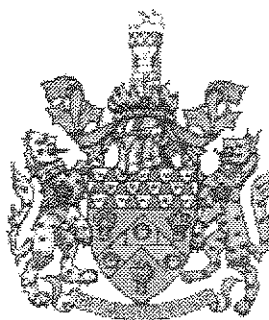


## Housing and Council Tax Benefit

## Backlog Statistics

Date	Backlog – New Applications	Backlog - Renewals	Number of Documents	Notes
21 August, 2000	9 weeks	Up to Date	2,243	
7 September, 2000	9 weeks	Up to Date	2,131	
18 September, 2000	7 weeks	Up to Date	1,920	
25 September, 2000	7 weeks	Up to Date	1,809	
2 October, 2000	7 weeks	Up to Date	2,001	
9 October, 2000	8 weeks	Up to Date	1,914	
16 October, 2000	7 weeks	Up to Date	1,899	
31 October, 2000	7 weeks	Up to Date	2,029	After half-term week
6 November, 2000	7 weeks	Up to Date	1,976	
14 November, 2000	7 weeks	1 week	2,072	
20 November, 2000	7 weeks	2 weeks	1,988	
27 November, 2000	7 weeks	1 week	1,986	
4 December, 2000	7 weeks	1 week	1,635	
15 December, 2000	8 weeks	2 weeks	1,698	
19 December, 2000	8 weeks	2 weeks	1,775	
22 December, 2000	8 weeks	2 weeks	1,534	Christmas/New Year Break
8 January, 2001	9 weeks	Up to Date	1,488	
15 January, 2001	8 weeks	Up to Date	1,153	
22 January, 2001	7 weeks	Up to Date	865	
29 January, 2001	6 weeks	Up to Date	700	
5 February, 2001	4 weeks	Up to Date	520	Wednesday closing started
12 February, 2001	3 weeks	Up to Date	410	
19 February, 2001	2 weeks	Up to Date	263	
26 February, 2001	3 weeks	Up to Date	437	After half-term week
5 March, 2001	4 weeks	Up to Date	729	After close down for new year recalculation
12 March, 2001	3 weeks	Up to Date	531	

19 March, 2001	3 weeks	Up to Date	352		
26 March, 2001	2 weeks	Up to Date	280		
2 April, 2001	2 weeks	Up to Date	458		
9 April, 2001	2 weeks	Up to Date	517		
16 April, 2001	3 weeks	Up to Date	683		Easter
23 April, 2001	4 weeks	Up to Date	701		
30 April, 2001	4 weeks	Up to Date	609		
7 May, 2001	5 weeks	Up to Date	663		
14 May, 2001	5 weeks	Up to Date	650		
21 May, 2001	3 weeks	Up to Date	392		
28 May, 2001	2 weeks	Up to Date	122		
4 June, 2001	Up to Date	Up to Date	52		
11 June, 2001	Up to Date	Up to Date	83		
18 June, 2001	Up to Date	Up to Date	132		
25 June, 2001	Up to Date	Up to Date	49		



### **Benefit Section**

**Business Plan – 2001 / 2002**

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

- To give you full and accurate information on Benefit issues, whilst providing a value for money service
- To assess your entitlement to Housing and Council Tax Benefit within 14 days of the receipt of all relevant information
- To keep you waiting no longer than 4 minutes during a personal visit to our office. (Initial enquiries)
- 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 reply to your letters within 10 working days
- To offer information and advice when you have any benefit related problems
- To provide fully trained staff who can help you with your query or problem
- To provide and have available information about Benefits
- To constantly review how we administer Benefits and find out how **you** want us to provide the service 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

## List of Contents

Section 1	Introduction
Section 2	A Review of the last 12 Months
Section 3	Our Objectives
Section 4	Critical Success Factors
Section 5	Employee Issues
Section 6	Our Performance
Section 7	Our Action Plan

