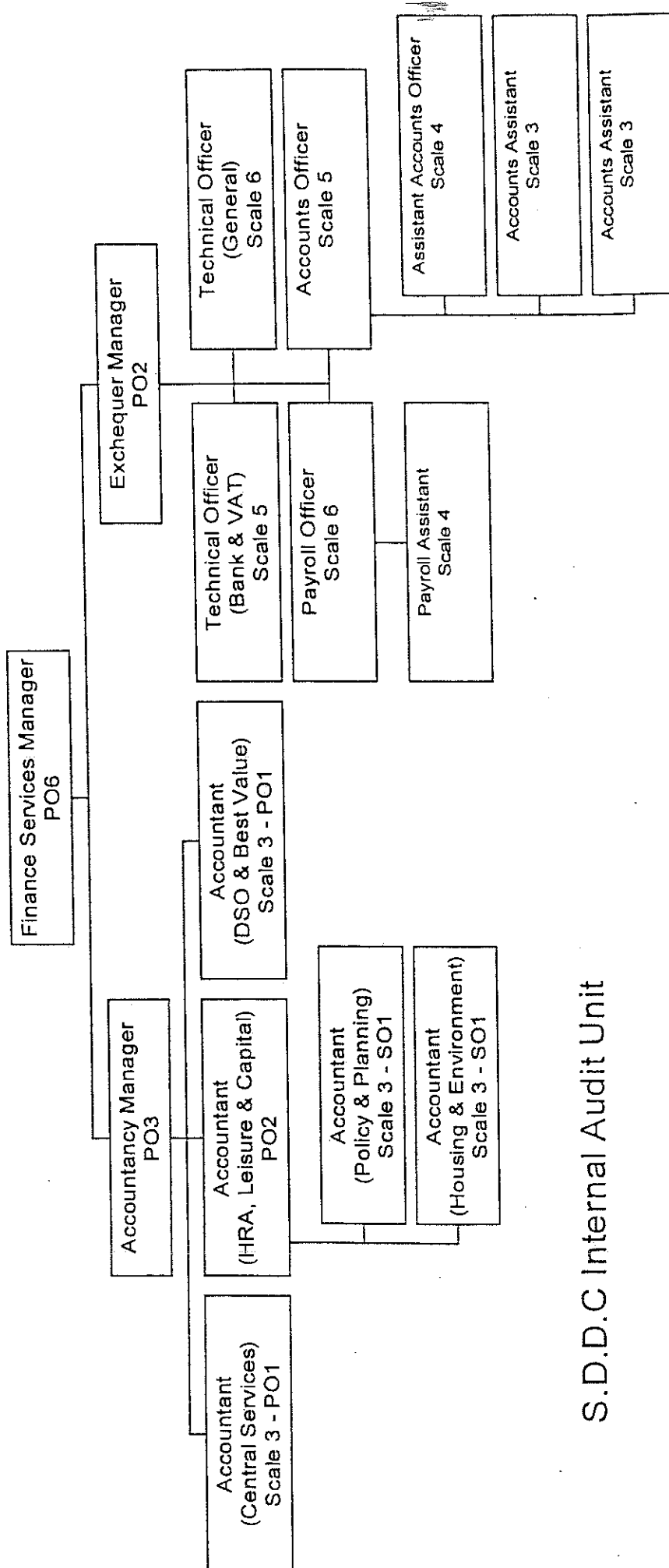
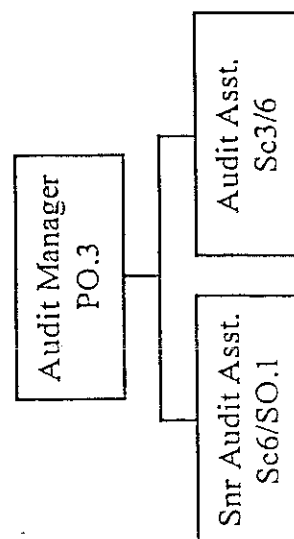


# FINANCE SERVICES ORGANISATION CHART



## S.D.D.C Internal Audit Unit



# **FINANCE SERVICES** **PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

<u>Service</u>	<u>Ref</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>2000/01</u> <u>Actual</u>	<u>Average</u> <u>of Derbys</u> <u>Authorities</u> <u>2000/01</u>	<u>Ranking</u>
<u>Accountancy</u>					
	DAC01	Statement of Accounts Approval Date (Deadline 30th Sept)	20-9-01	Later	4/11
	DAC11	Number of critical comments by the External Auditor	None	None	n/a
	DAC12	Percentage of key financial returns completed within set deadline			
<u>Audit</u>					
	DAU11	Net Cost of Internal Audit per audit day (£)	210	190	7/10
	DAU12	External Audit opinion of Internal Audit function	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	n/a
	DAU13	Percentage of the Annual Audit Plan completed in the Year	68.00%	82.00%	7/9
<u>Creditors</u>					
	DCR11	Unit cost of each creditor invoiced processed (£:p)	3.56	2.36	10/11
	DCR12	Average number of invoices processed by each employee	12,570	18,244	7/8
	DCR21	Percentage of key financial returns completed within set deadline	100.00%	88.00%	n/a
	DCR22	Percentage of payments made by electronic media	0.29%	34.18%	8/10
	DCR23	Percentage of manual payments	0.05%	1.43%	2/10
<u>Sundry Debtors</u>					
	DDR11	Unit cost of collecting for each debtor account raised (£:p)	12.90	5.76	9/9
	DDR21	Debtor days / average collection period (in days)	72	64	4/7
<u>Insurance</u>					
	DIN11	Total cost of insurance per 1,000 head of population (£)	2,110	3,565	2/11
	DIN12	Total cost of insurance as a percentage of the Gross Budget (£)	0.64%	0.71%	4/10
	DIN13	Average claims handling cost per insurance claim (£:p)	338.07	172.03	7/7
<u>Payroll</u>					
	DPY11	Unit cost per payslip produced (£)	8.32	4.19	10/10
	DPY12	Average number of payslips processed by each employee	8,042	11,917	5/7
	DPY13	Unit cost of payroll per employee (£)	169.32	96.74	11/11
	DPY21	Average number of payslips per employee	5.33	6.13	4/9
	DPY22	Percentage of payments made correctly and on-time	100.00%	99.81%	n/a
	DPY23	Percentage of key financial returns completed within set deadline	100.00%	100.00%	n/a
<u>Treasury Management</u>					
	DTM 11	Average rate of interest on all external borrowings	7.20%	7.73%	5/10
	DTM 12	Average rate of interest on all external investments	n/a	6.19%	n/a

