

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

22 SEPTEMBER 2014

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOODS

UPDATE ON BENEFIT PERFORMANCE

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Committee on current benefit performance and measures that have been put in place to effectively manage performance in relation to benefit processing across the authority.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.0 That the Committee notes the current performance of benefit processing and agrees to the proposed new performance measures as set out in Appendix 1.
- 2.1 The Committee notes the audit findings reported by PWC (external auditors) as set out in Appendix 2

3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The Governance Committee asked for a review into Housing Benefit processing and performance management due to continued difficulties with external audits of subsidy claims over the past 6 years.
- 3.2 A full review has been undertaken into historic performance and current performance. Benchmarking within the district has been undertaken – see Appendix 1 – this identified that Melton is a ‘good performing authority’ in relation to new claims processing. In relation to other areas we are in the top quartile.

Since April 2014 over 95% of all new claims are being processed in less than five working days. This is a key target that also allows us to support those most in need and is enabling the Council to focus on those claimants who have multiple issues referring them to services such as Me & My Learning and Sure Start.

- 3.3 During the review the area of most concern that has been highlighted is that current accuracy rates are below that set and expected. This issue of poor accuracy has contributed to the audit outcomes.

Corrective actions had already started to be undertaken based on what was identified in the 2012/13 audit. The initial testing for 2013/14 has identified 4 types of error – compared to 14 types of error identified in the initial testing in respect of 2012/13. This is a significant improvement however it is accepted that we still have some to work to do – consequently there is still a high chance of qualification for the external audit for 2013/14. See Appendix 2 for the 2013/14 types of error identified to date.

3.4 The errors that have been highlighted to date relate to errors caused in processing by front office benefit processors as confirmed in the PWC report. A new performance framework and accuracy targets has been set for Customer Services Processing Staff and back office staff which has been in effect since 1st April 2014.

3.5 An analysis of performance from all processing staff has taken place and new performance measures and reviews with individual staff have been put in place to help drive improvement and accuracy of processing claims. Several performance management initiatives are now well embedded as follows

- The back office People Team has weekly meetings with Customer Services Team Leaders where key performance and issues are discussed at a higher level
- Team Leader – Benefits and Customer Services Team Leader responsible for Benefits meet fortnightly where all aspects of Benefit service delivery are discussed with a main focus on accuracy and performance improvements. During these meetings clear actions and expectations are set with defined timescales for achieving them.
- Performance Statistics are produced in a timely manner on a monthly basis and discussed and reviewed at all levels
- Outcomes from quality checks, audits, errors are analysed and fed into any training plans and/or reviews of processes and procedures
- Monthly bulletins are also issued to all processing staff that contain key messages, results and relevant important information.
- Customer Service Champion attends the monthly Back Office Benefits Team meetings

4.0 **POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The new performance framework, targets and performance management of staff will take management resources in time in relation to having to continue to closely monitor staff performance. Positively the new performance frameworks are already showing improvements and should start to positively impact on future audits.

A training plan has now also been developed which is aimed at addressing weaknesses in staff performance. The training schedule is in operation and if individual performance is not improved alternative processes will be implemented.

5.0 **FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The continued issue with performance issues around accuracy it is felt will result in an audit qualification for 2013/14 which there is a high chance a repayment will need to be made to DWP. At this stage the figure is not known and would be paid from our existing benefit budgets. In addition auditor time and therefore fees will be higher than that which would be undertaken in a claim that is unqualified and error free.

6.0 **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS**

6.1 There are no legal implications to this report

7.0 **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

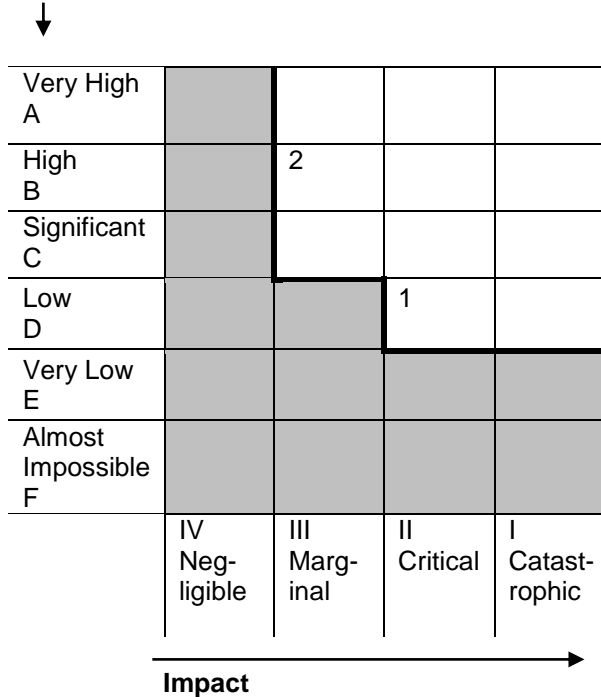
7.1 There are no particular implications arising from this report.

8.0 EQUALITIES

8.1 There are no particular equalities issues arising as a result of this report.

9.0 RISKS

9.1 **Probability**



Risk No.	Description
1	Staff accuracy performance does not show improvement.
2	2013/14 External Audit will result in qualification.

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 There are no particular implications arising from this report.

11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 Consultation has taken place with staff and managers within the Communities & Neighbourhoods Department, Communications Department and Central Services Department.

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 All

Contact Officer: Ronan Browne
Date: 20 August 2014

Appendices : Appendix 1 – Current Benefit Performance/ Proposed Performance Targets
Appendix 2 – PWC Audit Testing Findings 2013/14