taylor													COMPLETE Quarterly meetings being held with RSL's. SLA with Redditch Co-Op Housing complete - verification to commence April 2010
R3d	Understanding and addressing the needs of disabled persons and vulnerable groups.	David Taylor													COMPLETE Income Maximisation posts to identify any problems. Take-up strategy has specific action to support this.
R3e	Promote the appointments system and home visits facility.	David Taylor/ Lynn Jones													COMPLETE Information about appointments and home visits included in adverts and already raised with RSL and private landlord groups.
25.4 (R4)	Ensure challenging service standards and performance targets are in place, that are relevant to customers needs. Service Plan in place. Action plans for the delivery of service standards delayed. Consultation with stakeholders started and customers to be involved via survey and/or participation group ready for inclusion in next years plans.														

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R4f	Greater transparency of performance will enable Councillors' challenge to be more effective which can help drive further improvement.	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas													COMPLETE Benefit performance data more available.
R4g	Relate service costs directly to the outcomes and performance delivered, establishing whether improving value for money is being achieved.	Teresa Kristunas													Work underway to identify service costs.
25.5 (R5)	Performance Improvement .														

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R5a	Improve claim processing performance.	Kerry Herbert													Average processing time has been further improved to 10 days for March (National Average is 14 days according to latest DWP data) New lean ways of working have been a factor in the improvement.
R5b	Improve accuracy rate to above average performance.	Kerry Herbert													Three month extension requested – no national figures collected anymore but enhanced work checking needs to be introduced – looking at capacity to move post away from processing to carry out work checking.
R5c	Improve Appeals performance in meeting its targets. The published target is to make a submission to the Tribunals Service within 28 days.	Sandra Maddox													28 day target met in Feb 10. March data yet to be finalised.

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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 the Council.	David Taylor													COMPLETE
25.6 (R6)	Service Planning Action plans not yet fully developed. Other issues will be addressed in the new Take-Up Strategy.														
R6a	Develop specific aims for the Benefits Service.	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas													COMPLETE

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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.	David Taylor													Action plans to be completed once service plan has been finalised. Six week extension requested.
R6c	Involve staff in setting future priorities and objectives for the Service, to shape the immediate future of the Service.	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas													COMPLETE Staff have been involved in setting new priorities and objectives for 2010/11.

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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.	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas													<p>COMPLETE</p> <p>New Service plan (due April 2010) will directly link to these themes.</p> <p>Staff have been consulted and draft Service Plan 2010-11 in process.</p> <p>Income Maximisation Officer posts to help with new claims for AA and DLA and Child Tax Credit.</p> <p>Take up strategy completed.</p>

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25.7 (R7)	Performance Management Data in support of performance targets for individual members of staff still being compiled – Performance Development Team (PDT) supporting.														
R7a	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is not sufficiently involved in overseeing the management of performance. There should be a greater emphasis on performance analysis against existing policies and obligations rather than future policy development. Increase the role of the Portfolio Holder in performance management	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas										?	?	?	There is now regular feedback on performance and the portfolio holder has an increased role through new performance management framework. Referred back to O and S by Executive for their comment.
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.	David Taylor													Data analysed to set individual targets. Feedback given to processing staff on their current performance.

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R7c	Limited up to date management information is available to senior managers and Councillors to assess variations in performance	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas													COMPLETE
R7d	Introduce regular reporting of current performance to customers against either the corporate Customer Service Standards or the Service targets.	David Taylor/ Lynn Jones													COMPLETE Website, OSS TV screen and noticeboard in T/Hall updated to show performance data for 2009-10. New performance measures for 2010-11 will be shown from May 2010 (April Data)

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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	David Taylor													COMPLETE Basic monitoring already under way – County unemployment data analysed to help predict future demand. Caseload numbers and types monitored monthly.
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.	Teresa Kristunas													COMPLETE
25.8 (R8)	Customer Information On target – not due till later in the year.														

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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.	David Taylor													Work underway, including telephoning customers for more information or queries and advising to provide information within 7 days of claim receipt. This will reduce the number of decision changes. Not due until May 2010
R8b	Increase understanding of the reasons for the high number of unsuccessful and defective (incomplete) claims	David Taylor													COMPLETE Analysis of defective claims complete. New method (above) being trialled to reduce number of defective claims.
25.9 (R9)	Customer led Improvement On target – not due till later in the year.														
R9a	The Service does not systematically measure customer satisfaction on an ongoing basis.	David Taylor													COMPLETE Customer satisfaction survey completed.

