

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

8th September 2010

**BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT PLAN – QUARTERLY MONITORING APRIL -
JUNE 2010**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor 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 first quarter and to provide an update on progress against the Benefits Service Improvement Plan.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that

- 1) **subject to any comments, the report be noted, and**
- 2) **the secondment of the Improvement Plan Project Officer be extended until 31st March 2011, and**
- 3) **that £11,950 is allocated from the balance of Department of Works and Pensions monies received in 2008/09.**

3. BACKGROUND

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

Work is progressing towards the aims of the improvement plan and the re-inspection in October 2010. The Performance Development Team (PDT) from the Department for Work and Pensions has worked with the Benefits Service to help implement the recommendations from the Audit Commission inspection. In particular improving overpayment recovery, access to the service, performance management, and developing a Take Up strategy.

4. KEY ISSUES

4.1 Claims Performance

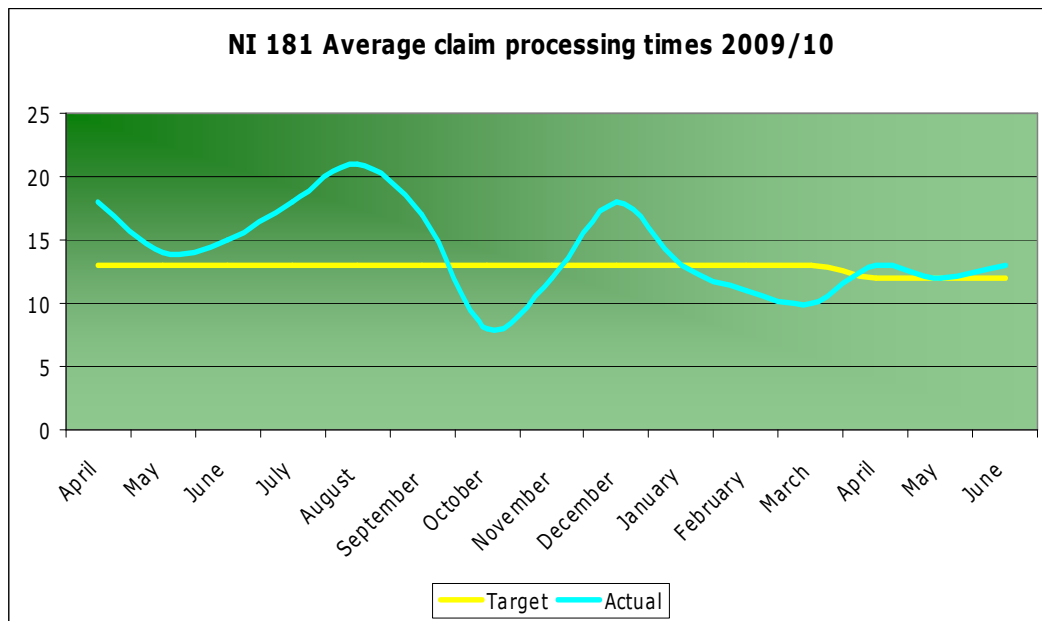
There is now only one national Indicator for the Benefits Service.

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- 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 12 days was set as a target and the average for the quarter 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, the latest available national data is for the third quarter of 2009/10.



2009/10

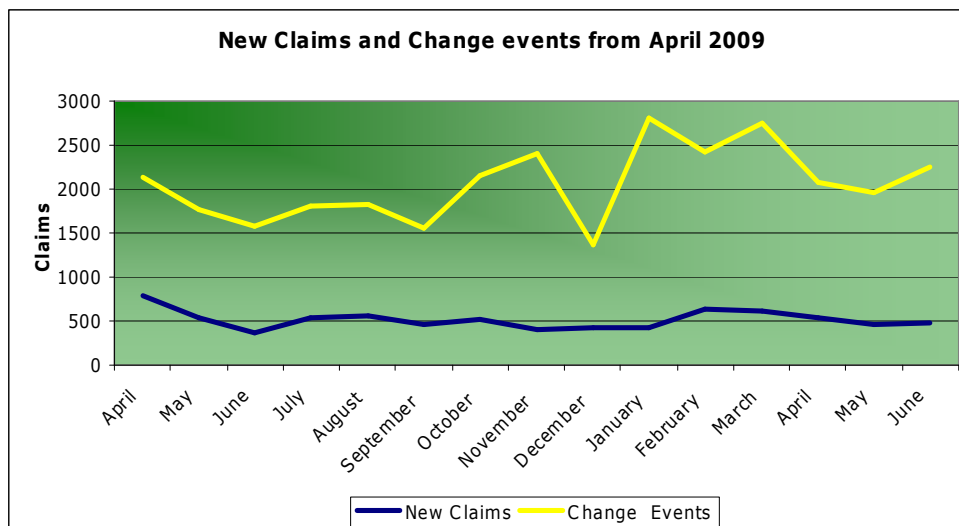
National average processing times

	National Average*	RBC Quarter 1 (2010/11)	RBC YTD
Combined	11	13	13
New claims	23	21	21
Change Events	8	11	11