APPENDIX 3

ANALYSIS OF TOTAL COST OF FINANCE SERVICES

Current Year (2002-03) Budgets

BREAKDOWN OF COSTS	Accountancy		Sundry Debtors		Creditor Payments		Payroll		Insurance Admin.		Internal Audit		Total	
	SDDC	1	SDDC	1	SDDC	1	SDDC	1	SDDC	1	SDDC	1	SDDC	1
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Oversees - Pay, NI and Pension	223,550	169,000	201,150	36,800	8,000	24,170	40,500	14,000	18,880	45,000	23,230	15,300	10,000	447,000
Employee Benefits	1,000	2,000	1,880	0	0	0	0	0	150	100	0	0	0	4,000
Travel and Subsistence	900	7,000	12,870	200	0	0	300	0	0	250	0	50	0	2,900
Printing and Development	1,500	2,000	4,270	0	0	0	0	0	340	500	340	0	0	1,100
System Maintenance/Support/Development	30,850	81,000	33,390	18,950	14,000	12,000	12,850	15,000	25,100	8,500	16,000	0	0	600
Hardware	6,400	0	1,550	0	0	0	1,750	0	0	1,700	0	450	0	2,250
Charges for Accommodation	13,250	16,000	17,870	2,000	1,000	4,550	2,200	2,000	2,890	2,550	2,890	850	1,000	5,700
Travel/Running and Other Expenses	11,450	1,000	6,250	5,200	2,000	1,690	2,450	4,000	13,080	3,050	2,100	850	0	2,450
Post Services/Management Recharges	79,300	32,000	7,180	39,250	6,000	18,510	22,200	4,000	24,370	18,750	9,000	3,200	2,000	13,550
Other Charges	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>368,200</b>	<b>330,000</b>	<b>274,870</b>	<b>103,950</b>	<b>31,000</b>	<b>59,230</b>	<b>82,250</b>	<b>39,000</b>	<b>84,750</b>	<b>80,400</b>	<b>59,600</b>	<b>20,700</b>	<b>13,000</b>	<b>769,900</b>

Number of FTE's	8.1	8.3	7.5	2.0	0.6	1.0	2.2	0.9	2.0	2.1	1.8	1.5	0.6	0.5	0.3	3.0	4.0	3.0	18.0	16.1	15.3
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Council's Gross Exp (£) 30,000,000 40,000,000 35,000,000

Indry Debtor Invoices Processed p.a.

Creditor Invoices Processed p.a.

Number of Payslips p.a.

Number of Insurance Claims p.a.

45,000 24,000 32,500

7,932 17,000 8,800

55 100 40

APPENDIX 3

**UNIT COST OF FINANCE SERVICES**

	South Derbys.	Authority 1	Authority 2
	£	£	£
<b><u>All Activities</u></b>			
Direct Cost per FTE	26,769	24,161	26,386
Overhead Cost per FTE	16,003	15,217	12,611
Total Cost per FTE	42,772	39,379	38,997
<b><u>Accountancy</u></b>			
Direct Cost as a % of Council's Gross Exp.	0.79%	0.50%	0.62%
Overhead Cost as a % of Council's Gross Exp.	0.43%	0.32%	0.17%
Total Cost as a % of Council's Gross Exp.	1.23%	0.83%	0.79%
<b><u>Sundry Debtors</u></b>	£:p	£:p	£:p
Direct Cost per Invoice Processed	8.44	1.52	3.74
Overhead Cost per Invoice Processed	12.35	3.18	4.72
Total Cost per Invoice Processed	20.79	4.70	8.46
<b><u>Creditor Payments</u></b>	£:p	£:p	£:p
Direct Cost per Invoice Processed	0.96	0.75	0.99
Overhead Cost per Invoice Processed	0.87	0.88	1.61
Total Cost per Invoice Processed	1.83	1.63	2.60
<b><u>Payroll</u></b>	£:p	£:p	£:p
Direct Cost per Payslip Processed	6.16	2.29	2.94
Overhead Cost per Payslip Processed	3.97	2.12	3.83
Total Cost per Payslip Processed	10.14	4.41	6.77
<b><u>Insurance Administration</u></b>	£	£	£
Direct Cost per Claim	295	100	n/a
Overhead Cost per Claim	82	30	n/a
Total Cost per Claim	376	130	206

# **SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **FINANCIAL SERVICES BEST VALUE**

### **REVENUE DIVISION**

#### **1. Introduction**

Best Value forms one component of the government's plans to modernise local government and to provide better services at lower cost. The legislation requires local authorities to deliver quality services and achieve continuous improvement in line with the requirements of the local community.

#### **2. Overview**

The Revenue and Benefit service provides for the collection of Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rate along with the granting of Council Tax Benefits. The service is also responsible for the processing of remittances and the administration of the concessionary fares scheme.

There is the constant requirement to provide a high quality service to the customer along with the need to keep up to date with the many legislation changes which affect both the collection of council tax and national non-domestic rate as well as the administration of the benefit scheme.

This part of the review has examined the provision of the service and the most efficient way to take it forward. It also addressed the way the service can be delivered.

The revenue and benefit IT systems had origins dating back into the early 1980's and were non-industry compatible being unable to embrace e-government requirements. The arrangements with our partners, Derbyshire Dales District Council, were resource hungry for specification, writing and testing.

However, a modern document management system was in use. This had reduced working times and assisted greatly with performance. A modern cash receipting system was also in use.

### **3. Scope**

The review set out to address two specific areas in the delivery of the revenues and benefit service.

The first area was the shape of the service delivery to the customer and the arrangements to ensure that a robust services was provided.

The second area was the way that information technology is employed to achieve cost-effective service delivery.

The review did not look at the minute details of the service delivery. It was concerned with addressing the two main areas of delivery and concentrated on the strategic level of service delivery. It also addressed how the authority could provide solutions to any current shortcomings and risks.

### **4. Methodology**

The Financial Services review was divided into two areas, Financial Services (including Audit) and Revenue Services. The two areas have dealt with the issues surrounding their services and the findings will be drawn together in a final report.

Revenues and Benefits were addressed first. This was because of factors surrounding the partnership with Derbyshire Dales and the need to address the IT provision along with the feeling that it was a logical step to take following the eradication of the benefit backlog.

Two seminars were held in September, 2001 to address issues relating to the revenues and benefit service. The first seminar launched the Terms of Reference for the review and gave details of the position of the service at that time. The issues and challenges faced were outlined along with details of investigations that had been carried out in the preceding months. This seminar was also used to address the key issues facing the service.

The second seminar, held later that month, was used to present details about the performance levels and costs of the service and presented a number of options, including advantages and disadvantages, to identify the way to carry the service forward.

## **5. Key Tasks**

The review set out to achieve the following key tasks:

- ❖ The broad overview of the service currently provided
- ❖ The review of how this service is delivered
- ❖ Ways of ensuring a robust approach to the delivery of the service
- ❖ Ways of providing IT solutions to support the service and the method of service delivery

The review also set out to consider, in some detail, the delivery of the service in partnership with other local authorities and organisations. Indeed, this proved to be the main platform identified to improve and sustain service delivery into the future.

Consultation with customers to ascertain their needs was also identified as a key task and there was to be particular emphasis placed in the development of e-government solutions.

## **6. Issues and Challenges**

A number of issues and challenges were identified and these centred around the computer software used, the alliance with Derbyshire Dales District Council, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, the introduction of the Benefit Verification Framework, Council Tax Recovery and the need for constant improvement.

The fragile nature of the current software was recognised as was the fact that it was a time consuming system, unable to project management information and unable to embrace technology advances. The existing system requires specialist skills in IT language and the end-user ability to specify and test.

The arrangements for the delivery of the software relied on the co-operation of both parties, neither of whom were able to maintain the system alone and both processing limited availability of staff compared to software suppliers.

It was recognised that the service was likely to fall short of a minimum standard due to the limitations of the computer system, the far reaching implications identified in inspections throughout the country and the consequent need to revise current working practices.

Other issues identified were the need to be more pro-active in the recovery of debt and the need to implement the use of Debit/Credit cards to assist with the collection of money due throughout the authority.

There was a requirement to achieve constant improvement to the service provided and improve and maintain the results of the best value indicators.