## Section 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Business Plan sets out our purpose and objectives. It demonstrates how we contribute to fulfilling the Council's overall objectives and strategies, our current position, where we are aiming to achieve and how we will accomplish it.
- 1.2 The Plan includes details of our main resources i.e. our employees and examines how their needs will change over the coming 12 months and what we and the Council will do to address these changing needs.
- 1.3 The services covered by the plan include:-
  - *Administration and Payment of Housing and Council Tax Benefit.*
  - *Benefit Fraud Investigation.*
- 1.4 These services are provided to meet the following legislative or other requirements:-
  - ♦ *Of the Local Government Act 1972 – the requirement to establish effective and appropriate financial systems and charge one officer with that responsibility – that officer is the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972)*
  - ♦ *The Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996*
  - ♦ *Satisfying the External Auditor's requirements (in our case the District Audit Service)*
  - ♦ *Local Government Finance Act 1988*
  - ♦ *Local Government Finance Act 1992*
  - ♦ *Social Security, Contributions and Benefits Act 1992*
  - ♦ *Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999*
  - ♦ *Housing Benefit (General) Regulations 1987 (as amended)*
  - ♦ *Council Tax Benefit (General) Regulations 1992 (as amended)*
  - ♦ *Data Protection Acts 1984 and 1998*
  - ♦ *Human Rights Act 1998*
  - ♦ *The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000*
  - ♦ *Social Security Administration Act 1992*
  - ♦ *Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act 1997*
  - ♦ *Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984*
  - ♦ *Theft Acts*

- ♦ *Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000*
- ♦ *Social Security Fraud Act 2001*
- ♦ *Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 – the requirement to establish effective and appropriate financial systems and charge one officer with that responsibility – that officer is the Chief Finance Officer.*

1.5 The following statistics give an idea of the scale of the work undertaken by the Benefit Section:

- ♦ *Administering 5089 Benefit cases including dealing with nearly 500 pieces of post each week, with payments/allowances of over £11m a year. The total of 5089 is broken down as follows:*
  - *Private Tenants* 1,283\*
  - *Council Tenants* 2,193
  - *Council Tax Benefit* 1,613
- ♦ *Processed over 259 Fraud Referrals, of which 81 were proved to be fraudulent (31% of cases referred)*
- ♦ *A Fraud Investigation Business Plan has been developed*
- ♦ *Dealt with approximately 12,000 Telephone Calls covering the following:*
  - *Benefits*
  - *Benefits Investigations*
- ♦ *Dealt with over 5000 personal callers to the Council offices*
- ♦ *Dealt with 3 compliments about our service*
- ♦ *Dealt with 2 complaints about our service*
- ♦ *Dealt with over 1500 letters/correspondence*

## Section 2 A Review of the Last 12 Months

2.1 This Section of the Plan evaluates how we have performed during the last 12 months

2.2 In 2000/2001 we aimed to achieve the following things:-

- *Be prepared for Best Value, including the 4 C's (Challenge, Compare, Compete and Consult)*
- *Clear the Benefits Backlog*
- *Maximise take up of Benefits with our partners, particularly Derbyshire Welfare Rights.*
- *Continue to develop better use of the technology.*
- *Continue to improve our services openness and accessibility.*
- *Use of clear application forms and leaflets using Plain English*
- *Maintain the improved relationship with other sections/departments/bodies and make further improvements*
- *Continue to work with others in the Council to improve processes and working practices*
- *Continue to work with our business partners outside the Council to improve the service to our community.*

2.3 Throughout the year we achieved the following:-

- *Cleared the Benefit backlog – our customers were recently having their claims for Benefit processed the day they are received with the full information necessary to assess their Benefit claim. We are continuing to process all Benefit claims within 7 days, which is as good a performance as anywhere in the country currently.*
- *Improved the Service to our Customers by making one point of contact for our customers. No passing of customer from person to person.*
- *Prepared for the Division's Best Value Performance Review, planned in 2001/02.*
- *Continuing to maximise Benefit takeup. A campaign was jointly carried out with Derbyshire Welfare Rights for pensioners, to maximise their Benefit entitlement.*

- Continued the development of the new technology. Our internet site will continue to be expanded and eventually have a Benefit Claim Form to download.
- Worked with our system supplier, Anite Systems to install our Document Imaging and Workflow systems.
- Reference Site for Anite Systems
- Our Benefit Claim Form, Income Support Review Form, Private Tenant Rent Review Form and Certificate of Earnings form have all been awarded the Crystal Mark by the Plain English Campaign.
- Preparing for the implementation of the Verification Framework
- Worked with other authorities to process benchmark benefit functions

2.4 In 2001/2002 we plan to achieve the following:-

- Undertake the Revenues Division Best Value Performance Review.
- Be a leader in terms of Housing Benefit administration, building on our recent achievement of beating the Benefit backlog.
- Embrace e-government, with the aim of making our services interactive, building on the division's existing use of new technology.
- Improve the control and management of the Housing Benefit system.
- Maximise Benefit subsidy.
- Implement new guidance and legislation in Benefits (including the new Appeals Service), advising staff, advisors and customers alike in Plain English.
- Build on partnerships and joint working already forged.
- Increased awareness and training for staff.
- Produce guidance and procedural notes for Benefits staff.
- Continue to maximise take up of Benefits through advertisements in publications.
- Look at redesigning our Benefit Claim Form in accordance with the new BFI model claim form.
- Redesign leaflets, conforming to Plain English to help our customers.
- Continue to prepare for the implementation of the Verification Framework



- 2.5 To summarise, we have cleared the Benefit backlog during the last year, helping the Council to achieve better performance.