National average as at end of Quarter 3 2009/10 most recent data available

4.3 Case-load and Claims received

A total of 1463 new claims were received in the quarter compared to 1697 for the same quarter last year. The caseload remained relatively unchanged at 8104 from previous months but is 342 more than the corresponding period in 2009. There were further increases in the numbers of change events processed. A total of 6282 change events were worked on in the quarter compared to 5484 for the first quarter last year.



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 90% of claims within 14 days. Between April and June 2010 93% of new claims were dealt with within 14 days of being able to make a decision.

4.5 Overpayment recovery

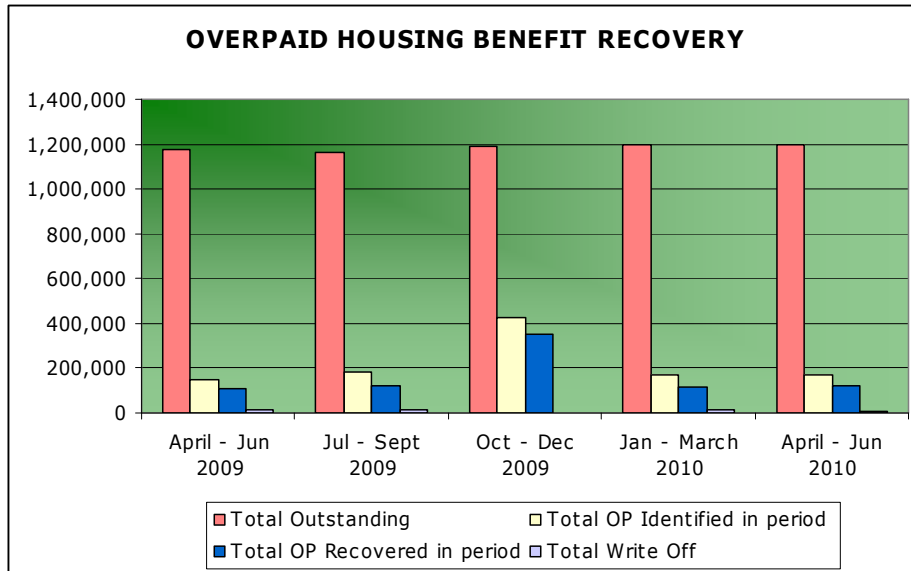
There was £1,193,867 outstanding in overpaid Housing Benefit at the beginning of the quarter. This was lower than the total at the beginning of the previous quarter but showed an increase from the same quarter last year when the total outstanding was £1,176,210. A new dedicated post to recover these overpayments started in April 2010.

4.6 New overpayments totalling £170,037 were identified and £118,913 was recovered in the quarter. This compares to £145,865 identified and £111,417 recovered in the same period last year.

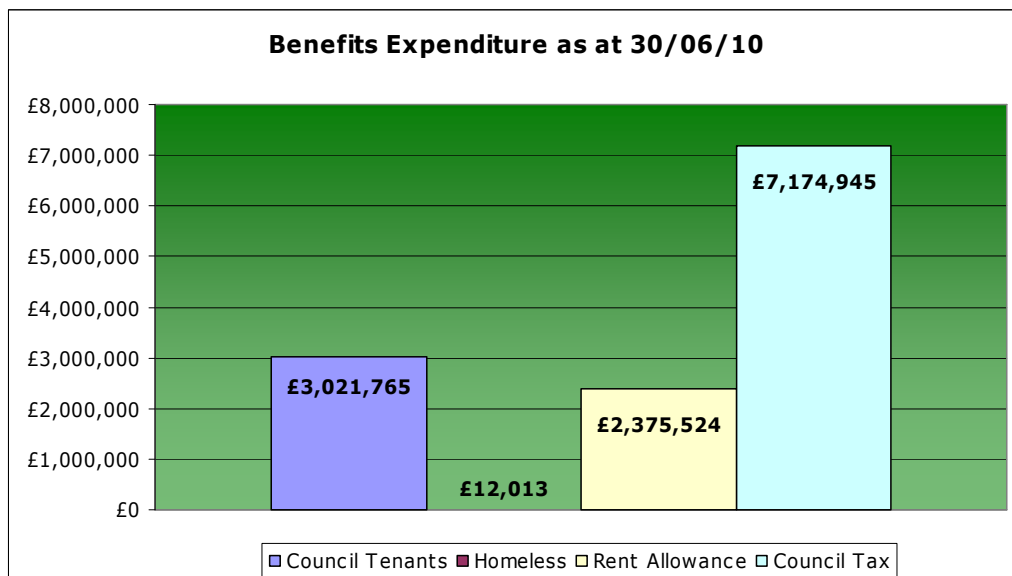
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4.7 Full subsidy is payable on Local Authority Error overpayments if they remain below the 0.48 % of qualifying expenditure threshold. Only £25,018 or 0.21% of qualifying expenditure has been coded as Local Authority error. Total expenditure on Benefit payments for the first three months was £12,584,247 an increase of £979,413 compared to the same period in 2009/10.