## 7.1 Baseline Assessment

A comprehensive baseline assessment was carried out and the following information was identified:

### AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

#### *Revenue Collection*

The provision of an effective Revenue Collection Service by billing, collecting and, where necessary, recovering through the courts the Council Tax, National Non-Domestic Rate in accordance with the relevant legislation and the anti-poverty and equal opportunity policies of the Authority.

#### Council Tax

Council Tax was introduced on 1 April, 1993 and is collected under the provisions of the Local Government Act, 1992 and various regulations made thereunder. The regulations require that the amount due is collected in ten instalments unless written agreement is reached on alternative payment arrangements. The first instalment is due on 15 April in the year of account (this will be the 1 April from 2000 onwards) and the Council offers flexible payment dates with the 1, 10, 15, 20 and 25 of each month being available.

Two reminders are allowed under the Regulations before instalments are cancelled and the full amount becomes due, with ultimate recourse to a summons, liability order or possible commitment to prison.

The amount of Council Tax due also includes the requirements of the Derbyshire County Council and the Derbyshire Police Authority which, as major precepting authorities, precept on the Council as billing authority. The Council's own budget requirement also includes the precepts of parish councils.

There are approximately 34,700 properties in the district subject to Council Tax and it is necessary to issue over 17,000 final notices and reminders each year, resulting in over 4,000 summons being issued. Approximately 3,500 liability orders are obtained for Council Tax cases.

#### National Non-Domestic Rate

When general rates were abolished and community charge was introduced, the Local Government Act, 1988 introduced a national non-domestic rate for non-domestic property. NNDR is collected in essence as an "agent" for the Department of the Environment.

The rateable values are assessed by the Valuation Office Agency and the rate in the £ or "multiplier" is set by central government. Billing authorities are required to bill and collect the amounts due and pay the proceeds to central



government. The national proceeds of NNDR are re-distributed to billing and major precepting authorities on a per-capita basis, with the same amount per-capita being paid to authorities of the same class.

There are 1,900 properties on the National Non-Domestic Rate list and it is necessary to issue over 1,200 final notices and reminders each year. 425 summons are issued per annum resulting in 350 liability orders being obtained.

### ***Housing and Council Tax Benefit***

The provision of an effective Housing and Council Tax Benefits Service in accordance with the relevant legislation and the anti-poverty and equal opportunity policies of the Authority.

#### **Housing & Council Tax Benefits**

There are three main categories of benefit covering Council Tax liability, Rent Rebates for Council Houses and Rent Allowances for those in private rented accommodation, including that of various Housing Associations. Boarders and hostel dwellers can, under certain circumstances, also be eligible for rent allowances.

The housing and council tax benefits schemes are, in practice, operated as "agents" of the Department of Social Security with very little discretion available to the Council except in limited and well-defined areas and usually with a financial ceiling. There is, therefore, little control that can be exercised over the quantum of the benefits awarded. Recent amendments to the regulations have included provisions for discretionary enhancements to rent allowance payments where the effects of the regulations restrict the amount of rent allowance paid.

To administer the scheme effectively, a comprehensive application form has to be completed by each applicant unless they are in receipt of Income Support in which case details are supplied along with those from the Department of Social Security. All current applications are subject to a rolling review procedure which ensures that correct information is held and that each benefit period does not exceed the statutory 60 week period.

The current caseload comprises of just under 5,000 successful Council Tax Benefit applicants of which 2,200 also receive a Rent Rebate and a further 1,300 also receive a rent allowance. The Council Tax Benefits and Rent Rebates are credited to the relevant accounts whereas Rent Allowances are paid by crossed cheque. Each case has to be reviewed on a regular basis and changes of circumstances reported by the applicant have to be actioned.

It should be noted that benefits relating to council house rents and the associated subsidy are included in the housing revenue account, whereas all

costs of administration are included in the general fund. There are subsidies paid towards the cost of the benefits themselves and administration costs.

### Benefit Fraud Investigation

The area of Benefit Fraud Investigation is carried out by a dedicated Housing Benefit Fraud Investigation Officer. The Department of Social Security introduced a system of subsidy initiatives and penalties to encourage local authorities to embark on housing benefit fraud investigation. The Council gains in two ways from combating housing benefit fraud. Firstly it receives additional subsidy based on "Weekly Incorrect Benefit Savings". In addition, any overpayments attract a premium on the subsidy.

Throughout the period since the appointment of a Benefit Fraud Investigation Officer a number of initiatives have been examined and those approved are to be implemented on an ongoing basis in a bid to increase the level of the detection of fraud. These are incorporated into an annual Business Plan produced at the beginning of each financial year.

### Appeals

The legislation under which the Council operates the housing and council tax benefit schemes provides for an appeal mechanism. The Council is required to give each claimant a written determination of his or her claim to benefit. If the claimant is not satisfied, there is a review process within the office administration. If, after this review process is undertaken, a claimant remains dissatisfied, then he or she can appeal to the Appeals Service.

### *Cash Office and Enquiry Facilities*

The provision of an effective Cashier and Enquiry service for Revenue Service customers.

The Council operates cash office facilities at the Civic Offices in Swadlincote and payments may also be made at any post offices throughout the country. All payments made over the counter and postal remittances are processed in the central cash office. The other transactions are received and posted automatically. The cash office also acts as an enquiry office for all Revenue Division queries, there being two booths for use when such queries are of a confidential

## **7.2 Profile of South Derbyshire District (Revenue related issues)**

In the financial year 2001/02, some £24 million for Council Tax and £18 million for the National Non-Domestic Rate was collected. Rent Rebates of £4.6 million, Rent Allowances of £3.8 million and Council Tax Benefit of £2.5 million was awarded.

There are almost 34,700 properties banded for Council Tax purposes. In addition, there are almost 1,900 National Non-Domestic Rate properties.

The caseload for Housing and Council Tax Benefit claimants is 5,000. Of these, 2,200 also receive Rent Rebate (paid to Council Tenants) and 1,300 receive Rent Allowance (paid to private tenants and tenants of Registered Social Landlords).

The Cashier Service processes over 80,000 transactions per year for Council Tax, NNDR, Housing Rent and Invoice payments. These include those received over the counter or through the post as well as those that are received by electronic means other than by Direct Debit.

### **7.3 Scope of the Revenue Services portion of the Best Value Review**

The review addressed two specific areas in the delivery of the Revenue and Benefit Service.

- The first area was the shape of the service delivery to our customers and the arrangements employed in providing a robust service.

- The second area was the way that Information Technology is employed to achieve cost-effective service delivery.

- The review did not look into the minute detail of the service delivery, although existing benchmarking information was used. The development plan includes a number of issues to be taken forward once the two fundamental issues mentioned above have been addressed.

- Further issues to be addressed include the work of the Fraud Investigation Unit along with how the Verification Framework will be implemented.

- The review concentrates on the strategic level of service delivery and how the authority plans to provide solutions to any current shortcomings and risks. This includes the effective working with other agencies.

### **7.4 Democratic Process**

The authority has introduced a Modernised Structure and reports are submitted to the Finance and Management Committee which meets on a 6 weekly cycle.

There is some delegation of operational duties to the Chief Finance Officer and Members have recently approved a scheme for the granting of discretionary reliefs, a major part of which involves delegation, along with an appeals procedure.

