

CUSTOMER SERVICES BUSINESS PLAN

HOUSING BENEFITS

Part1 - Summary of BFI Report

BFI Recommendations

	Report Reference	Proposed action	Date Action by	Responsible Person(s)	Evidence that action completed	Action/progress at 31 March 05
1. Strategic Management						
1. Ensures that as part of its review of strategic and operational planning that targets are included for processing of claims	2.13	Review BVPI performance with Cumbrian and 'like' authorities Include agreed targets with Service Plan Design and publish service standards and expectations for users	July 05 Apr 05 Apr 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager	Targets included in Service Plan and issued Service standards published	Targets set for 2004/5 re-issued to staff November 04, pending review. Draft Service Plan to be issued for consultation 15 April 05 Service Standards to be issued for consultation 15 April 05
2. Produces an operational plan that clearly shows what actions will be taken, and by what dates, to achieve its targets		Development of Service plan including consultation with Service Managers and key stakeholders	Apr 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager	Published Service Plan Action plan, arising from BFI visit, produced.	Service Plan to be issued for consultation 15 April 05 Action Plan approved by Executive, 10 March 05

BFI Recommendations

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3. Reflects performance targets in individual work objectives which should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound		Development of Service plan including consultation with Service Managers and key stakeholders Reissue of performance Management Framework	Apr 05 May 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager and Team Leaders	Targets included in Service Plan Updated Performance Management Framework issued to staff	Targets set for 2004/5 re-issued to staff November 04, pending review.

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4. Monitors progress against its targets at a service and individual staff level		Improve output reports from Systems	Sept 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager	Comprehensive daily service status report	Basic reports now available from Academy and Anite
		Standing item at: Revenues and Benefits Management Team	Apr 05		Notes of Revenues and Benefits Management Team Meetings	Inaugural meeting of Revenues and Benefits Management Team scheduled for 14 April 05
		-Benefits Management Team	Completed and in place	Team Leaders	Notes of Benefit Managers Meetings	Introduced as standing item on Benefit Management Team agenda
		-One to Ones	Completed and in place	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager and	Notes of individual one to ones held by appropriate line managers	One to Ones commenced
		-Appraisals	May 05	Team Leaders	Notes of Appraisals on individual staff personnel files	Staff advised that appraisals will recommence May 05

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5. Develops HB and CTB delivery procedures that cover all aspects of the Benefits service and includes: - all legal requirements - Departmental circulars	2.24	Review and revise existing practice and help notes into single comprehensive document Design and production of advice and information leaflets for service users	Oct 05 Apr 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager and Financial Controls Technical Officer	Procedural manual published Leaflets on display in public access areas	There a number of procedures in place but these require an overhaul. Drafts of advice and information leaflets will start to be issued by 15 April 05
6. Ensures that procedures accurately reflect actual working practices and translate local policy into practical steps for delivery		Creation of working practice quality group with representation from all staff groups and users	Sept 05	Financial Controls Technical Officer Quality Group	Effective and usable manual Month on month improvement in accuracy rates to 99% plus by March 06.	Quality group to be created July 05, using feedback from Quality Officer based on first quarters results. Target set April 05

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7. Incorporates changes and amendments to procedures within 10 days of receipt		Prompt internal distribution of legislative changes received to Financial Controls Technical Officer Legislative changes given priority over other work Validation by Senior Financial Controls Officer	Completed and in place Subject to service needs Completed and in place	Senior Financial Controls Officer Financial Controls Technical Officer	Procedural documents produced on time	Changes are generally introduced within this timescale but formal procedures need to be developed to provide necessary evidence
8. Establishes a formal management control process for developing and changing local procedures to ensure that only current guidance is available to staff		Introduce version release control to BS standards!	Dec 05	Senior Financial Controls Officer	Physical evidence in manual	Awaiting release of staff from Software Implementation Project Group. Work scheduled to commence June 05

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9. Ensures written procedural guidance is available to all staff and confirms that all Benefits delivery procedures are fully understood by both managers and staff		On line availability	Dec 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager,	Access to all users	Procedures do exist but in a variety of formats.
		Use of testing analyses	Started Dec 04	Technical Support Officer, and Financial Controls Technical Officer	Results of Training needs Analysis Academy Skill-wise reports	Re-run of Training needs analysis completed Dec 04. Showed improvement to above industry standard.
		Validation by Quality Officer		Revenues and Benefits Service Manager, and Financial Controls Technical Officer	Revised procedures for Quality Officer and Assessment Team Leader Month on month improvement in accuracy rates to 99% plus by March 06.	Consultation Document issued to Managers March 05 Target set April 05