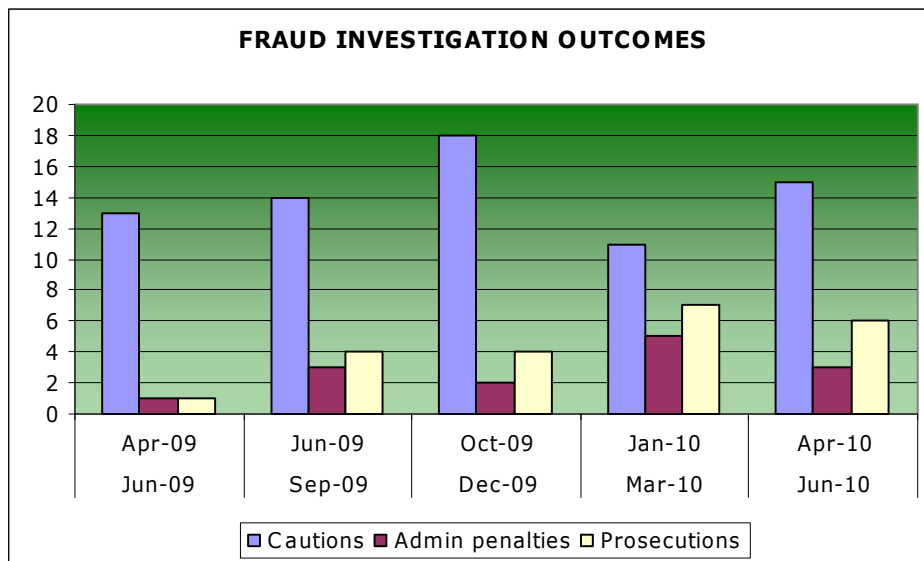


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4.8 Counter Fraud work

In the quarter 347 cases where fraud was suspected were referred to the Investigations team, and 15 Cautions and 3 Administration penalties were issued. 6 cases were identified as being suitable for prosecution. 284 home visits were also made to check that the correct level of Benefit was in payment



Improvement plan

4.9 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.

4.10 The overpayment recovery process has been mapped and a new Overpayments Officer appointed. There are signs that the recovery of debts is beginning to improve.

4.11 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.

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- 4.12 Service users have been asked their views on aspects of service provision and the service is working closer with voluntary and community organisations.
- 4.13 Service standards set, monitored and reported to customers – available from web site and from Customer Service Centre.
- 4.14 Detailed training plan developed to show objective of training.
- 4.15 Benchmarking exercise underway to look at value for money.
- 4.16 Equalities training for service arranged.
- 4.17 The latest position regarding the Benefits Improvement Plan has been included at Appendix 1.
- 4.18 Since November 2009 an Officer has been seconded to help with the development of the Service and with the Improvement Plan. The secondment will end in November 2010. To continue to improve the service and support the Transformation Programme due to commence November 2010 it is requested that this secondment is extended at a cost of £11,950 until the 31st March 2011. The secondment is being funded from the additional administration grant awarded to the authority from the Department of Work and Pensions in 2008/09. There is an unallocated balance of £32,500 remaining following the allocations approved by Members on 27th July 2009.

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

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**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

**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

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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.

20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	YES
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	YES
Corporate Procurement Team	No

21. WARDS AFFECTED

Not ward specific

22. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Position Statement – Benefits Service Improvement Plan

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as at June 2010

23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Audit Commission inspection report.

24. KEY

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