## **7.5 Corporate Objectives**

The following corporate related critical success factors identified in the Corporate Plan relate to the division:

- . Put in place arrangements for good corporate governance
- . Develop management competencies
- . Implement service planning
- . Establish training and development plans for employees
- . Implement the Best Value review
- . Implement the absence management policy
- . Manage service delivery
- . Incorporate e-government in service delivery
- . Embrace organisational change
- . Support the improvement of morale
- . Ensure people are treated fairly and equally
- . Promote a right first time ethos
- . Support the improvement of communication with employees
- . Improve on current levels of our customers satisfaction
- . Support and promote team working
- . Formulating policies and practices that assist in the introduction of an effective, integrated performance management culture
- . Improve performance where the government has set national targets

## **7.6 Legal Framework**

The collection of the Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates and the administration of the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Scheme are statutory functions and the Council has a legal requirement to carry out these functions.

Legislation in this area, particularly surrounding the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Scheme changes on a regular basis and is subject to review, often at short notice.

Key areas of legislation are:

- The Local Government Finance Act, 1988
- The Local Government Finance Act, 1992
- The Social Security Administration Act, 1992
- The Housing Benefits (General) Regulations, 1987
- The Council Tax (General) Regulations, 1992

## 7.7 Service Costs

### Revenue Expenditure

The table below shows the committee spending controlled by the Head of this Division.

Division	Gross Spending	Income	Net Spending
Total Committee Costs	£7,773,740	£6,012,650	£1,761,090

Revenue Expenditure consists mainly of Benefit Payment made on behalf of Central Government

### Central Departmental Costs – recharged to committees

The Council has a system of central establishment charges. This means that costs related to this division are charged first to a holding code and then recharged to committees. The table below summarises these costs which are controlled by the head of this division and then recharged to services.

Division	Gross Spending	Income	Net Spending
Total Central Support Costs	£934,330	-	£934,330

## 7.8 Organisational & Management Structures

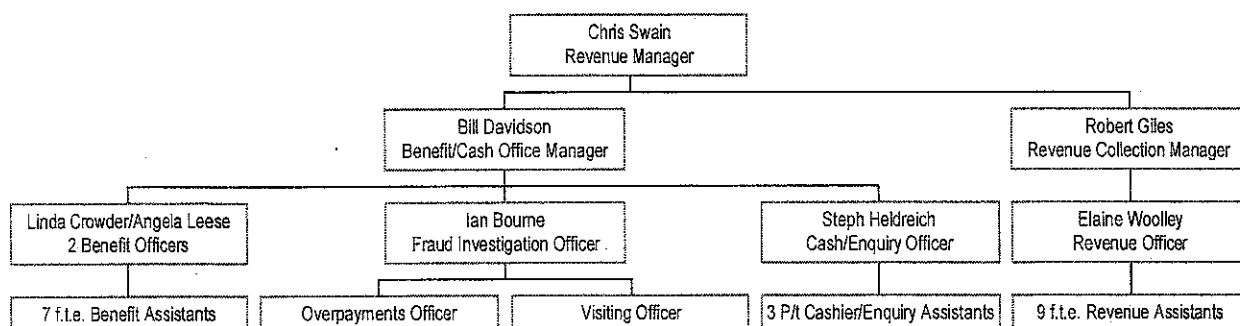
The Revenue Division is part of the Finance and I.T. Department.

The Division is managed by the Revenue Manager and is divided into two main section as follows:

- ☐ Revenue Collection
- ☐ Benefits and Cash Office

An organisation chart is shown below:

### Work organisation – Revenue Services



The total establishment is 32 members of staff with 12 being part-time filling 29 FTE positions.

## 7.9 Service Standards and BVPIs

The Division has a service plan, approved by the Finance and Management Committee. Performance against this plan is monitored on a quarterly basis and reported formally to members at half yearly intervals.

The table below shows the Best Value Indicators that relate to the service provided within the revenue division:

Best Value Indicator	Actual 2000/01	Actual 2001/02	Estimate 2002/3	Target 2003/4	Government Target 2004/5
9 – Percentage Council Tax Collected in year	98.28%	98.30%	98.30%	98.35%	98.20%
10 – Percentage NNDR collected in year	98.90%	98.75%	98.75%	98.80%	98.70%
76 – Fraud Strategy	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
77 – Cost of administration per benefit claim - weighted	£47.23	£48.16	£49.00	£50.00	-
78a - Average number of days to process new Benefit Claims	29 days	10 days	7 days	7 days	-
78b – Average number of days to process changes of circumstances	21 days	7 days	7 days	7 days	-
78c – Percentage of renewals processed on time	100%	100%	100%	100%	-
79a – Accuracy of processing (correct calculations)	99.47%	97.00%	99.00%	99.00%	-
79b – Accuracy of processing (percentage of overpayments received)	Unable	To	measure	Due to	Software limitations
User Satisfaction Survey	2000/01 only	2000/01 only	2000/01 only	2000/01 only	
80a – Facilities to get in touch with the office	83.41%				
80b – Service in the actual office	85.21%				
80c – Telephone service	84.17%				
80d – Staff in Benefit Office	81.48%				
80e – Clarify and understanding of forms	72.69%				
80f – Amount of time it took to inform claimant	75.03%				

These indicators also form the basis of statistical returns made by the Council to the Department of Work & Pensions. This information is provided quarterly and used to compare the Council's performance with local authorities across the country. The Council has consistently been within the upper quartile for these measures of performance.

### Local Performance Indicators

The table below shows the local indicators that the Division has developed to measure its performance.

Local Indicator	Estimate 2002/3	Target 2003/4
Average number of chargeable Council Tax dwellings per employee	2,700	2,750
Average number of chargeable NNDR properties per employee	1,125	1,125
Average time for paying new claims for Council Tax Benefit	7 days	7 days
Average time for paying new claims for Rent Rebate	7 days	7 days
Average time for paying new claims for Rent Allowance	7 days	7 days
Average time for processing changes of circumstances for Council Tax Benefit	6 days	6 days
Average time for processing changes of circumstances for Rent Rebate	6 days	6 days
Average time for processing changes of circumstances for Rent Allowance	6 days	6 days
Average number of claimants per employee	750	750
Percentage of claims not processed at the end of the year	2.50%	2.50%
Number of transactions processed per cashier (per annum)	19,500	19,500

## 7.10 Benchmarking

The Division is a member of two process benchmarking groups. One covers Revenue Collection and the other Benefits. Other members of these groups are:

#### Revenue:

Bassetlaw District Council  
 Bromsgrove District Council  
 Broxtowe Borough Council  
 Derbyshire Dales District Council  
 East Staffordshire Borough Council  
 Gedling Borough Council  
 Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council  
 Lichfield District Council  
 Rushcliffe Borough Council  
 South Northamptonshire District Council

#### Benefits:

Amber Valley Borough Council  
Bassetlaw District Council  
Derbyshire Dales District Council  
East Lindsay District Council  
Gedling Borough Council  
Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council  
Rushcliffe Borough Council  
South Holland District Council

A group of authorities has been established to develop and produce leaflets for use by the public. The leaflets cover the housing and council tax benefit service (including the range of policies that relate to that service) and future plans include a suite of leaflets for council tax and the national non-domestic rate.

