

Epping Forest District Council: Benefits Inspection Post-Inspection Action Plan

R1	Deliver quicker and more accurate payments to customers				
	Action:	Responsibility:	Deadline Date:	Notes:	Date Completed:
a	<p>Investigate and analyse reasons for delays in the provision of supporting information /documentation. Put service improvements in place to reduce delays where possible</p> <p>Investigate alternative methods of reminding customers to provide information eg using text messaging, emailing.</p>	Benefits Manager	September 2010	<p>Reasons for delays have been analysed and service improvements have been put in place. Further guidance has been issued to speed up the decision making process</p> <p>Discussions to take place with ICT re setting up text messaging. Outcomes from the Customer Satisfaction Survey showed that emailing was not a popular method of communication.</p>	Analysis completed June 2010 but monitoring remains an ongoing process
b	<p>Continue to set targets for Benefit staff for benefit processing times and other performance targets. Review performance targets on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Identify best practice from other Authorities to reduce processing times</p>	Assistant Director – Benefits Benefits Manager Investigation & Intervention Manager Senior Benefit Officers	<p>April 2010</p> <p>September 2010</p>	Targets set as part of the PDR process	April 2010
c	Investigate the cost implications of placing advertisements in the local press to raise awareness of the importance of reporting changes in circumstances	Assistant Director – Benefits Benefits Manager	September 2010	Much work is already undertaken in this area targeted specifically at benefit claimants. An article will be placed in each edition of the Forester. The cost implications of placing	

	Recommend the identification of high risk cases within existing caseload and carry out a review of entitlement	Investigation & Interventions Manager	March 2010	advertisements in the local press will be assessed for value for money. High risk cases have been identified and full reviews are being carried out.	March 2010 and ongoing
d	Increase the amount of accuracy checking and recording being carried out by the Senior Benefit Officers. Ensure that the checking is formally recorded and a target of 5-10% to be set.	Senior Benefit Officers	March 2010	Increased checking is being carried out and formally recorded. A target of a minimum of 5% has been set	March 2010 and ongoing
R2	Improve the customer focus and delivery of the service				
	Action:	Responsibility:	Deadline Date:	Notes:	Date Completed:
a	Customer satisfaction survey to be undertaken to obtain customers general view of the current service provided. Surveys to be sent with new year notification letters General customer satisfaction survey to be scheduled annually with new year notification letters Develop customer satisfaction survey specifically for website to identify improvements that can be made to the benefit website pages Develop customer satisfaction survey specifically for Visiting Officers to identify any improvements that can be made whilst officers carry out home visits	Assistant Director – Benefits Benefits Manager Investigation & Intervention Manager Senior Benefit Officer – System Administration	March 2010 Annually from March 2011 May 2010 May 2010	1000 surveys dispatched with pre-paid reply envelopes in early March 2010 Survey complete and tested, should be live on website during September. Survey developed and issued when visits carried out	March 2010 May 2010

b	Formalise arrangements with existing and potential stakeholders to obtain their views on the service. The requirement for a formal landlord forum to be assessed.	Benefits Manager	September 2010	Liaison meetings that currently take place with JCP & CAB are being formalised. PS meetings have always been formalised.	
c/d/e	In consultation with partners and service users, develop and publish service standards to clearly publicise what can be expected of the Benefits Service. Outcomes to be reported to interested parties Assess whether appeal submissions can be less detailed in order to speed up the appeal process and allow more challenging service standards to be set.	Assistant Director – Benefits Benefits Manager Investigation & Intervention Manager Senior Appeal and Overpayment Officer	September 2010 June 2010	Other Essex Authorities to be surveyed on service standards through the Essex Benefit Managers Group. Shortened appeal submissions have been submitted to The Tribunal Service. The success of less detailed reports can only be assessed when the hearings take place. This will not be for some time as The Tribunal Service currently have a backlog and are taking up to a year to arrange a hearing.	May 2010
f	See 5a				
g	Assess customer demand for extended office opening hours.	Corporate Directors Assistant Director – Benefits Benefits Manager	April 2010	100% of the respondents to the March 2010 customer satisfaction survey have indicated that they are satisfied with the current telephone and reception opening hours. 0% indicated that they would like extended opening hours. No further action to be taken on this issue at this time although customers will be surveyed again in the future.	April 2010

	<p>Benefit staff to be located at the new Limes Farm area office when completed.</p> <p>Assess the requirement for Benefit staff to be located in the south of the District to enable easier public access. Identify potential premises that could be used. To be involved in working parties for the Debden Broadway redevelopment if a need for an area office, or relocation of the service, is identified.</p> <p>Subject to possible service relocation, redesign of existing reception area in the Civic Offices</p> <p>Clear signposting in the reception area for customers who speak no English. Access to interpreting service to be maintained.</p> <p>Investigate the possibility of introducing e-claims</p>		<p>Summer 2011</p> <p>March 2011</p> <p>March 2011</p> <p>April 2010</p> <p>March 2011</p>	<p>Officers of the Benefits Service are involved in the working group for the redevelopment of the Limes Farm Office</p> <p>There are corporate plans to create a one stop service in Debden Broadway. Officers of the Benefits Service are involved in the working group for the redevelopment.</p> <p>Architects have been appointed to provide options as part of a feasibility study to refurbish the existing reception area. Initial meetings with the architects have taken place</p> <p>Information leaflets and posters in the reception area</p> <p>Exploratory discussions with providers have taken place. Demonstrations to take place</p>	<p>April 2010</p>
R3	Improve value for money				
	Action:	Responsibility:	Deadline Date:	Notes:	Date Completed:
a/b/c	Continue with benchmarking of performance & cost data via both the Cipfa benchmarking club and the Essex Benefit Managers	Director of Finance Assistant Director – Benefits Benefit Manager Investigation & Intervention	December 2010	2009/10 cipfa Benchmarking data has been submitted but the results will not be available until Autumn 2010	