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R9b	The Service cannot clearly demonstrate that it has delivered significant improvements in outcomes for service users.	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas													Not due until May 2010
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.	David Taylor/Lynn Jones													COMPLETE Survey completed as per R9a. Survey analysis complete. Periodic surveys to be undertaken to inform service plans.
R9d	A benefits realisation methodology should be applied to demonstrate Think Lean improvements are proportionate to the resources used and lead to outcomes for the customer as a direct result.	David Taylor/Karen Jones													COMPLETE NVQ completed for lean techniques to evidence gathering – will record outcomes for customers. New proformas created to record outcomes and processes.
25.10 (R10)	Customer Access Benefits appointments system and visits to be promoted in Redditch Matters and posters. Registered Social landlords advised of appointments system and home visits. Area to be identified in One Stop Shop for Benefit promotion.														

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R10a	Improve telephone access. Calls put on hold or not answered at all. Customer service staff unable to contact Benefits quickly to ask for detailed advice. There is no systematic monitoring of abandoned calls.	David Taylor/ Lynn Jones													Monthly monitoring of telephones data commenced – more detailed reports to be investigated.
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.	David Taylor/ Lynn Jones													Appointments promoted. SLA to be revised to set out when Benefit staff should meet with Customer Service staff. Outline discussed with Lynn Jones 03/02/10.
R10c	Leaflets and forms are not readily available in the One Stop Shops. Customers have to request them.	David Taylor/ Lynn Jones													COMPLETE Leaflets & forms readily available in self-service area and a benefit notice board in TH OSS Website contains forms for download and advice for customers, including an electronic claim form.

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R10d	Benefits Service has not yet identified its hard to reach groups. Not due till July 2010.	David Taylor													Not due until July 2010
R10e	The Service has not formally assessed whether all users have fair and equal access to the Service and its policies.	David Taylor													Linked to completion of Equalities Impact Assessment. New e-claim form has ethnicity and disability monitoring reports included.
R10f	Some vulnerable claimants are receiving a slower service than other claimants.	David Taylor													Original target date of Nov 2009 missed – Income Maximisation posts to identify any problems.
25.11 (R11)	Value for Money Work ongoing. Some comparators obtained continuing to source others.														
R11a	Demonstrate improved outcomes that have arisen from actively exploring opportunities to work in partnership to deliver financial efficiencies	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas													Shared Service agenda Shared training with Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest.

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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.	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas													COMPLETE DWP data now published and standing agenda item for County Managers Group for bench marking. Regular Further comparative analysis to be undertaken.
R11c	Compare costs to other services, calculate unit costs and seek to evaluate cost effectiveness.	David Taylor													Delays getting detailed costs together and persuading other authorities to share data – County group to exchange performance information quarterly from April 2010 . Three month extension requested.

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R11d	Create robust proposals for delivering efficiency savings. Identify areas for efficiency savings that are cash-able and sustainable.	David Taylor													Shared service. E-claim form and BACS take-up.
R11e	Future investment proposals should demonstrate an awareness of linking improvement in performance to value for money	David Taylor/Teresa Kristunas													COMPLETE Evaluating performance improvements that may be possible before purchasing additional software
25.12 (R12)	Training Work ongoing, due later in year.														
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.	Kerry Herbert / Sandra Maddox/ Shona Knight													COMPLETE Overarching training plan has been drafted. On target for April 2010.
25.13 (R13)	System and System Reports Local Authority error on target – only partial improvement on other areas due to capacity. Due later in year.														

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R13a	Improve data assurance in the process for compiling the performance indicators.	David Taylor /Sandra Maddox													Review of roles delayed – capacity issue – intended to move processing officer into Controls team to support this area.

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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.	David Taylor /Ian Sprott													LA error on target and tested – only limited improvement elsewhere. Previous year audit qualified and additional testing may be required by DWP – Capacity issue to be looked at as part of review of how teams organised within the service. Look at options to provide more dedicated resource – pay IBS to carry out checks, work with another authority or use existing staff. Three month extension requested.

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R13c	IBS and Anite are not being used to best effect.	David Taylor / Vicki Lewis													Not due until 2010 but any areas identified for quick wins implemented – NVQ project to improve Anite letter requesting further information – standardised paragraphs to save time and ask for consistent information. Investigating input of forms directly into processing software to avoid typing in names and addresses etc.