#### The authorities involved are:

Amber Valley Borough Council  
Ashfield Borough Council  
District of Bolsover  
Derbyshire Dales District Council  
Chesterfield Borough Council  
Erewash Borough Council  
High Peak Borough Council  
Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council  
Lichfield District Council  
Newark & Sherwood District Council  
North East Derbyshire District Council  
North Warwickshire Borough Council

### **7.11 Policies and Codes of Practice**

The Division has developed a number of policies and codes of practice and these are as follows:

- ☐ Recovery Codes of Practice (for Council Tax and NNDR)
- ☐ Code of Practice for Bailiff Services
- ☐ Prosecution Policy
- ☐ Code of Practice for Investigation Officers
- ☐ Discretionary Housing Payments Policy
- ☐ Housing and Council Tax Benefit policies (developed jointly with the authorities in the leaflet group in paragraph 7.10 above)



## **7.12 External Service Providers**

Revenue Services has used the services of bailiff companies for many years. Currently, two bailiff companies are used and the performance of each is monitored. Other external service providers despatch the annual council tax bills and benefit notifications. The plastic payment cards are produced by a specialist company and a number of payments are processed at post offices throughout the country. The collection of certain benefit overpayments is also undertaken by a company specialising in debt collection.

During the best value process, two external service providers were interviewed – C.S.L. Group Ltd. and W.S. Atkins Ltd.

## **7.13 Partnership Working & Arrangements**

A consortium has been formed between the following authorities to install a new revenues and benefits system bid funded under the provisions of the Invest to Save Round 4:

- ☐ Derbyshire Dales District Council
- ☐ High Peak Borough Council
- ☐ North East Derbyshire District Council
- ☐ South Derbyshire District Council
- ☐ Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

The project shows new innovations and will be used as a foundation for the development of extensive joint working arrangements in all areas of revenues and benefits administration.

The project involves the five district councils working together in partnership with the private sector in the delivery of a revenues and benefits computer system. Accessibility by the public is to be enhanced through the use of internet technology, with kiosk access points being provided at various locations in each district.

The supplier will be responsible for the provision and maintenance of the software and will, effectively, produce a desktop service. The supplier will also take the risks for supplying the software and will also be expected to ensure that day to day security of the systems is provided to industry standards, including full disaster recovery planning.

Once the computer systems are in place, the objectives are as follows:

- ☐ To provide a cost effective and efficient revenues and benefits service taking into account economies of scale
- ☐ To provide customers with the ability to gather information and to communicate electronically concerning their affairs via the internet

- ☐ To provide an effective service by having highly trained staff
- ☐ To establish effective partnerships between authorities, including reciprocal working arrangements within the Consortium membership
- ☐ To address rural social exclusion and improve benefit take-up
- ☐ To reduce the level of fraud through cross boundary working throughout the Consortium's area

The project is managed by a Joint Committee, established under section 101(5) of the Local Government Act, 1972 and the Project Team is overseeing the implementation and development of the project.

Prior to the commencement of the project, the District of Bolsover left the consortium and was replaced by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

#### **7.14 Who are our Stakeholders?**

These have been identified as:

- ☐ Council Tax Customers
- ☐ National Non-Domestic Rate Customers
- ☐ Benefit Claimants
- ☐ Council Tenants
- ☐ Invoice Payers
- ☐ Travel Pass Recipients
- ☐ The Public in general
  
- ☐ RSLs and other landlords
- ☐ Elected Members
- ☐ Local M.P.
- ☐ Management Team
- ☐ Other Departments
- ☐ Our own Staff
- ☐ Trade Unions
- ☐ Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
- ☐ Valuation Office Agency
- ☐ Department for Works & Pensions
- ☐ Benefits Agency
- ☐ Rent Service
- ☐ Other Local Authorities
- ☐ Community Groups
- ☐ Chamber of Trade/Commerce
- ☐ Voluntary Sector (e.g. CAB)

- ☐ Co-op and Giro Banks
- ☐ The Post Office
- ☐ Sub-postmasters/postmistresses
- ☐ Computer Hardware/Software Suppliers

#### **7.15 Revenue Staff Consultation/Involvement**

Two members of staff are members of the Best Value Review Team and have been able to contribute in that forum. They have also been able to feed back information to their colleagues.

Since the commencement of this review, the Council has also introduced a corporate team briefing process. This provides further opportunity to brief staff on corporate and service-related issues on a regular weekly basis.

#### **7.16 Implementation of Corporate Policies/Framework**

The Revenue Division has an approved Service Plan which is linked into the Departmental and Corporate Plans. All staff undertake Personal Development Reviews on a rolling basis and have individual training plans.

#### **7.17 Local, Regional and National Context of Service**

The service is delivered to meet the needs of communities within the district. The service is governed by national legislation and government guidance. Any discretionary powers are exercised by the authority.

There is a network of practitioner's meetings held throughout the East Midlands region to cover all aspects of the revenue and benefit work.

### **8. Focus Groups**

A Revenues Focus Group was held on 17 April, 2002 and was attended by eight persons and whilst the comments came from two or three individuals, there were no dissenting voices.

A number of questions were asked and the responses recorded (see **Annexe \*\***). In general, there appeared to be satisfaction with the service and support for a more robust action on the enforcement of payment. A number of the other issues are to be investigated as part of the schedule of key issues.

A further Focus Group was held on 26 February, 2003 to which a number of professional partners were invited. The format of the meeting was a short presentation covering the service and issues followed by a question session. The outcome of this focus group is at **Annexe \*\***. It should be noted that a further positive outcome of this focus group was the constructive relationship

that was formed between the Department of Work and Pensions and the authority.

## **9. Joint Working**

Joint working features to a large extent throughout the working of the Revenue Division. Examples of joint working are:

- The Revenues and Benefits Consortium (para. 7.13)
- The joint leaflet group (para. 7.10)
- Benchmarking Groups (para. 7.10)
- Joint working the JobcentrePlus and the local D.W.P. Fraud Unit. Two successful bids for joint funding have resulted in two joint initiatives. These are the provision of interview facilities to PACE standards in Swadlincote and joint visits to establishments to identify applicants who may be "working and claiming".

Visits have taken place to the neighbouring authorities of East Staffordshire Borough Council and North West Leicestershire District Council with a view to instigating joint working arrangements.

There was also a further meeting arranged with East Staffordshire and members of staff met to discuss issues and formulate links for future working arrangements and to exchange experiences. Two areas of particular interest are:

- Attendance at the joint Landlord's Forum meetings
- Sharing East Staffordshire's experience in the implementation of the Verification Framework

A group has also been formed comprising of all Derbyshire authorities (including Derby City) to take forward a number of initiatives. Areas under consideration are:

- Joint publicity in local newspapers/county newspaper for council tax discounts and exemptions
- Work together on ideas for the new annual bill leaflet
- Joint direct debit campaigns (including the introduction of "paperless" direct debits)
- Joint training of staff on revenue issues
- Investigations of a joint recovery policy
- Derbyshire-wide internet site for revenues

*South Derbyshire takes a leading role in these meetings and ensures that the concepts are carried forward.*

## 10. Best Value Team Seminars

The initial approach to the best value review was to form the team and then hold a number of seminars, information be presented to the team members and discussion then taking place.

Members of the Team were:

Terry Neaves	Chief Finance Officer
Chris Swain	Revenue Manager
Bill Davidson	Benefits/Cash Office Manager
Mark Fearn*	Revenue Collection Manager

Angela Leese	Benefit Officer
Deborah Vickers	Revenue Assistant

Councillor John Wilkins, Chair of Finance & Management  
Councillor Roy Bell, Chair of Corporate Scrutiny Committee  
Councillor Heather Wheeler, Leader, Conservative Group

Bob Trahern	North Warwickshire Borough Council
Malcolm Chell	Technical Admin Manager
Steve Powell	Building Control Manager

\*Mark Fearn was subsequently replaced by Robert Giles as Revenue Collection Manager.

