



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL CABINET  
13 MAY 2003

Report of the Director of Finance

## Benefits Service – Performance Monitoring Position Statement at 31 March 2003

### RECOMMENDATION

1. To note the progress made in the Revenues and Benefits Service and to agree to continue receiving regular update reports.

### REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

2. The Council's Corporate Plan 2002/05 includes the aim of eliminating the backlog problems with benefit claims. The aim of our Service Improvement Strategy that was agreed by the Cabinet on 3 December 2002 is to make continuous improvements in the Revenues and Benefits Service to a level where we compare with the best performing unitary and metropolitan authorities.

### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 On 3 December 2002 the Cabinet agreed a Service Improvement Strategy for the Benefits Service to deliver the three main challenges in the Council's 2002/05 Corporate Plan:
  - eliminating backlogs
  - processing at least 90% of new benefit claimants within 14 days of receiving all of the information
  - improving the quality of service to customers.
- 3.2 On 18 February 2003, Cabinet received a report showing that work outstanding had reduced by over 50% since November 2002. The amount of new claims, renewal claims (claims in payment needing to be reviewed), change of circumstances and cancellations needing to be actioned had reduced from 8,563 to 4,283 at 31 January 2003.
- 3.3 The main headline of this report is that work outstanding **has reduced by a further 18%** and at 31 March 2003 the number of 8,563 outstanding items had reduced further to 3,488. This equates to under three weeks workload and our optimum target position is to be operating with outstanding workload of two weeks.

- 3.4 In addition to our corporate plan challenges, the Council also monitors performance against statutory performance indicators. Although significant improvements have been made in reducing outstanding work these are not yet being fully reflected in the performance indicators to 31 March 2003.
- 3.5 The Cabinet has requested that progress reports be produced for both the Cabinet and Social Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Commission to review progress.

### **Eliminating Benefit Backlogs**

- 3.6 The new process management system is bedding in and our staff have adapted to this new culture of working very well. They are being set individual and team performance targets and their outputs are being measured on a daily basis.
- 3.7 Following the implementation of our Service Improvement Strategy, we have been processing **all** new benefit claims received since that date at below the Government's national performance standard average of 36 days.
- 3.8 An analysis of outstanding work at 31 March 2003 compared to 31 January 2003 when last reported is shown at appendix 2. Thanks to the efforts of our staff, this shows a further significant improved position where the total outstanding claims waiting to be processed has reduced from 4,283 claims to 3,488 claims. Of these 3,488 claims 1,585 of them cannot be processed until we receive further information from customers.
- 3.9 Our external contract with Barony continues to be tightly controlled and at 20 April 2003 they have 1,320 items of work to complete before the end of their contract. Their target date for completion of this work is 9 May 2003.
- 3.10 Since 1 April 2003, we have been implementing our new staffing structure that was agreed by the Council on 12 February 2003. As soon as all staff are in post and fully trained, we will be in a position to deliver a continuously improving service for our customers.

### **Processing at least 90% of new benefit claimants within 14 days of receiving all of the information**

- 3.11 By 31 March 2003, our performance had improved to a position where we processed 68% of new claims within 14 days of receiving all of the information from customers.
- 3.12 Although performance is below target, we are in a significantly improved position compared to 31 March 2002.

### **Improving the Quality of Service**

- 3.13 A full list of service improvements was included in the Cabinet Report of 18 February 2003.
- 3.14 We continue to make good progress with all of these items including our front line customer service which is a priority. We are appointing additional benefits staff to improve the quality of service at the Council House and area housing offices.

- 3.15 We are also proceeding with a queuing system and an improved telephone service for our benefits customers at the Council House.

### **Government's Statutory Performance Indicators**

- 3.16 The Benefits Service also monitors performance in accordance with statutory performance indicators. Performance against these indicators for the 2002/03 year end to 31 March 2003 is shown in the table at appendix 3.
- 3.17 Although we are making significant progress in reducing the outstanding workload in the Benefits Service, this is only now starting to have a noticeable beneficial impact on the statutory performance indicators and will be reflected in our monitoring for 2003/04.
- 3.18 The table at appendix 3 shows some improvement when compared to 2001/02 although service targets have not been met. Our business plan for 2003/4 shows stretching targets linked to our agreed Service Improvement Strategy. Our performance will be measured against these targets and reported to Cabinet during 2003/04.

### **OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

4. None other than the Council's resolution on 4 November 2002 to request the Cabinet to monitor the implementation of an action plan to ensure the aim of the Corporate Plan is achieved which is "to eliminate benefit backlogs forever."

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<b>Background papers:</b>	Council Cabinet 3 December 2002 – Benefits Service Improvement Plan
<b>List of appendices:</b>	Council Cabinet 18 February 2003 – Benefits Services Performance Monitoring Position Statement 31 January 2003 Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 – Analysis of Benefits Workload Position at 31 March 2003 Appendix 3 – Housing Benefit Service – Performance Management – Statutory Performance Indicators

## IMPLICATIONS

### Financial

1. None directly arising.

### Legal

2. None directly arising.

### Personnel

3. None directly arising.

### Corporate Themes and Priorities

4. The Council's Corporate Plan 2003/06 includes under the priority of 'improving life chances for disadvantaged people and communities' the aim of 'making prompt and accurate payment of benefits'. This report identifies progress we are making to achieve this aim.