

Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service – Quarterly Performance

RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That the Commission consider the performance of the Housing and Council Tax Benefit service as at 15 August 2005 and forward any comments to the cabinet.
- 1.2 That regular performance reports continue to be produced to review progress of the service.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 Members of the Commission have requested to receive regular performance reports including comparisons with other unitary authorities. This report identifies progress made since the last report to the Community Regeneration Commission on 9 December 2004.
- 2.2 Appendix 2 shows that outstanding workload has been stable since 8 November 2004 – the comparable performance figures shown in our last report of 9 December 2004. The table shows we are actioning changes, reviews and cancellations very promptly as a priority, in order to minimise any overpayments to customers. We still need to improve our turnaround times for new claimants where only 25% of the claims that we receive contain all of the information for us to be able to process without having to first seek further information. We are to do more home visits to customers in order to improve our performance in this area.
- 2.3 We are confident that outstanding workload will reduce and performance will improve as we continue to review and update our business processes and performance management systems in the service and we are being supported with this work by a team of Department of Works and Pensions consultants at nil cost. We also have seven new processing staff starting their training on 5 September 2005 who will be fully trained by early January 2006.
- 2.4 Our Service Improvement Strategy that was agreed by Cabinet on 3 December 2002 set challenging targets for our service with the aim of performing to a level where we compare with the best performing unitary and

metropolitan authorities and be at Department of Works and Pensions national standards during 2005/06.

- 2.5 Housing benefit administration is a key service within the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment rating and our annual submission in July 2005 gave us a self assessment scoring of 3 out of 4 which is a 'good' service rating. We are expecting confirmation of this rating from the Audit Commission in October 2005.
- 2.6 The graph at appendix 3 shows that we are processing all new claims received on average within 48 days at the end of July 2005 which is a one day improvement on our 2004/05 performance. Our target is to further improve our performance to reach 36 days average by 31 March 2006, which is at national standard.
- 2.7 Further benefits performance indicators are shown in the table at appendix 4. Significant improvements were made in 2004/05 against three of the performance indicators with a slight dip in performance in the 'accuracy of outputs' indicator. Due to robust checking procedures that we now have in place our performance on accuracy has improved in quarter one of this financial year. The definition for the change of circumstances indicator in 2005/06 has changed which is the reason why performance looks as though it has dipped compared with last year.
- 2.8 In line with the Commission's request, a table comparing our performance with 21 other unitary and metropolitan authorities is shown at appendix 5 for three of the key housing benefit indicators. The table shows comparisons at 31 March 2005 and we are positioned:
- a. 14th for processing new claims
 - b. 10th for processing changes of circumstances and
 - c. 12th for % of new claims processed within 14 days of receiving all information

2.9 Improvements in Customer Service

Since our last report on 9 December 2004, we have also made further improvements in our service to benefits customers ...

- Customer service at our merged housing benefit/council tax inquiry counter is proving to be very popular and more convenient for customers. Feedback from customers has been excellent to our 'greeter system', where customers are now met personally at busy times before taking their seat in the queue.
- We have upgraded our telephony equipment in the service and provided more telephone handsets to our staff which has meant more customers are now able to access our service.
- Evidence from our joint working arrangements with The Pensions Service, where we now do joint visits to pensioners living in the city and deal with both housing benefit and state pension type enquiries at the same time shows the system is working very well.

- Our benefits outreach service in all area housing offices shows an increasing number of customer enquiries and feedback from our customers and Derby Homes has been excellent.
- We carried out a successful benefits take up campaign in March 2005 targeted primarily at pensioners in the city where publicity was included with all of our non benefit, annual council tax bills. The results were excellent and shows that an extra 193 people are now qualifying for council tax benefit and an extra 36 people are receiving help with their rent of nearly £2,300 a week.
- A member of staff from Job Centre Plus is providing a 'drop in' surgery on 2 half days a month in our customer enquiry counter service area in the Council House providing a more holistic benefit service to our customers including giving unemployed people advice about job vacancies and opportunities.

