

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>REVENUES AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE BUSINESS PLAN 2017/18</b>
<b>DIRECTORATE:</b>	<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE &amp; TOWN CLERK</b>
<b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b>	<b>CLAIRE MOSES, ASSISTANT HEAD OF SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS</b>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 As set out in the Shared Revenues and Benefits Business Case Delegation and Joint Committee Agreement, an annual Business Plan will be presented to this committee in November/December each year for consideration and approval.

## **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1 This report sets out the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan for 2017/18.

## **3. Business Plan**

- 3.1 The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Business Plan for the financial year 2017/18 is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

- 3.2 Key features of the plan, are:

- Key achievements in 2016/17;
- Savings in 2016/17;
- Key activities for 2017/18;
- Key risks;
- Safeguarding;
- Equality actions;
- Working in neighbourhoods;
- Workforce development.

## **4. Summary of Plan**

- 4.1 The year 2016/17 has been a year where a number of key channel shift projects in Revenues and Benefits have been progressed/implemented, despite ongoing demands on the service in terms of national changes (such as welfare reforms) as well as continuing high volumes of Benefit claims and Revenues correspondence.
- 4.2 Most areas have resulted in improvement performance – with notable areas of high standards of performance including in-year collections for Business Rates and Council Tax. In fact, the 2015/16 in-year Business Rates collection rate for City of Lincoln Council (99.78%) was the third highest in the country. All three collection rates for Business Rates exceeded 99%, as did Council Tax collection for North Kesteven, as well as City of Lincoln's Council Tax improving for the third

successive year. Benefits claims processing times have generally remained positive, as have improvements in accuracy, outstanding workload and customer satisfaction.

- 4.3 Ongoing budget pressures including a combined reduction in funding through Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) meant that consideration needed to be given to also reducing the shared service budget for 2016/17, which as part of budget-setting was agreed at a level of 50% of the amount by which these aforementioned grants have reduced.
- 4.4 The plan for 2017/18 continues to look at initiatives to meet challenges from the welfare reform and channel shift agendas, - but also looks at wider issues such as devolution, business growth, anti-poverty and corporate fraud. Each item is detailed in the Business Plan at Appendix 1.
- 4.5 Maintaining and improving levels of performance in 2017/18 will continue to be remain of paramount importance. Collecting revenues remains challenging due to factors such as the economic climate and cumulative effect of welfare reforms. Business Rates is undergoing significant change over the next 2-3 years with a revaluation exercise in 2017, as well as a full retention scheme by 2020 and the preparatory work this entails. Ongoing benefit and welfare changes, such as rollout of Universal Credit, a reduced Benefit Cap as well as pressures on the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) budgets will continue to mean this will result in ongoing pressures for officers dealing with claims processing.

## **5. Strategic Priorities**

- 5.1 Growing the local economy: The Revenues and Benefits shared service can through effective policies assist in business growth, as well as affordability of housing (through timely Housing Benefit payments, and use of Discretionary Housing Payments),
- 5.2 Protecting the poorest people in Lincoln: The Benefits Service has a key role in reducing poverty and disadvantage; by ensuring residents receive the benefits they are entitled to and providing money/debt advice. Digital Inclusion, Channel Shift, Financial Inclusion and Partnership Working are key priorities for the shared service.

## **6. Organisational Impacts**

- 6.1 Finance: Any costs/savings need to have due regard to the Medium Term Financial Strategies of both City of Lincoln and North Kesteven. As at the timing of writing this report details of central government funding for 2017/18 is unavailable (e.g. Housing Benefits Administration Subsidy).
- 6.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules: There are no direct Legal or Procurement implications arising from this report.
- 6.3 Equality, Diversity & Human Rights: There are no direct implications arising from this report.

**7. Risk Implications**

7.1 A Risk Register is in place for the Revenues and Benefits shared service, and is included at Appendix 2 to this report.

**8. Recommendation**

8.1 The Joint Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Comment on the Annual Business Plan for the shared service, and
- 2) Approve the 2017/18 Business Plan.

**Is this a key decision?** ~~Yes/No~~

**Do the exempt information categories apply?** ~~Yes/No~~

**Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?** ~~Yes/No~~

**How many appendices does the report contain?** Appendix 1 – Business Plan 2017/18  
Appendix 2 – Risk Register

**List of Background Papers:** None

**Lead Officer:** Claire Moses, Assistant Head of Shared Revenues  
and Benefits  
Telephone (01522) 873764