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10. Uses a formal work measurement methodology to develop specific targets for each Benefits processing task and: • assigns complexity weightings to each task to allow the differing experience and skill levels of staff to be taken into account when setting individual work targets for them • assigns priorities to tasks to reflect their urgency • introduces targets for the assessment team	2.32	Formal review of work measurement to identify best practice	Oct 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager and Team Leaders	Methodology that reflects local circumstances agreed. EDMS target completion dates revised Performance Management reports improved. Month on month improvement to processing days for - new claims - change of circumstances Target set for average of 10% improvement per quarter starting July/Sept 05 quarter	Targets already in place although based on historical and industry standard levels of productivity Further discussion to take place with BFI to consider use of BFI staff to assist in this area of activity Target set

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11. Collects, analyses and uses management information available from all HB and CTB systems to assist continuous improvement		Design and develop - daily service status report - weekly KPI monitoring , and - monthly service plan and review	Apr 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager and Team Leaders	Each document produced and in use in - management reporting - one to ones	Improved basic reporting now in place but requires development. Examples of proposed reports issued for discussion
12.Reviews its obligations under the provisions of the Race Relations Act 1976, as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 Act and takes action to: identify and consult with local ethnic minority groups, or their representatives, to establish clearly both the needs for and expectations of the Benefits service, and takes appropriate actions to satisfy them	2.48	To form part of corporate review	July 05	Head of Customer Services and Revenues and Benefits Service Manager	Race Equalities Statement issued	First cut of statement drafted

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13.Consults with other functions within the council that are concerned in any way with the work of the Benefits service to define clearly its working arrangements with them	2.51	Areas identified as: Copeland Direct Council Tax and Recovery Housing Strategy and Homelessness Team	Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager and Team Leaders	Merger of Copeland Direct, Council Tax and Recovery into a single Department. Revised operational arrangements with Housing and Homelessness	Merger planned for 1 June 05 as part of corporate re-structure. Assimilation process underway. Regular meetings with Homelessness Team and SLA drafted
14.Specifies clearly what is expected from all parties and how the arrangements will be monitored		Introduction of SLAs to include escalation procedures	Oct 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager	Signed SLAs Minutes of review meetings	Outline draft of one SLA produced, to be distributed for consultation as 'model' document by end of April 05, following which remaining draft SLAs will be produced and distributed to potential partners.
15.Formally reports on the success of the arrangements, agreeing and taking action where monitoring shows this is needed		Identify reporting process SLAs to detail remedial action process	Oct 05 Nov 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager	Signed SLAs Minutes of review meetings discussed at Revenues and Benefits Service Management Team	Contingent on actions in Proposal number 14.

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16.Establishes formal arrangements with landlords to ensure it has effective working arrangements with them to support customers in claims processing	2.57	Re-introduction of regular Landlord Forum SLAs introduced	Jul 05 Aug 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager	Signed SLAs Minutes of review meetings	List of landlords established. Some joint working planned for end April 05. Meeting with Major Housing Association planned.
17.Makes similar arrangements with other relevant external welfare organisations		Introduction of welfare advisers forum SLAs introduced	July 05 Aug 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager	Signed SLAs Minutes of review meetings	Initial meeting with CAB and Age Concern held
2. Processing of Claims						
1. Reviews its current claim form in line with the Department's HBCTB1	3.13	Revise existing form in line with HBCTB1 but also to reflect local circumstances	Jun 05	Revenues Project Team	Revised form in use	Work commenced. Examples obtained from other LAs, particularly those using Academy software and attaining Plain English Award
2. Ensures adequate supplies of HB and CTB claim forms are provided to its: • reception points • Registered Social Landlords and other welfare organisations		Controlled release of documentation at appropriate service points to reduce potential for fraud Consider use of e-forms	Jun 05 Dec 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager	Forms available on demand from several sources	Reception and service points asked to identify requirements to ensure sufficient supply in place. Order placed for further supply of existing forms

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3. Adds version controls to the form to ensure that only the current version is used		Introduce document control process to BS standards	Jun 05	Senior Financial Controls Officer	New forms printed and available.	Awaits re-design of new form.
4. Ensures that the additional guidance notes are always issued with the form		To be incorporated in redesign of form	Jun 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager	New forms printed and available.	Existing guidance to be reviewed and print order placed by end of April 05 as interim measure.
5. Analyses the reasons for claims being made without all the supporting information or evidence and takes appropriate action.		Improve management information Undertake statistical evaluation. Carry out user surveys Wide consultation on form design Improve clarity of guidance notes adopting 'Plain English' standards	Aug 05 Sept 05 Ongoing Ongoing April 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager and Customer Services Manager	10% reduction in % of incomplete claims by Oct 05 Target set for average of 10% improvement per quarter commencing July/Sept 05 for processing days for new claims and changes in circumstances Improved customer satisfaction ratings Reduction in customer contact	Work commenced. Now identifying: - number of requests for further information issued - number of callers to office - reasons for visit to office Further action will depend on outcome of statistical data analysis

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6 Improves workflow management by: - ensuring work is prioritised on receipt - taking early action to request additional information - issuing reminders before 28 days has elapsed - producing exception reports that identify the length and reasons for processing delays	3.26	Improve quality and use of EDMS reports Team Leader responsible for control and flow of work to assessors Regular review of outstanding work at Benefit Managers Meeting Introduction of pre-assessment process	May 05 Completed and in place Completed and in place Aug 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager and Team Leaders	Reduction in callers Reduction in elapsed processing time Reduction in Subsidy 'penalties' Reports show improved status.	Priorities defined by managers and work issued daily to staff From December 04 new claims given priority. From Dec 04 diary dates re-introduced pending new system and reminders issued in a timely manner. Parameters set in new system as at April 05 go live.