*The support of Members, Senior Officers and Staff in helping to achieve this is recognised by the Benefit Section.*

*The other notable achievement is the Benefit Section's continuing leading use of new technology. The successful implementation of the Document Image Processing system is to be applauded. The Council's internet website will continue to be developed and expanded to include information about Housing Benefit. Eventually this will be linked to the IRRV's Housing benefit best practice page.*

## Section 3    Our Objectives

3.1    The objectives of our Business Unit are as follows:-

- ♦ *To provide focused services that respond to our customers needs and requirements, whilst adhering to the legislation and best practice under which the services must operate.*
- ♦ *To discharge the Councils statutory functions in relation to the administration of Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit.*
- ♦ *To calculate and pay Benefit accurately within specified timescales.*
- ♦ *To maximise take up of all Benefits.*
- ♦ *To ensure the prevention and detection of Benefit Fraud and the protection of public money.*
- ♦ *To maximise Housing Benefit Subsidy for the Council.*
- ♦ *To satisfy all legal requirements, including but not exclusively Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972*
- ♦ *Generally, to provide advice, guidance and a service to the Council, its Members, Employees and Customers.*
- ♦ *Consolidate improvements to Benefit Services*
- ♦ *Continue to build on improved communications and relationship in the Finance Department, providing Departmental solutions.*
- ♦ *Apply the requirements of Best Value to our services, and help others to do the same.*
- ♦ *Continue to embrace new technology, including further development of our web pages*
- ♦ *To be accessible to our customers in person, electronically, by telephone and written.*
- ♦ *To make greater use of consultation to determine customer needs*
- ♦ *To continue to make use of Forums such as the Private Landlords' Forum*
- ♦ *To challenge existing working methods and practices and ensure that there is a demonstrable improvement in the effectiveness of our services. We should not continue with work practises purely because 'we've done it that way for years'*
- *To continue to take part in Process Benchmarking with other local authorities*
- ♦ *To address training gaps and provide training for all staff to ensure that they have an understanding of our business needs and are able to provide an efficient service*

- ♦ *To increase awareness in customer care, by the provision of customer care training for all units*
- ♦ *To increase our use of new technology, such as the Internet and Intranet, to inform and educate our staff, members and customers*
- ♦ *To improve and increase information provision throughout the units*
- ♦ *To continue to work with our Business Partners, such as the Benefit Agency, Employment Service and the Rent Service.*

## Section 4 Critical Success Factors

4.1 It is important that we identify the Critical Success Factors required to achieve our overall business objectives and to ensure they are constantly measured, monitored and revised.

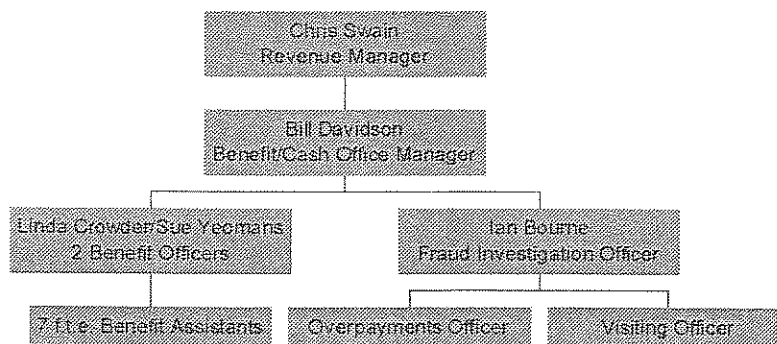
4.2 Details of the Critical Success Factors relevant to our Business Unit are as follows:-

- ♦ *Continue to realise the importance of staff to the process.*
- ♦ *Recognise the need to technically train and involve staff.*
- ♦ *Adapting quickly and effectively to changes in guidance and legislation issued by the Government.*
- ♦ *Improve our Benefit Service Delivery – our aim is to continue to process all claims within the national accepted standard of 14 days within receipt of the full information required.*
- ♦ *Maximise take up of Benefits.*
- ♦ *The 'Right Benefit to the Right People' – whilst maximising takeup we should continue to ensure all customers in the community we serve receive benefits to which they are legally entitled to and that benefit is not fraudulently obtained.*
- ♦ *Recognise that our customers have no choice on who delivers the Benefit Service which can be complex with ever changing rules – we must recognise this in continuing to design clearer application forms and leaflets in Plain English.*
- ♦ *Continue to ensure our customers are made aware of the services available and the information required.*

## Section 5 Employee Issues

5.1 We recognise the important contribution our people make to our business. This Section of the Plan reflects and recognises this.

