

Performance Surgery Minutes – BV78a and BV78b

Title of Indicators:	78a Average time taken to process new benefit claims 78b Average time taken to process notification of changes to benefit claims
Indicator definitions:	Refer to Annex A
Portfolio:	Neighbourhood, Social Cohesion and Housing Strategy
Scrutiny Commission:	Community
Accountable Officer:	Mark Holmes
Assistant Director:	Kath Kennedy

Meeting held on the 16 August.

Attendees:

Councillor Amar Nath
Lisa Callow
Mark Menzies
Mark Holmes
Heather Greenan
Nadya Dunayeva
Rob Davidson
Mahroof Hussain
David Brewin
Martin Gadsby
Phil Davies

1. What were the main causes of underperformance discussed?

- System conversion and the 4 weeks closure caused underperformance due to the lead-time required. Moreover, it has taken staff longer than anticipated to adapt to the system changes. Therefore the rate of recovery post-conversion has been slower than expected – although quarter one figures do indicate an improvement in BV78a (34 days).
- The fact that only 1/3 of all forms can be processed without the need for further information. In those cases where further information is required, applicants are allowed 30 days to provide the required evidence.
- Councillor Nath asked whether certain types of information were more likely to be ‘missing’ and whether the relevant part of the benefits form could be better explained or promoted to claimants before they submit the claim. Mark Holmes confirmed that missing information can vary between applications.

- Some work has been undertaken to review processing and completeness rates by source e.g. Derby Direct, Housing Options, Derby Homes, DWP. Refresher training is planned and will be targeted on specific issues identified.
- The constraints of the Verification Framework do affect processing rates. Ensuring robust evidence whilst maintaining customer friendly revision processes is important. Encouraging a customer friendly culture will not only help to improve relationships with customers, but also solve some of the BVPI problems. There has certainly been an increase in satisfaction rates by benefit claimants between 2003 and 2006.
- The benefits backlog has affected recovery of tenant rent arrears. Phil Davies queried whether more linkages could be made between the rents and benefits systems on Academy - to better use the information available (taking into account any data protection issues).
- The service has undertaken visits to Birmingham and Nottingham authorities to look at areas for improvement. In some cases, good performance in BV78 is due to more resources per claim.

2. What actions were agreed to improve performance? Has an action plan been prepared?

- An improvement plan has already been put in place to remove the backlog of new claims.
- Focus effort on ensuring a 'right first time' approach.
- Re-engineering review of Benefits process e.g. in-built system reminder for further information at 15 days.
- Better communication e.g. use of tailored teams to deal with specific claimants, use of text messaging etc.
- Develop service level arrangements with partners for completeness of claims etc.
- Raising awareness regarding process delays amongst customer service and partner staff e.g. refresher training.
- Cllr Nath asked what percentage improvement in completeness of claims would be required to meet the national targets for BV78a and b.

3. What are the resource implications of these actions?

- Risks: cost, fraud, overpaying claims, inconsistency, time.

4. What are the timescales?

- Performance will be reviewed at the next Performance Surgery in November.

5. When will progress be reported to Scrutiny?

- 1 October – Community Commission meeting.