The first meeting took place on 6 September, 2001 and the following issues were addressed:

- The Terms of Reference for the Review
- A presentation outlining where the service was at that time
- A presentation outlining the issues and challenges that faced the service
- A presentation giving details of the work that had been taking place during the previous months to prepare for the review and collate information to inform the options that would be available
- A session to identify the key issues facing the service and those which would feature in the review.

A second seminar was held on 17 September, 2001 and the issues covered were:

- The presentation of performance levels and costs (these had been requested at the previous meeting)
- A presentation of the options available to take the service forward (this included the advantages and the disadvantages of each option)
- A lengthy discussion of the options
- A session to identify the way forward

Following those seminars work was carried out to take forward the issues that had been discussed and agreed.

## **11. Joint Working with the Private Sector**

Throughout the period of the review there has been constant dialogue with companies in the private section who are in a position to provide services to enhance the delivery of the service.

The companies are

❖ S.T.S.	<i>Billing by e-mail and associated Issues including call centres</i>
❖ Bottom Line, Checkpoint, PCF	<i>Production of cheques/direct debits/ Letters/invoices</i>
❖ LG Solutions	<i>Delivering revenue services on a Practical day to day basis</i>
❖ FDM	<i>Direct Mail</i>
❖ Adelante	<i>e-payments</i>
❖ Co-operative Bank	<i>Processing of postal payments</i>
❖ Eiger Systems	<i>On-line verification of bank details for BACS payments</i>
❖ Bucks Net	<i>Bespoke e-solutions for revenue Services</i>

## **12. Housing and Council Tax Benefit – Policies and Customer Pledge**

Housing and Council Tax Benefit are a major pillar of support from the public purse to those on low income. These benefits are a vital form of financial help for some of the most vulnerable members of society.

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit is significant for a number of reasons:

- the substantial amount of money involved, £11.6 million in 2001/2002 before Government subsidy, for this Council;
- the large number of people dependent on this help towards their rent and Council Tax; and
- the potentially high risk within the system for fraud and error

Local authorities administer the system, but the Department for Works and Pensions sets the rules about who is eligible. The Government also subsidises some of the costs incurred by Councils in administering the scheme, for example, by way of an Administration Grant.

The successful administration of the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit schemes helps the Council meet some of its strategic objectives and by tackles deprivation and poverty.

The following policies have been developed:

- ❖ Benefit Take-up
- ❖ Customer Care
- ❖ Performance Indicators and Standards
- ❖ Interim Payments for Private Tenants
- ❖ Dealing with Overpayments
- ❖ Modifications of the Benefits Scheme
- ❖ Rent restrictions
- ❖ Discretionary Housing Payments
- ❖ Backdating of Benefit Entitlement
- ❖ Appeals
- ❖ Compensation for Benefit Maladministration

Additionally a Customer Pledge has been developed:

**WE HOPE TO PROVIDE OUR CUSTOMERS WITH A HIGH LEVEL OF SERVICE AND AIM:**

- To give you full and accurate information on Revenue and Benefit issues, whilst providing a value for money service
- To keep you waiting no longer than 6 minutes, for an initial enquiry, during a personal visit to our office.
- To deal with your enquiry during your visit to the office or to reply to you within 10 working days
- To answer your telephone call within five rings and provide a Direct Dial service

- To process your Benefit claim (when full information is provided) within 10 working days
- To reply to your letters, applications for Discounts and Exemptions and Changes of Address within 10 working days
- To find out the best way to pay your benefit to you
- To offer information and advice when you have problems paying any benefit that has been overpaid to you
- To provide fully trained staff who can help you with your query or problem
- To provide and have available information about claiming discounts, exemptions and benefits and other Revenue Services
- To constantly review how we provide Revenue Services and find out how you want us to provide them as well as ask you how well you think we do
- To deal with any complaints following the procedure set out in the Council's Complaints Procedure
- To recognise that our staff and customers are critical factors in achieving success in the delivery of our service.
- To have as a key aim to develop and maintain a highly motivated team of appropriately skilled people dedicated to excellence in the service we provide.
- To treat customers and each other with friendliness, courtesy and dignity

**TO HELP US PROVIDE OUR CUSTOMERS WITH A HIGH LEVEL OF SERVICE CUSTOMERS ARE ASKED TO:**

- Bring or send all the documents that are requested (and to ensure that any items sent in the post are securely packaged and that the correct rate of postage is paid)
- Respond to all correspondence and requests for information with the minimum of delay
- Report changes in circumstances at the earliest opportunity and, where appropriate, also notify the Department for Works and Pensions
- Check that the contents of the notification of entitlement letter are correct and report any inaccuracies immediately
- Treat benefit staff and each other with friendliness, courtesy and dignity



### **13. The Key Elements of Benefit Performance**

Comprehensive Performance Assessments were introduced during the period of the review and the following key elements have been identified:

- (a) Strategic Management
- (b) Customer Service
- (c) Processing Claims
- (d) Working with Landlords
- (e) Internal security
- (f) Counter-fraud
- (g) Overpayments

Each element is currently being investigated and the findings recorded.

A detailed assessment will be made of Council Benefit Administration against this benchmark.

#### **Strategic Management**

The service is currently developing policies and procedures to cover the whole of the delivery areas for Housing and Council Tax Benefit. A number of such policies are in place and others are being developed jointly with those listed in para. 7.10.

Those policies under development will require the support of staff training and awareness along with the introduction of procedures associated with the new computer software.

The number of items of work outstanding is monitored on a daily basis and any remedial action that may be required can be taken as appropriate. Statistics are produced on a monthly basis to monitor the performance of the Benefit Service. These cover issues such as percentage of cases dealt with within 14 days and the average time to deal with changes in circumstances. These are reported to Members in a regular bulletin which covers a variety of issues.

#### **Customer Service**

The processing of Housing and Council Tax Benefit claims and changes in circumstances does not suffer from a back-log of items, a situation enjoyed during the last two years. This has, however, been partly the result of restricted opening hours to the public.

Each applicant receives a questionnaire which they are invited to complete. This is in addition to the questionnaire that is issued in respect of the Best Value Performance Indicator. The Revenue Services

portion of the Council's web-site also includes a form which can be used to submit questions/comments/complaints in respect of the service.

The application form used for Housing and Council Tax Benefit claims is reviewed on a regular basis and meets the requirements of the local community and the current computer system employed to assess the claims.

Customer service is recognised as a fundamental issue in the delivery of the service. Funding has been secured (jointly with a number of authorities in Derbyshire) to delivery training. This meets that a training audit has been carried out for each member of staff so that individual training needs can be met.

### Processing Claims

There are targets in place for the processing of benefit claims and changes of circumstances and these are monitored on a regular basis. Performance is well within targets in all areas.

It is anticipated that the Verification framework will be introduced in 2003/04, the authority being fully compliant by 31 March, 2004.

The services has been compared with the HB/CTB Performance Standards and work is progressing to incorporate those findings into an implementation plan. There are a number of areas where action is required, although the authority is performing to standard in some areas.

There are service level agreements in place with a wide range of organisations, including the Benefits Agency, Rent Officer and a number of Registered Social Landlords. Part of the service level agreement provides for regular monitoring meetings to take place.

### Working with Landlords

There is an open access policy towards discussing claims with landlords provided that the claimant has authorised the council to do so. The authority attends landlord events arranged by East Staffordshire Borough Council and a landlord leaflet is available to all landlords and interested parties.