For more information contact:	Don McLure Tel: 01332 255284 email: don.mclure@derby.gov.uk
Background papers:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 – Analysis of Benefits Workload at 15 August 2005 Appendix 3 – BV78a Average Number of Calendar Days Taken to Process New Claims – Monthly Cumulative Totals Appendix 4 – Performance - Statutory Performance Indicators Appendix 5 – Derby's Performance Compared with other Authorities

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

1. None arising from this report.

Legal

2. The Council has a statutory duty to provide a Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Service under the provisions of the Social Security Act 1986.

Personnel

3. None arising from this report.

Equalities impact

4. Our benefits take up strategy is aimed at encouraging all low income households to apply for council tax and housing and benefit with specific targeting of pensioners, low earners and black and minority ethnic communities.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

5. The Council's Corporate Plan 2005/08 recognises the importance of a high quality and performing Benefits Service in helping meet one of its values of 'adopting new ways of working wherever these will help us do things better and provide value for money, customer focussed services', and one of its priorities of 'Improving customer service in the city centre and locally.' This report identifies progress we are making in the Benefits Service to help achieve this aim.

Appendix 2

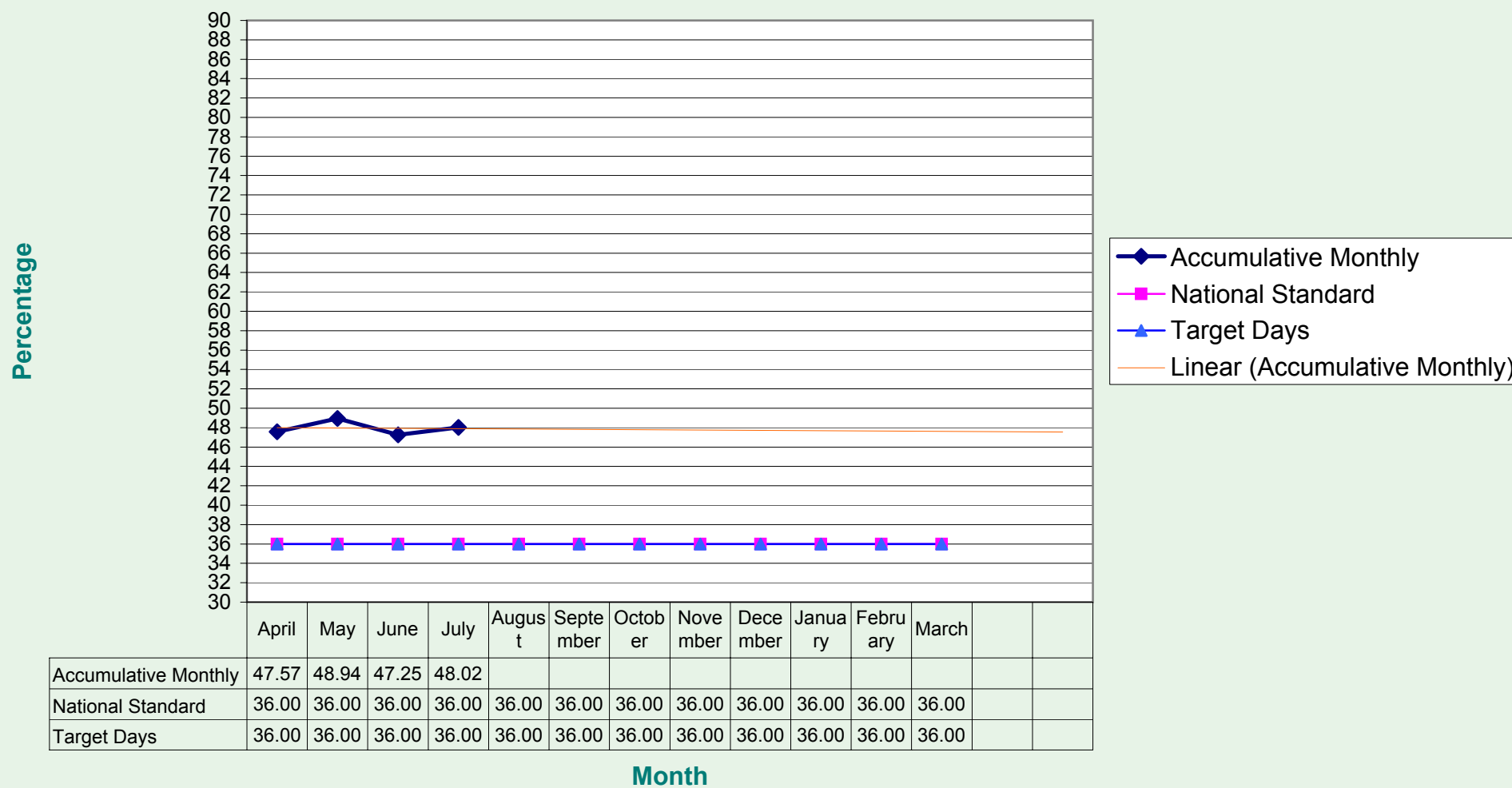
Analysis of Benefits Workload Position at 15 August 2005