5.2 Our human resources in the Benefit Section are summarised below.



5.3 Other general employee related issues arising from our plans for the next 12 months are as follows:-

- ♦ *The health and stress factors of our staff in continuing to provide the Benefit Service.*
- ♦ *The ever increasing changes in legislation and working practices, particularly in Benefits. Recently this has seen the introduction of Supported Accommodation and we are currently preparing for the introduction of VF. On 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2001 the new Benefit Appeals procedures will be introduced, along with Discretionary Housing Payments.*
- ♦ *The ongoing training, both professionally through the IRRV qualifications and on the job training, of our staff to increase their skills and so to improve the service.*
- ♦ *As front line service providers, we must ensure that all staff are aware of procedures in providing good customer care. We must also ensure that front line staff are trained to deal with abusive and/or potentially violent situations, that ensures their own safety, and the safety of others is maintained.*
- ♦ *The comments about our service from our internal customers and colleagues.*

5.4 We are committed to developing our employees and to delivering high quality, effective training. We will evaluate training and development outcomes and effectiveness by:-

- ♦ *A written but flexible plan that sets out the organisation's goals and targets.*

- A written plan that identifies the organisation's training and development needs, and specifies what actions will be taken to meet these needs.
- Training and development needs that are regularly reviewed against goals and targets of the organisation, team and individual level.
- A written plan that identifies the resources that will be used to meet training and development needs.
- Responsibility for training and developing employees is clearly identified and understood throughout the organisation, starting at the top.
- Objectives are set for training and development actions at the organisation, team and individual level.
- Carrying out Personal Development Reviews for all staff.

5.5 Training and development to be delivered in the next 12 months which will assist our Business Unit as follows:-

Training & Development Delivered	How this has assisted our Business Unit
Customer Care Training	Enable those on front line services to have a greater awareness of the needs of customer care
IT Training	Enable staff to use systems more effectively, and improve service delivery
VF, Discretionary Policy, Supported Accommodation, New Benefit Appeals, Discretionary Housing Payments	Give staff an awareness and understanding of the issues involved in these initiatives.
Health & Safety – Workstation	Look at reducing problems caused by incorrect use of work stations
Violence and Abuse training	Enable front line staff to spot potential problems and the correct way to deal with them.
On the job training	Training new and existing members of staff on tasks and duties to increase flexibility within the section
Best Value	Enable staff to understand and contribute towards Best Value
Attendance Management Training	Need to understand and monitor absence for the council's attendance management policy.
Benefit Legislation – IRRV Benefit Technicians	Give nominated staff an awareness and understanding of the issues involved in these initiatives.

## Section 6 Our Performance

- 6.1 To enable us to monitor our performance throughout the year we use a set of performance indicators. These indicators are split between statutory Best Value and Audit Commission Indicators and non-statutory local indicators. Details of how we have performed over the last 12 months and our targets for the next 12 months are set out below.

Description	1999/2000 Performance	2000/2001 Performance	2001/2002 Target
The average time for processing new claims for Council Tax Benefit from the date of receipt of the claim by the Local Authority for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 (AC98(13))/(DBN02)	23 days	See below	See below
The average time for processing new claims for Housing Benefit from Local Authority tenants from the date of the receipt of the claim by the Local Authority for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 (AC98(14))/(DBN03)	21 days	See below	See below
The average time for paying new claims for rent allowance from the date of claim by the Local Authority for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 (AC98(15))/(DBN04)	28 days	See below	See below
The percentage of renewal claims for rent allowances paid on time (AC98(16))	83%	See below	See below
The cost of administration per Benefit claimant (AC98(17))	£100.69	Not available	£140.00
The percentage of recoverable overpayments (excluding Council Tax) that were recovered in the year (BV079(b))/(AC98(18))/(DBN08)	Not known	Not known	Not available
What percentage of Benefit claimants felt that they were clearly told what information to provide? (AC98(19))	80%	Results still to be measured	98%

