

Change and improvement in revenues and benefits services

Checklists

To help the meet the challenge of improving efficiency the Revenues and Benefits report (Audit Commission, November 2005) examined the potential for savings in the administration of revenues (council tax and business rates) and benefits (housing and council tax benefit).

The report highlights a number of enablers and possible barriers that could impact on improvement in the delivery of these services. We have extracted the following content from the transactional services web tool, available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/transactionalservices. It is designed to help you meet the challenging efficiency agenda for public services.

Follow the checklists below to help you consider whether your organisation is ready for change in the administration of revenues and benefits services. Focus on the points that you answer negatively to. This will help you to identify your **next steps** to improvement.

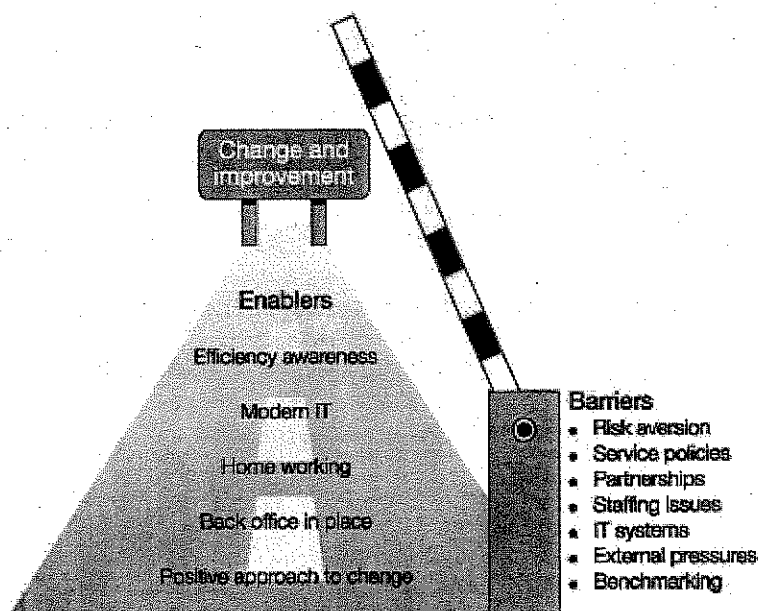


Image to show the enablers and barriers involved in change and improvement in revenues and benefits services.

Enablers

1. Efficiency awareness

- ✓ Is there a clear understanding of efficiency and how this is contributing to improvements for customers and the council?
- ✓ Are the right management practices are in place?
- ✓ Is there robust performance management and systems in place?
- ✓ Is there effective benchmarking activity taking place?

- ✓ Are costs – internal and external – understood?

2. Modern IT

- ✓ Have you evaluated which systems are in place?
- ✓ Are they meeting business and service needs?
- ✓ Do the IT systems support current and future needs for improved efficiency?
- ✓ Do systems allow for flexibility for staff and customers?

3. Home working

- ✓ Is the necessary IT in place to support home working?
- ✓ Do existing staff want it anyway?
- ✓ Have you evaluated the benefits (cost and service) for staff and customers?
- ✓ Are the right systems in place to support it? (e.g. health and safety, IT, monitoring, training)
- ✓ Have you examined examples on which to base a model?
- ✓ Can other examples be imported to this council?
- ✓ Have you considered the other opportunities that could open up? (e.g. Work for other councils, extend opportunities for staff with access difficulties)

4. Back office in place

- ✓ Is there a split between customer service and processing staff?
- ✓ Are there opportunities to relocate back office staff to an alternative site?
- ✓ Does IT support the split?
- ✓ What are the advantages and disadvantages for the council and customers?
- ✓ How best could potential savings be used to improve the service?
- ✓ Is there an opportunity to develop a partnership?

5. Positive approach to change

- ✓ Is there a split between customer service and processing staff?
- ✓ Are there opportunities to relocate back office staff to an alternative site?
- ✓ Does IT support the split?
- ✓ Have you considered the advantages and disadvantages for the council and customers?
- ✓ Have you considered how the potential savings be used to improve the service?
- ✓ Is there an opportunity to develop a partnership?

Potential barriers

1. Risk averse/control culture

- ✓ Have you considered the cost of not changing?
- ✓ Will the customer benefit? (this can help to break down potential barriers)
- ✓ Has a full cost benefit analysis been undertaken?
- ✓ Is the existing culture ready for such a change?

- ✓ Can the cultural change be managed?
- ✓ Have risks been assessed and are they being managed?
- ✓ Can CPA ratings be used as a guide to assist partnership working?
- ✓ Are there any other supporting indicators (BFI rating, awards, IIP) to provide confidence to support partnership working?
- ✓ Can external expertise help increase capacity and effectiveness?