### Internal security

All documentation is stored on a Document Image System which provides a secure base for the information. Payments of benefit are

made either by transfer to the Council Tax and/or Rent accounts. Rent Allowances are paid by crossed cheque. The payments by cheque are reconciled on a quarterly basis. The transfers to the Council Tax and Rent accounts are reconciled on a weekly basis. All areas are balanced at year-end as part of the Housing and Council Tax subsidy procedures.

The internal security will be enhanced with the introduction of the Verification framework and all new members of staff are subject to a police check.

### Counter-fraud

There is a service/business plan produced each year to outline the activities and plans for the Fraud Investigation Unit. This is updated on a six-monthly basis.

The Benefit Fraud Investigation Officer has been trained to full PINS standard and this enables a wide range of counter-fraud activities to be administered.

A stand-alone computer system, INCASE, is used to record and monitor all fraud investigation activity. This also records the amounts that can be claimed in respect of subsidy.

The Fraud function is currently being reviewed and it is likely that additional resources will be allocated during the current financial year.

### Overpayments

All overpayments are recorded and allocated and recovered in accordance with all the options proved by the benefit regulations. A dedicated officer is employed to ensure that the recovery of overpayments is maximised. A number of methods of collection are employed from the provision of instalment facilities to the referral of cases to County Court.

The use of the document image processing system allows for the allocation of work to be carried out and the minimisation of overpayments by the prompt action of cancellations and other changes which would reduce benefit entitlement.

There is a procedure in place to address the issue of the non-recovery of recoverable overpayments and the appropriate information is submitted for authorisation.

The current software used does not allow the monitoring of the recovery of overpayments and the effectiveness of efforts in this area. This should be addressed with the introduction of the new computer system.

## 14. The Four 'C's

### Challenge

The following issues were considered

The majority of the service provided is subject to statute and regulations, so it was not appropriate to consider the cession of those activities.

However, the review did address the method of the provision of the service and the private sector was consulted. Two providers were invited to express an interest in running the service and it became apparent that they were not interested in an authority this size. They would, however, express an interest if this authority was part of a package with other authorities.

Consequently, the formation of a partnership to provide the service was investigated and the result was the joint acquisition, with four other authorities, of revenue and benefits software under partnership arrangements with a private sector provider. This will form the foundation of joint working arrangements between those authorities and the resultant economies of scale and sharing of best practice.

### Compare

A comparison of Key Performance Indicators was made with a number of local authorities who have come together to report these indicators. The authorities concerned are Amber Valley, Conwy, Crewe & Nantwich, Fenland, Hinckley & Bosworth, Kings Lynn & West Norfolk North Warwickshire, Rugby, Salisbury, Sedgefield and Warwick, along with South Derbyshire. Information is collected on a monthly basis by Amber Valley and is circulated to the authorities taking part. An annual summary is also prepared. (Attached at **Annexe A.**)

The indicators compared are:

- New local authority tenant benefit claims processed within 14 days
- New private tenant benefit claims processed within 14 days
- New council tax benefit claims processed within 14 days
- Renewal local authority tenant claims processed within 14 days
- Renewal private tenant claims processed within 14 days
- Renewal council tax benefit claims processed within 14 days
- Average time to process a new local authority tenant benefit claim
- Average time to process a new private tenant benefit claim
- Average time to process a new council tax benefit claim
- Average time to process a renewal local authority tenant claim
- Average time to process a renewal private tenant claim
- Average time to process a renewal council tax claim
- Average time to process a local authority change of circumstance
- Average time to process of private tenant change of circumstance
- Average time to process a council tax benefit change of circumstance

### Consult

During the period of the best value review there have been three focus groups arranged. A fourth group, consisting of benefit recipients, could not be arranged due to the lack of response from a large number of claimants invited.

The groups that did meet provided a valuable insight into the delivery of the service. The first group was made up of staff members, the second from members of the citizens' panel and the third from a selection of professional bodies with whom the service works on a regular basis. (see **Annexe B**)

### Compete

The involvement with the Revenues and Benefits consortium means that the areas of competition have been fully investigated. It has become apparent that this will be the most cost-effective way of delivering the service. Furthermore, the rules of the Joint Committee ensure that the service has been acquired in a cost effective and structured way under the strict rules governing competition.

## 15. Findings and Key Issues

KEY ISSUE	EVIDENCE	BEST VALUE PRINCIPLE	REQUIRED OUTCOME
<b>1</b> To provide a cost effective and efficient revenues and benefits service taking into account economies of scale	Best value indicators Requirement identified at Focus Groups	Compete and Compare	Reduce the costs of the service and improve the quality of the service
<b>2</b> To provide customers with the ability to gather information and to communicate electronically concerning their affairs via the internet	Requirement of the Government's e-government strategy		Full use of the Council's web-site and the enhancement of the current forms that are available. Kiosks located at various locations in the area
<b>3</b> To provide an effective service by having highly trained staff		Compete and Compare	The provision of high quality service able to withstand competition
<b>4</b> To establish effective partnerships between authorities, including reciprocal working arrangements within the Consortium	Findings of the Best Value Group	Compete	The creation of effective working arrangements with our partners will provide the opportunity for inter-authority working and the sharing of workloads
<b>5</b> To address rural social exclusion and improve benefit take-up			The introduction of kiosks in various locations in the district
<b>6</b> To reduce the level of fraud through cross boundary working throughout the Consortium's area			Successful implementation of the Verification Framework and joint working arrangements
<b>7</b> To outsource non-core activities		Compete	The reduction in unit costs and the removal of non-core duties from staff

## 18. Implementation Timetable

Work on the new Revenues and Benefits System (including the monitoring of progress)	April to October, 2003
Investigation of on-going joint working projects (for post implementation)	June, 2003
Investigation of on-going joint working projects with other neighbouring authorities	July 2003 onwards
Training for Benefit Staff	a) Legislation: June to September, 2003 b) New system: August to October, 2003
Training for Revenue Staff	New system: August to October, 2003
The introduction of the new Revenues and Benefits system	October, 2003
Introduce Kiosks	October, 2003 to January, 2004
Develop reciprocal working arrangements	October, 2003 to March, 2004
Introduce the Verification Framework	December, 2003 to March, 2004
Evaluate the new Revenues and Benefits system	April, 2004
The outsourcing of non-core activities	April to September, 2004
Further development of the web site and on-line facilities	April to September, 2004
Investigate the use of additional methods of consultation	October, 2003 to September, 2004
Review and update the Implementation Plan	(1) April, 2004 (2) June, 2004 (3) September, 2004

## Annexe 'A'

### Key Performance Indicators – Comparison Table :

#### All Councils – Annual Figures 2001-2

##### (a) Benefits

	Amber Valley BC	Crewe & Nantwich	Fenland	North Warks	Rugby	Salisbury	Sedgefield	South Derbyshire
New local authority tenant benefit claim processed within 14 days	93.18%	Not Yet Received	Not Recorded	Not Yet Received	95.53%	65%	54%	94%
New private tenant benefit claim processed within 14 days	59.97%	Not Yet Received	Not Recorded	Not Yet Received	92.55%	71%	85%	92%
New council tax benefit claim processed within 14 days	81.79%	Not Yet Received	Not Recorded	Not Yet Received	95.08%	63%	61%	91%
Renewal local authority tenant benefit claim processed within 14 days	Not Collected	Not Yet Received	Not Recorded	Not Yet Received	Not Collected	Not Collected	Not Collected	Not Collected
Renewal private tenant benefit claim processed within 14 days	Not Collected	Not Yet Received	Not Recorded	Not Yet Received	Not Collected	Not Collected	Not Collected	Not Collected
Renewal council tax benefit claim processed within 14 days	Not Collected	Not Yet Received	Not Recorded	Not Yet Received	Not Collected	Not Collected	Not Collected	Not Collected
Average time to process a new council tax benefit claim (BVPI 78a)	35 days	Not Yet Received	31 days	Not Yet Received	25 days	45 days	109 Days	10 Days
Average time to process a new local authority tenant benefit claim (BVPI 78a)	28 days	Not Yet Received	29 days	Not Yet Received	23 days	44 days	113 Days	8 Days
Average time to process a new private tenant benefit claim (BVPI 78a)	45 days	Not Yet Received	31 days	Not Yet Received	29 days	39 Days	76 Days	9 Days