What percentage of Benefit claimants were satisfied with the way that they were dealt with by the Authority? (AC98(20))	81%	Results still to be measured	95%
Whether we have a written security strategy for combating fraud and error (BV076)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Average cost of handling Housing/ Council Tax Benefit claims taking into account the differences in claim types (BV077)(DBN01)	New Indicator	£31.12	£36.00
Speed of processing (average time for new claims) (BV078(a))	New Indicator	33 days	30 days
Speed of processing (average time for changes) (BV078(b))(DBN05)	New Indicator	23 days	20 days
Speed of processing (percentage of renewals paid on time) (BV078(c))(DBN06)	New Indicator	100%	100%
Number of Benefit Appeals heard before Appeals Board (Independent Appeals Board)	0	1	5
Number of Appeals Board Hearings finding in Customer's favour	0	1	3
Accuracy of processing (percentage of cases calculating correct benefit due) (BV079(a))/(DBN07)	New Indicator	98.67%	98.75%
Weekly Benefit Savings Achieved (BFR01)	£135,136 (Baseline - £92,337)	£96,367 (Baseline £92,887)	£95,000 (Baseline - £90,472)
Number of Benefit Claims amended and/or cancelled following Benefit Investigation	127	98	To be collected
Number of Successful Prosecutions	0	0	3



User satisfaction survey on issues of accessibility, staffing, etc (BV080)	New Indicator	Satisfied with facilities: 92.35% Satisfied with office service: 50.97% Satisfied with telephone service: 46.25% Satisfied with staff: 88.38% Satisfied with forms: 81.41% Overall satisfaction: 85.61%	Not to be collected in 2001-2
Average number of benefit cases processed per employee	1,000	850	700
Increase awareness of Benefits by means of advertising (BEN02)	Not carried out	Not carried out	To be collected
Percentage of new claims following the above campaigns (BEN03)	N/a	N/a	To be measured
Number of external communications received and processed by Email (BEN04)	New Indicator	N/a	To be measured
Number of external visits to the Revenues Division internet pages (BEN05)	N/a	Not available	Still being considered
Percentage of Customers seen by Benefit Staff within ten minutes	N/a	Not available	75%
Proportion of working days lost to sickness absence (BV012)	Still being considered	Still being considered	Still being considered
Voluntary Leavers as a percentage of staff in post (BV013)	Still being considered	Still being considered	Still being considered
Staff Turnover Rate	Still being considered	Still being considered	Still being considered

## Section 7 Our Action Plan

7.1 This Section details the actions that we have identified for the year.

BV Ref	Recommendation	Improvement Action	Resourced By	Lead by	Begin	Finish	Indicator for Success
1	Best Value Performance Review	Produce plan for Inspectors	Best Value Officer/Revenues Manager	Revenues/Benefit Manager	1/4/01	30/09/01	Revenues Best Value Plan
2	Keep Benefit processing up to date (with the aim of 100% processing within 14 days of receipt of full information)	Review and Monitor	Benefits Service	Revenues/Benefit Manager	1/4/01	Ongoing	All Benefit Claims processed within 3 days of receipt of full information
3	Continue to embrace new technology	Corporate IT Plan	Council/ IT Division/ Revenues Division	All	1/4/01	Ongoing	Implement Web Technology.
4	Meet Government Target regarding 100% of Services available electronically	Corporate IT Plan	Council/ IT Division/ Revenues Division	Head of IT/IT Division/ Revenues Manager	1/4/01	31/3/05	Services all available electronically
5	Maximise Benefit Take up	Advertising/ Joint Working with Voluntary Organisations	Benefit Section/Voluntary Organisations/ Welfare Rights	All	1/5/01	Ongoing	Take up increased by 2% due to campaign. 15% of Council Tax payers in receipt of Benefit
6	Maximise Benefit Subsidy	Follow DSS guidance	Financial Services/ District Audit/ Revenues Division	Revenues/Benefit Manager	1/4/01	31/3/02	Audited Subsidy Claim
7	Training Programme for Benefit Staff	Training Programme Action Plan	Benefit Manager	Benefit Manager/ Benefit Officers	1/5/01	31/3/03	Training identified and carried out
8	Benefits Procedure Manual	Action Plan	Benefit Manager	Benefit Manager/ Benefit Officers	1/5/01	31/3/03	Procedure Manual available electronically and in hard copy