



Annual report 2014-15

Revenues and Benefits Shared Service



districtnk
100 flourishing communities
North Kesteven District Council



**CITY OF
Lincoln
COUNCIL**



Foreword

We are now entering the fifth year of our Revenues and Benefits Shared Service and it is pleasing that much progress is being made with some excellent areas of performance.

The service has been delivered at a time when welfare reforms leave us facing several challenges and this will only continue in the months to come with the roll out of Universal Credit.

Both City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council have worked to produce a robust Welfare Reform Strategy that has nine key aims. This to ensure these changes have been and will continue to be implemented effectively, accurately and on time.

We are also part of a high profile proactive Universal Support Delivered Locally trial with other councils and partners in West Lincolnshire, trialling a number of ways we can support our residents once Universal Credit is rolled out.

You can read more about our response to Universal Credit and the strategy on page 7.

Services such as ours place a key focus on the outcomes for our customers, from securing more benefits through our Welfare Team through to agreeing realistic payments due to the councils through our Revenues Team.

More information about our successes can be seen on the opposite page, while on page 4

you can see how we've performed over the past year, including our council tax and business rates collection figures. Pages 5 and 6 highlights the challenges we face and how we plan to overcome them in the months ahead.

It has been a fantastic effort by everyone to get to the point we have reached, however the challenges will continue and we will need to keep improving and delivering the best possible service to the citizens of Lincoln and North Kesteven.



Councillor Donald Nannestad

Chair of the Revenues and Benefits
Joint Committee

Committee purpose

The purpose of the Shared Revenues and Benefits Committee includes:

1. To approve and monitor the Shared Revenues and Benefits Service Delivery Plan for each Financial Year.
2. To approve the annual budget for the Joint Committee and the Shared Revenues and Benefits.
3. To approve the annual report of the Joint Committee and the Shared Revenues and Benefits.
4. To monitor expenditure and income of the Joint Committee and Shared Revenues and Benefits Service against the agreed annual budget.
5. To set progress and performance targets for the functions delegated to the shared service, approve the delivery plan for the performance of such functions and monitor and review the performance of such functions against such targets and delivery plan.

Key successes



Excellent performance in most areas



Role of Welfare Team - of even more important challenges from various national welfare reforms



Discretionary Housing Payments - proactive work with this vital grant to assist those most in need of help with housing costs



Adapting to Single Fraud Investigations Service - with transfer of Housing Benefit fraud investigation to Department for Work and Pensions from 1 October 2014



Development and subsequent approval of a Welfare Reform Strategy



More than £0.5million saved across the two partner local authorities, providing better value for money



Plenty more...

About the service

The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service delivers Revenues and Benefits functions for City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council.

This includes;

- Collection of Council Tax
- Collection of Business Rates (also collecting for West Lindsey District Council)
- Processing of Housing Benefit / Council Tax Support claims
- Processing of Discretionary Housing Payment applications
- Collection of City of Lincoln Business

Improvement District levy

- Welfare/Benefits/Money advice
- Recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments
- Recovery of other incomes (currently only for City of Lincoln – former tenant arrears, sundry debtors)
- Investigation of Housing Benefit Fraud (up to 30th September 2014)
- Benefit appeals

The shared service has a combined live Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support caseload of almost 20,000, and bills more than 90,000 domestic and 9,000 commercial properties.

Performance

2014/15 - Revenues

	2014/15	2013/14
Council Tax in year collection		
City of Lincoln Council	96.93%	96.56%
North Kesteven District Council	99.25%	99.16%
Business rates in year collection		
City of Lincoln Council	99.46%	99.31%
North Kesteven District Council	99.78%	99.53%
West Lindsey District Council	99.17%	99.12%

2014/15 - Benefits

	Average no. days - new claims	Average no. days - changes of circumstances	Customer satisfaction	Customers - work outstanding
North Kesteven District Council	12.05 days 2013/14 12.66 days	2.91 days 2013/14 2.92 days	99.67% 2013/14 99.49%	1,036 2013/14 978
City of Lincoln Council	26.14 days 2013/14 28.33 days	5.07 days 2013/14 6.97 days	98.33% 2013/14 99.11%	1,267 2013/14 2,397