**(c) Non-Domestic Rates**

[illegible]

## **Best Value Review - Financial Services**

Revenue Focus Group held on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2002

Focus Group attended by 8 persons - comments arising from 2- 3 individuals. No dissenting voices. Discussion took place between participants when point raised for clarification purposes or to support statement made

Felt that the level of questions were at a basic level for Focus Group concerned - due to participants having already experienced a BVR process.

1. Do you understand the principals of Best Value and do you know what the implications of the results of the review could be?
  - ☐ To provide a service in the best way, - 3 E's -Efficient, Effective and Economic
  - ☐ Continuous improvement
  - ☐ Accountability
  - ☐ 4 "C"'s - Compare, Competition, Challenge and Consultation
  - ☐ All options to be considered
  - ☐ Could change existing working practices
  - ☐ Service could be outsourced / insourced / partnership working
  - ☐ Lead to an expansion / contraction of the service provided
2. If currently, Revenue Services were a car, what type and model would you describe it as?
  - ☐ "Old Banger" - current IT system
  - ☐ Rapid response vehicle -
  - ☐ "Prototype" model - Revenues Section
  - ☐ Traditional VW Beetle
  - ☐ Emergency Ambulance - Benefits Section
  - ☐ All terrain vehicle
  - ☐ Different sections are different vehicles

3. What do you think are Revenue Services' strengths and what are the opportunities you face?

Strengths

- ☐ Staff - experienced - willing- flexible
- ☐ Local knowledge / traditions
- ☐ Personal contact with public
- ☐ Locally accessible
- ☐ 1/3 of population live near offices
- ☐ Good customer image
- ☐ Ability to respond quickly to changes in legislation (Benefits section)

Opportunities

- ☐ e-government
  - ☐ e mails
  - ☐ banking
  - ☐ standard forms on the Web
- ☐ Information re service provided on the Web
- ☐ Publicise services provided
- ☐ Take on work from elsewhere
- ☐ On track to be a "Centre of excellence"
- ☐ Good customer image
- ☐ Still have capacity to consider other options available

4. What do you think are Revenue Services' weaknesses and what challenges do you face?

Weaknesses

- ☐ Staff shortages
- ☐ Inaccessible to 2/3 of the residents in the District
- ☐ Inflexibility
- ☐ Lacking resources and money
- ☐ Current IT system
- ☐ Office layout for staff and access by the public is not well planned
  - ☐ Interview rooms
  - ☐ Public areas
- ☐ Opening hours are restricted
- ☐ Access to staff by phone is limited
  
- ☐ Poor service provided to the elderly etc
- ☐ Unable to get out of the office to meet them and help them (Benefits)

### Challenges /threats

- ☐ Some one else could provide the work undertaken by the Section
- ☐ Public are becoming to accept the "Call centre" image
- ☐ e-government
- ☐ underfunding of the service

5. How do you think services users feel about the service (please consider external and internal customers)?

### External

- ☐ Public are aware that changes are being made to improve the service provided
- ☐ Do not receive may complaints from the public or external agencies
- ☐ Public are not fully aware of the services provided by this Council in relation to the Council Tax paid
- ☐ Professional approach

### Internal

- ☐ Good service provided
- ☐ Rapid response to queries
- ☐ Departmentalised - Staff in other departments do not know Revenue staff and vice versa

6. What improvements would you wish to make to your services?

- ☐ More staff
- ☐ Joined up working both within the Revenue Section and within Council
- ☐ A more localised stationery supply
- ☐ Improved office layout - toilet provision, office environmental factors for both staff and public
- ☐ Sundry debtors to be undertaken and all money collections
- ☐ Improved accessibility to service
- ☐ Training issues - IT systems not used to full potential
- ☐ More responsibility
  
- ☐ Workshops to be held in areas of the district e.g. Benefits
- ☐ Organisation culture which allows "innovation"

# **Finance Services Best Value Review - Public Focus Group Meeting**

**Held 10<sup>th</sup> July 2002 (6 persons present)**

## **1. What are the good points about the service?**

- ☐ If the service is good why does the Council have bad payers?
- ☐ Direct debits
- ☐ Easier payment methods e.g weekly deductions / instalments as opposed to monthly
- ☐ Contact points, if you have a problem
- ☐ Recycling facilities

## **2. What are the bad points about the service?**

- ☐ Better collection methods - reduce bad debts
- ☐ Bad debt collection procedures are lengthy - can they be simplified , shorter timescales . The length or complexity of procedures encourages those people who do not want to pay to do so
- ☐ Length of time to sort issues out - need to speed the collection of bad debts up
- ☐ Better enforcement- name and shame bad payers (after conviction)

## **3. What improvements to the service**

- ☐ Phone - easy access, staff courteous etc
- ☐ Is the post box (near bus park - Door to Planning dept) used , can it be used by public when offices are close rather than walking to the other end of the building?
- ☐ Internet - not suitable for older generation, ideal if on line forms were available
- ☐ Saturday morning opening or open early evenings say once per month for people who are in fulltime employment and cannot get into the offices
- ☐ One stop shop ( including Derbyshire County Council services)

#### 4. How well do we communicate?

- Forms are clear and easy to understand
- Reduce the amount of information sent out (e.g job application packs)

#### 5. Feedback

- If exercise undertaken in the future, the participants felt seeing the Service Plan documentation was useful. They also would like to see the questions beforehand in order to prepare themselves better

7/1/2019

**SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**BEST VALUE REVIEW - REVENUE SERVICES**

**Feedback from Partners**

**Question 1:**

*Have we accurately portrayed in our literature and in the presentations today, the service that you receive from us?*

- Yes - accurate, reasonable, perspective
- Caveat - institutional versus personal perspective
- Inward looking - not outside (especially at the end of the presentation)
- Risk of not linking to Council strategy if inwardly focused
- Little emphasis on end users
- Efficient but right for service users?
- Bankers are part of the process - the Council has already taken on board services that can improve services. There is nothing else in the pipeline
- Should be telling people if good but with supporting evidence
- Spin not reality of performance
- Opportunities for sharing/learning of good practice from others (e.g. Beacon Councils)
- Overpayment BVPI not presented

**Question 2:**

*What are the service's main strengths and areas for improvement?*

***Strengths***

- Efficient system
- Responsive
- Good payment choices
- Internet - good; need to publicise
- Service Level Agreements in place with Trident Housing and the Rent Office

***Areas for Improvement***

- Strengths may sometimes be weaknesses (feedback from service users)
- From a client and partners perspective, restricted access to service - opening hours on queries/information
- Risks associated with change of software - contingency plan? Plan for dealing with Tax Credits? Plan B?
- Hot line needed