2. Service policies

- ✓ Are there differing local policies in place?
- ✓ Is it possible to administer different local policies?
- ✓ Have you identified the reason for the policy?
- ✓ Can the same outcome be achieved in a different way?
- ✓ Is the policy consistent with what the council is trying to achieve?
- ✓ Have you evaluated the advantages/disadvantages for customers if policies change?
- ✓ Can costing structures be agreed to take into account local policies?

3. Partnerships

- ✓ Can improvements and efficiencies be gained from working with others?
- ✓ Do external relationships already exist?
- ✓ What similarities exist between near-neighbours?
- ✓ Are there other alternatives?
- ✓ Have you considered which sector is likely to be most suitable – public or private?
- ✓ Have you considered the best place for the back office be based?
- ✓ Have you considered the issues for all the councils/agencies involved?
- ✓ Can the potential savings be used to help create more local jobs?
- ✓ Have the views of councillors been fully considered?
- ✓ Is the business case and cost benefits clear?
- ✓ Are there any opportunities for a shared accommodation close to the authorities?
- ✓ Could better quality staff be recruited in other areas?
- ✓ Could recruitment problems be resolved by locating elsewhere?
- ✓ Has the potential saving to the taxpayer been identified?

4. Staffing issues

- ✓ Has consultation taken place?
- ✓ Have all options been explored and communicated?
- ✓ Is the cost and cost benefit situation clear and has it been communicated?
- ✓ Will customers benefit?
- ✓ Will staff benefit?
- ✓ Have quality of life and health and safety issues been considered?
- ✓ Can improved IT help?

- ✓ Have you considered the arrangements for : monitoring; training; communication; and management?
- ✓ Can the partnership be broadened, so that other services are included and giving potential for each council to have a back of office of a different service?
- ✓ Can staff groups help to take forward potential HR issues?
- ✓ Can improvements in efficiency and staff capacity be used to improve the service for customers?
- ✓ Have you considered the options for the best location of the back office?
- ✓ Have you identified all the issues for other councils/agencies involved?
- ✓ Can the potential savings be used to help create more local jobs?
- ✓ Have you considered the views of councillors?
- ✓ Is the business case and cost benefits clear?
- ✓ Are there any opportunities for a shared accommodation close to both authorities?
- ✓ Could better quality staff be recruited in other areas?
- ✓ Could recruitment problems be resolved by locating elsewhere?
- ✓ Have you identified the potential saving to the taxpayer?

5. IT systems

- ✓ Have you identified the terms lengths of all the existing contracts?
- ✓ Do you have the right expertise to administer the systems?
- ✓ Can efficiency improvements be made in spite of the differences?
- ✓ Have you fully considered the appropriate scale of the potential partnership?
- ✓ Have the cost implications been identified?
- ✓ Are there other opportunities to share and build trust before the IT issues have to be addressed?

6. External pressures

- ✓ Do you have information to help evaluate the options?
- ✓ Do you know of other councils delivering services with different IT systems?
- ✓ Can examples from the private sector approach help you?
- ✓ Is it something that could be worked towards?
- ✓ Have the benefits of 'being first' been assessed?
- ✓ Are there possible additional benefits to the local area that could be achieved through the arrangement?
- ✓ Have site visits to other innovative arrangements been made?
- ✓ Can you identify other research to assist in decision making?

7. Benchmarking

- ✓ Do you have the right data available?
- ✓ Does it tell the whole story?
- ✓ Are there any local issues that may skew existing cost information (erg, old IT system, one stop shops)?
- ✓ Are SLA's in place and have they been reviewed regularly?

- ✓ Has the whole picture of the existing service delivery arrangement been considered?
- ✓ Has a site visit been considered?
- ✓ Can you identify the information which would help inform your decisions and how can it be obtained?

Contact: Your Audit Commission Relationship Manager will be pleased to offer any guidance on taking forward any issues relevant to your council. If you wish to discuss any specific issues of detail in the checklists, please refer to Tim Savill who led the study (t-savill@audit-commission.gov.uk – 07876 144849).

Annexe 'B'

Updated Workplan

1 April 2006

ACTION 1	Contact the local Regional Centre of Excellence and establish arrangements.	JANUARY 2006 (and ongoing)	Contact made – details of various projects in the East Midlands obtained – attendance at appropriate workshops
ACTION 2	Work with accountant to establish baseline costs and allocation of costs.	FEBRUARY/ MARCH 2006	Contact made – work will continue in conjunction with East Midlands Regional Centre of Excellence benchmarking project
ACTIONS 3/4	Local policies and alternatives to current service provision - including all options.	MARCH TO JUNE 2006	Initial meetings have taken place with a number of possible partners – other work in progress
ACTION 5	Partnership Working - the whole picture	MAY TO JUNE 2006	
ACTION 6	Direct Debit take-up campaign and "paperless" direct debit	JULY 2006	Meeting has taken place with Co-op Bank (Council's Sponsors) to identify issues and take project forward.
ACTION 7	Create awareness/open approach to the project, etc.	ONGOING	Issues raised at Revenue Service Team Briefings. Committee Report prepared.