The challenges ahead

Reviewing the business

Key activity	Outcome/savings sought	Timescale
Continue development/implementation of a strategy for the council's response to Universal Credit	To provide a clear response to the challenges presented to the service in relation to the anticipated national rollout of Universal Credit; for example – in respect of customers, staff and processes.	2015/16
Channel Shift: Particular activities include; Correspondence, Self serve, Online application form	<p>Reduce officer time spent writing/checking correspondence/reduce printing costs/increased use of e-initiatives.</p> <p>Review range of online forms available and implement the solution that best meets customer needs as well as providing value for money.</p> <p>To further develop e-enabled access channels with as much direct back office integration as possible, and to encourage customers to utilise these channels – whilst still providing other access options for customers who require these.</p>	2015/16

Other key strategic commitments to be driven forward in the coming year

Key activity	Outcome sought	Timescale
Continued implementation and maintenance of welfare reform changes	Compliance with Welfare Reform Bill and related legislation, and to manage the impact on individual customers – providing assistance and advice wherever possible. Includes: Development of Council Tax Support schemes 2016/17 Readiness for national rollout of Universal Credit	2015/16
Universal Credit Local Support Services Frameworks	To continue to lead on and ensure effective Frameworks are in place to provide cohesive responses to individual and group needs in preparation for rollout of Universal Credit. To complete 12-month Universal Support Delivered Locally (USDL) trial testing triage, partnership and data sharing approach to providing support to customers. Trial in conjunction with West Lindsey District Council, Lincolnshire County Council, Lincolnshire Advice Network and Department for Work and Pensions. Both of the above initiatives provide key links and outcomes in relation to City of Lincoln's Anti-Poverty Strategy and North Kesteven's Welfare Reform Strategy.	2015/16 October 2015
Reacting to funding challenges 2015/16 and in preparation for 2016/17 – e.g. in respect of Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy, Department for Communities and Local Government Council Tax Support grant, New Burdens grant/s	To ensure that the budget is managed throughout 2015/16 and responses made accordingly, as well as preparation of a budget for 2016/17	In advance of and throughout 2015/16
Performance maintenance/improvement – particularly around Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collection, and Benefits processing times and accuracy	Performance maintenance/improvement – particularly around Council Tax and Business Rates in-year collection, and Benefits processing times and accuracy	2015/16



prepare for benefit changes

Responding to Welfare Reform

In February 2015, it was announced that a partial rollout of Universal Credit will happen in Lincoln during the period September 2015 to November 2015.

It has now been confirmed that an initial client group rollout of Universal Credit will commence in the City of Lincoln and North Kesteven from 30th November (2015).

To further embed an effective approach in the lead up to, and during rollout, both City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council have worked together on producing a robust Welfare Reform Strategy.

This strategy has nine key aims:

- To deliver Welfare Reform changes effectively and on time
- To proactively help our residents
- To let our residents and other organisations know about changes that are coming, or and preparation needed, to make sure our residents receive what they are entitled to
- To make sure both local authorities consider the financial implications for them as a result of the changes
- To ensure the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service is set up in the right way to deliver Welfare Reform
- To develop closer links between internal departments and partners so we can deliver effective support

- To bid for funding so we can deliver projects that benefit our residents
- To help residents meet new obligations from welfare changes (eg Discretionary Housing Payments; assistance with using a computer)
- To support other related strategies such as City of Lincoln Council Anti-Poverty Strategy and the North Kesteven Welfare Reform Strategy

This strategy lays the foundation for ongoing work, and will build upon some of the work already taken place, which have included:

- Writing to all customers affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy and benefit cap, to advise them of potential impacts and options
- Using the increased Discretionary Housing Payments from central government to reduce the impact of the removal of the spare room subsidy and benefit cap where possible and appropriate
- Consulted on and agreeing Council Tax Support schemes taking on board individual local authority demographics

In addition to this we are part of a high profile proactive Universal Support Delivered Locally trial with other councils and partners in West Lincolnshire, trialling a number of ways we can support our residents once Universal Credit is rolled out.

