

SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Revenue Services

Focus Group Meeting – Wednesday 26 February, 2003

List of Attendees

Co-operative Bank, Nottingham	John Murphy	Senior Manager
Department for Work and Pensions, London	Tony Withers	Policy Officer – Best Value
Girobank Plc, Bootle	Chris Rayner	Manager – Corporate Banking
Jobcentre Plus, Swadlincote	Linda McFetridge	Customer Service Manager
Rent Service, Nottingham	H.A. Thornton	Rent Officer
South Derbyshire CAB, Swadlincote	Sarah Brown Sharon Kinsella Graeme Royall	Money Adviser Deputy Manager Manager
South Derbyshire Mental Health Association, Swadlincote	Denise Shillabeer	Centre Manager
Swadlincote Chamber of Trade	Malcolm Prentice	Director
Valuation Office Agency, Derby	Pauline Blake Sue Hickmore	Admin Manager Referencing Manager
Walbrook Housing Association, Uttoxeter	Jane Memmay Barbara Noble	Rent Adviser Housing Manager

SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

BEST VALUE REVIEW - REVENUE SERVICES

Questions for discussion with Partners

Please note:

All questions relate specifically to the work of the Revenue Division which includes:

- *The billing, collection and recovery of Council Tax*
- *The billing, collection and recovery of the National Non-Domestic rate*
- *The administration of the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Scheme*
- *Cash Collection facilities (including the processing of electronic payments)*
- *The administration of the Concessionary Fares scheme*

Question 1:

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

Question 2:

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

Question 3:

What are your thoughts on our future vision for the service?

Question 4:

What should be the priorities for the service over the short and medium/long term?

Question 5:

How can we work more closely with you on a day to day basis and over the long term?

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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

Question 3:

What are your thoughts on our future vision for the service?

- Have concerns about the IT system
- Staff training needs to be 'spot on'; in house training is not a good idea
- Need to put basic building blocks in place (e.g. staff)
- The management of change will be important
- Will it deliver what end users want? If it works, it will be great.
- Have concerns about sharing work between Councils
- Lots of change is planned - senior management may be convinced but what about the staff?
- Can't argue with the vision - it's the nuts and bolts (i.e. implementation and delivery)
- The new system should not be used as an excuse for non delivery to service users
- The Valuation Office operates remote working and this has been beneficial in terms of managing the workload. The same comment applies to the Rent Office - staff like it.
- Need to be aware of staff reaction to changes

Question 4:

What should be the priorities for the service over the short and medium/long term?

- Communication Strategy to internal and external stakeholders - should be on-going
- Contingency plans
- Risk Management
- Addressing the impact on staff
- Talk to other Councils on implementation of new software/best practice
- Seek advice and use it!
- Review implementation plan
- From efficiencies gained - use staff for enhanced customers service/interface
- Greater use of performance information to measure success
- Extra effort to contact/consider customer views
- Level of service to be maintained
- Inform customers of glitches
- Project planning needed with external perspective!!
- A Value Statement
- Vision clarity
- Objectives
- Who's perspective?

Question 5:

How can we work more closely with you on a day to day basis and over the longer term?

- Communication (e.g. over change in times of access) - agencies need to know of changes. Information needs to be where vulnerable users go (e.g. Bank House). Partners are prepared to offer support/explain changes to users
- Customers need to feel good during the change. Names and relationship are important.
- Keep people informed and be friendly to people - they will go with you during the change
- Use of names - adds to empathy and assurance
- Share common objective to assist people of South Derbyshire
- DWP - encourages dialogue with local authorities (have common objective). There is a vast pool of knowledge that the Council can tap into. DWP tries to work with Councils to come up with solutions. DWP would like to know if a dip in performance is expected

EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE FOCUS GROUP

Partners

Expected outcomes	Organisation (if stated)
Better contact names of people who do specific jobs in the Revenue Department	Valuation Office Agency, Derby
Knowledge of policies and procedures SDDC engage in for collection and processing Council Tax and Housing Benefit	Trident Housing
A greater insight into how South Derbyshire administers Council Tax and NNDR to see how the VOA may offer more help	Valuation Office Agency, Derby
To assist the Council in setting and achieving some key objectives in its Best Value review	Rent Service, Nottingham
What can make the public see as Best Value for the seen high costs	Swadlincote Chamber of Trade
Effective working relationship between the DWP and the Local Authority	Department for Works and Pensions, London
Develop further relationship to assist claiming of benefits and helping to prevent fraud	Job Centre Plus
A better understanding of how SDDC Revenue Services work, particularly Housing Benefit	
What's happening at South Derbyshire. Are there opportunities to extend our relationship?	
Understanding of the Revenue Division - to enable me to assist my clients	South Derbyshire Mental Health Association, Swadlincote
Understand current systems/methods used and opportunities for improvement/going forward	
A better relationship with the Benefit section and easier passing of information	
Fact finding and input from a service user perspective (as CAB clients)	South Derbyshire Citizens' Advice Bureau, Swadlincote
Information on administration procedures on implementing Housing and Council tax Benefits and how these are causing difficulties	

Revenue Services

Expected outcomes	Name
What partners think are our strengths and weaknesses	Robert Giles (Revenues Collection Manager)
To identify opportunities for joint working	Bill Davidson (Benefits/Cash Office Manager)

Swain Chris

From: Withers Tony WACG Housing Support [Tony.Withers@dwp.gsi.gov.uk]
Sent: 27 February 2003 15:07
To: Chris Swain (E-mail); William Davidson (E-mail)
Cc: Dennett Barry WACG Housing Support
Subject: South Derbys - Focus Group Meeting

Chris/Bill

Thank you for your invitation to attend the Focus Group meeting yesterday, which I found very informative. Hopefully you received some useful feedback on the day.

You asked whether I could provide you with names of authorities that are of a similar size that have introduced the verification framework so that you could tap into their experience of the exercise. This list of authorities are set out below, however, should you require a full list of VF compliant authorities plus caseload, please let me know.

Chiltern	Fully Compliant	01/02/99
West Oxfordshire	Fully compliant	15/06/99
Rochford	Fully compliant	15/08/02
Chester	Fully compliant	01/07/02
Malvern Hills	Fully compliant	31/03/99
Flyde	Partial compliant	30/09/02
Boston	Fully compliant	06/03/00

Furthermore, I also advised you of the HB Help Team Service Toolkit for HB Managers that may incorporate advice on implementing projects such as introducing a new computer system, dealing with backlogs and of a "Dashboard facility" that can be installed that would display detailed statistical performance information on nominated PCs.

I have sent a copy of the CD-ROM in the post to you (you may already have a copy) with some explanatory notes that were given out at the recent IRRV conference in Harrogate, which may assist in improving service areas.

You may find the Dashboard performance information of some use, especially for the new computer system that is due to be installed in your authority. A visual example of what can be produced can be found by first selecting "Performance Management" > "How do I measure performance in my benefit team" > "examples" > "dashboard output doc".

I am in the process of trying to arrange whether DWP can provide you with a presentation on what information is available within this toolkit. I will of course let you know when I hear anything further on this matter. But please let me know whether this is still acceptable to you once, you have viewed the toolkit.

In the meantime, I would like to thank you for the hospitality I received at the Civic Offices and I look forward to receiving copies of the issues raised at the Focus Group. However, please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any information or advice on matters concerning HB/CTB.

Regards

Tony Withers
DWP - Housing Support Division