	<p>Group. Identify specific areas of high cost/poor performance and learn from best practice to achieve improvements</p> <p>Regular reporting to the Finance & Performance Management Scrutiny Panel</p>	Manager	June 2010 & December 2010	The June meeting of the Panel was before the Audit and Governance Committee had received the inspection report. Therefore, it was necessary to delay the Action Plan monitoring report to September.	September 2010
R4	Increase income levels of the poorest parts of the community				
	Action:	Responsibility:	Deadline Date:	Notes:	Date Completed:

a/b	Consult with other Authorities to ascertain best practice. Develop a take up strategy for the maximisation of benefits. Involve partners in the development of the strategy	Assistant Director – Benefits Benefit Manager	September 2010		
	Utilise existing ward data and Mosaic tool to identify potential areas of deprivation and target those areas for the take up of benefits		September 2010	The Benefits Division has volunteered to trial a take-up project utilising the services of mosaic	
	Obtain a quotation from Capita for their CTB take up campaign and assess whether it represents value for money.		April 2010	Quote obtained from Capita. but the quote in the region of £40,000 does not appear to represent value for money	
	Continue to identify potential partners for participation in any take up event opportunities in the local area and identify measures of effectiveness for each event.		September 2010	Posters have already been distributed to leisure centres, health centres and libraries. Officers of the Benefits Service will be participating in the Disability Awareness Day in December 2010. There have been limited opportunities to work in partnership for take up events in 2010	Posters etc distributed April/June. Identification of event opportunities will remain as an ongoing task
	Publicise the Benefit scheme in every edition of The Forester		April 2010	Arrangements have been made for an article to be regularly published in future editions of The Forester to advertise take up and the importance of reporting changes in circumstances	April 2010

R5	Improve the effectiveness of performance management and service planning				
	Action:	Responsibility:	Deadline Date:	Notes:	Date Completed:
a	Review the establishment of the Benefits Division and report to Members on performance and any proposed changes to the establishment	Director of Finance Assistant Director – Benefits	October 2010	When Cabinet approved the restructure in July 2009, an update report was requested within 18 months.	
b	See 3a/b/c				
c	<p>Performance statistics to continue to be updated on a weekly basis, ensuring that all staff are aware of ongoing performance. Monthly Academy performance and information@work statistics to also be provided and discussed between Senior Officers and their staff with a view to improving performance.</p> <p>Use performance data to identify any training need.</p>	Benefits Manager Senior Benefit Officers Training Officer	<p>May 2010</p> <p>September 2010</p>	<p>Staff have been reminded of the availability of performance data and where that data is held. Data is updated on a weekly basis</p> <p>Performance data used in the PDR process to identify training needs. Monitoring takes place on a regular basis to identify training needs that may arise during the year.</p>	May 2010 but ongoing monitoring
d	Investigate and analyse reasons for avoidable contact. Put service improvements in place to reduce avoidable contact where possible	Benefits Manager Senior Benefit Officer – System Administration	September 2010	Continue with the work that has already been started looking at causes of avoidable contact and potential solutions. Action Plan has been developed to secure improvements	June 2010 and ongoing

R6	Protect taxpayers money and improve the effectiveness of counter fraud work				
	Action:	Responsibility:	Deadline Date:	Notes:	Date Completed:
a	<p>In consultation with partners, develop and publish a service specific counter-fraud strategy.</p> <p>Fraud awareness training to be delivered to staff. Raise awareness of benefit fraud with partners and service users.</p>	Investigation & Intervention Manager	<p>September 2010</p> <p>December 2010</p>		
b	Continue to apply sanctions consistently and in line with fraud prosecution policy.	Investigation & Intervention Manager	March 2010	The recent additional resource on the team has meant that a greater number of investigations can be undertaken and the number of sanctions can be increased	March 2010 and ongoing
c	<p>Identify potential obstacles to the recruitment of Investigation Officers and seek to overcome those obstacles to attract experienced candidates.</p> <p>To assess performance against targets and evaluate resources quarterly</p>	Assistant Director – Benefits Investigation & Interventions Manager Human Resources	<p>April 2010</p> <p>December 2010</p>	Following previous unsuccessful recruitment exercises, one Investigation Officer commenced employment in February 2010 and a further Officer in August 2010. Fraud specific publications and websites have been identified for a wider audience when advertising. The issue will be reviewed further should another vacancy arise.	April 2010