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Position at 8 Nov 04 (including claims awaiting to be processed and pending)	Comparable position at 15-Aug	Awaiting to be processed at 15-Aug	Pended awaiting more information 15-Aug	Average weekly claims received (year to date)	Number of weeks work outstanding 15-Aug	Number of weeks work outstanding excluding work pending awaiting further information 15-Aug
New Claims	1616	1696	1066	630	303	5.6 weeks	3.5 weeks
High Risk Reviews	554	258	52	206	187	1.4 weeks	up to date
Sub total of claims	<hr/> 2170	1954	<hr/> 1118	836	490		
Change of Circumstances	261	461	77	213	705	up to date	up to date
Cancellations	106	329	59	68	363	up to date	up to date
TOTAL	<hr/> 2537	2744	<hr/> 1254	1117	1558	1.8 weeks	up to date

Note

Pended claims are those where we have begun to process the claims but we are awaiting more information from the customer before we can process.

Appendix 3



Housing Benefits Service – Performance Management – Statutory Performance Indicators

Indicator	2002/03 Actual	2003/04 Actual	2004/05 Actual	2005/06 Target	2005/06 Q1	Comment
BVPI 78a – average number of days to process a new claim	79 Target 65 days	55 Target 55 days	49 Target 46 days	36	47	Actual performance in 04/05 was on average 6 days better than previous year. We continue to improve into Q1 of 05/06 and we have set ourselves the Department of Works and Pensions national performance target of 36 days for this year
BVPI 78b – average number of days to process a change of circumstances claim	21 Target 18 days	14 Target 17 days	10 Target 13 days	13	20	Actual performance in 04/05 was on average 4 days better than previous year. In 2005/06 the criteria for measuring this performance has changed which is the reason why performance looks as though it has slipped
BVPI 79a – accuracy of outputs	94% Target 92%	96.4 Target 97%	94% Target 97.5%	98%	96.8%	Actual performance in 04/05 was slightly worse than previous year but our quality checking procedures are now much more robust and there has been an improvement in Q1 of 05/06 and we are confident that annual target will be reached
% claims cleared within 14 days of receiving all the information	64% Target 90%	74% Target 90%	77% Target 90%	92%	74%	Actual performance in 04/05 showed a 3% improvement than previous year. There has been a slight drop in performance in Q1 of 05/06 but we have a work plan in place that should drive improvements.

IPF Nearest Neighbours	Speed of Processing: Average time for processing changes of circumstances				
	2001/2002 Annual	2002/2003 Annual	2003/2004 Annual	2004/05 Annual	2005/06 Q1
Rotherham	7	7	7	4	
Stockton-on-Tees	11	10	13	6	
Kirklees	27*	29	11	6	
Telford & Wrekin	16	11	8	8	
Tameside	8	9	8	9	
Darlington	11	8	8	9	
Oldham	14	13	11	9	
Dudley	21	18	16	9	
Plymouth	28	39	30	9	
Peterborough	15	12	15	10	
Derby	27	21	14	10	
Walsall	9	14	12	13	
Wolverhampton	12	8	9	14	
Sandwell	80*	19	24	17	
Bolton	25	24	25	18	
Coventry	67	48	16	22	
Rochdale	12	11	7	24	
Bradford	46	12	11	29	
Leeds	12	21	No data	37	
Stoke-on-Trent	41	41	No data	48	
Wakefield	28	36	37	No data	

* This data has been marked as qualified by the Auditors