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7. Ensures that its new Benefits IT system provides reports which identify: - backlogs of work - where delays occur - claims not being actioned within prescribed timescales - performance, for the team and individual staff	3.37	Process review when new software fully installed	Sept 05	Head of Customer Services Revenues and Benefits Service Manager Senior Financial Controls Officer Team Leaders	No evidence of backlog Improved BVPIs Improved productivity	Workshops 4 April 05 identified nature of reports and responsibilities for action. Integration of Anite and Academy systems partly completed with finalisation by 20 April 05 Revised reporting mechanisms distributed for consultation. Ends 15 April 05.
8. Adopts the Verification Framework		Roll out to be planned following full implementation of new systems	Oct 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager Team Leaders	VF compliance	VF introduced for visiting VF module within Academy and Anite
9. Ensures that all staff are trained on the latest Verification Framework evidence requirements	3.53	To follow full implementation of new systems	Nov 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager Team Leaders	Improved accuracy on quality checks Month on month improvement in accuracy rates to 99% plus by March 06.	Guidance on evidential processes re-issued. VF training to planned prior to full VF implementation . Target set

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10.Ensures that identity is confirmed in all cases		Reminder and further guidance to staff	Issued	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager Team Leaders Financial Controls Technical Officer	Improved accuracy on quality checks Month on month improvement in accuracy rates to 99% plus by March 06.	Staff reminded and guidance issued. Will form part of QA by Team Leader and Quality Officer as covered in consultation document issued March 05 Target set
11.Records evidence seen, on its Benefits IT system, to support accuracy and quality checks		Reminder and further guidance to staff	Issued	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager Team Leaders Financial Controls Technical Officer	Improved accuracy on quality checks Month on month improvement in accuracy rates to 99% plus by March 06.	Staff reminded and guidance issued Will form part of QA by Team Leader and Quality Officer as covered in consultation document issued March 05 Target set

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12.Measures and monitors performance for dealing with customers' enquiries to ensure local standards are met.	3.61	Monitoring of reason for caller visit and/or phone call Call back to check customer experience of contact Improve advice to customers Improve provision of information from systems and ease of access and understanding FAQs to be developed May05	))Fully in place by)Jun 05) Ongoing Ongoing	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager Customer Services Manager Team Leaders	5% month on month reduction in repeat visits/callers Improvement in customer satisfaction at next BV review	Bespoke training arranged for all customer facing staff on use of systems and information requirements carried out March 05 Monitoring introduced to identify key reasons for customer contact. Planned extension of Copeland Direct involvement and regular review of customer satisfaction
13.Meets its statutory requirement to make referrals to the Rent Officer within 3 days, or as soon as practicable thereafter	3.69	Focus in quality assurance Reminder issued to staff	Ongoing Issued	Team Leader	Monitoring statistics	Reminder issued to staff Will form part of QA by Team Leader and Quality Officer as covered in consultation document issued March 05

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14.Makes a decision on referrals received from the Rent Officer within 2 days		Focus in quality assurance Reminder issued to staff	Ongoing Issued	Team Leader	Monitoring statistics	Reminder issued to staff Will form part of QA by Team Leader and Quality Officer as covered in consultation document issued March 05
15.Ensures that a 10% check of all work processed is carried out pre-notification	3.113	Revise working arrangements and focus of current QA work carried out	Aug 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager and Senior Financial Controls Officer	Increase in % of claims checked pre notification	Revised checking procedures introduced that have increased, at end of March 05 pre-notification checks to 50% Awaiting further information on using Academy to automatically select 10%
16.Ensures that the work of all staff is subject to such checks		Revise working arrangements and focus of current QA work carried out	Aug 05	1 Revenues and Benefits Service Manager 2 Senior Financial Controls Officer	Increase in % of claims checked pre notification Extended range of checks	Scope of checks extended Extended range of checks to be carried out by Team Leader and Quality Officer as covered in consultation document issued March 05

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17. Gathers data to identify areas of weakness to inform the targeting of future management checks and establish any training requirements.		Revise working arrangements and focus of current QA work carried out	Aug 05	Revenues and Benefits Service Manager and Senior Financial Controls Officer	Increase in % of claims checked pre - notification	Pre notification checks increased from 10 to 50% Scope of checks extended Development of feedback mechanisms planned for May 05