
Housing Benefit Performance 2016/17

Committee considering report:	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
Date of Committee:	17 October 2017
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Keith Chopping
Report Author:	Iain Bell

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To review the 'red' performance area to ensure that the appropriate remedial action is in place.
- 1.2 The year end return advised that 'budgetary pressures coupled with the introduction of Universal Credit being scheduled for full working age implementation by 2020/21 required changes to be made in staffing arrangements, in particular, the employment of new benefits assessments officers. These matters contributed to some performance issues. Also the need for new IT infrastructure also contributed to longer processing times.'

2. Recommendations

The following actions are recommended to ensure that performance is improved;

- 2.1 To agree to reset the targets to a more manageable but still challenging level.
- 2.2 To monitor the effect a new replacement server has had on improving performance.
- 2.3 To monitor the affects staffing vacancies have on performance
- 2.4 To monitor the affects the introduction of Universal Credit is having/will have on performance

3. Implications

3.1 Financial:

In order to avoid the potential loss of subsidy grant as a result of delays in processing claims and changes in circumstances, management action has been put in place which involves monitoring the situation on a weekly basis and taking any appropriate relevant action.

3.2 Policy:

Policy may require some change once results of UC roll out are fully known.

3.3 Personnel:

Not applicable

3.4 **Legal:**
Not applicable

3.5 **Risk Management:**
Not applicable

3.6 **Property:**
Not applicable

3.7 **Other:**
Not applicable

4. **Other options considered.**

- The challenges that the section is faced with when looking to improving Housing Benefit performance has meant that we have to look at working differently and using technology to assist us. This is part of a long term goal as implementing digital solutions are costly and more importantly time consuming. Therefore as part of the Financial Challenge Review a business cases will be submitted to introduce digital solutions, one of the benefits of which would be to improve performance.
- We will also review and improve all our standard letters. This is to ensure that customers understand the claim process.
- We will also be taking the opportunity to have a more joined up approach to debt collection by producing a corporate debt recovery and write off policy. This is relevant to a customer's change in circumstances and Housing Benefit overpayments.

Executive Summary

5. Background.

- 5.1 The table below shows the performance for assessing new claims and processing a change of circumstances since 1st April 2016. The performance target for 2016/17 was less than 18.5 days for new claims and less than 8.5 days for change of circumstances:

Date	No. of days for assessment of new claims	No. of days to action a change of circumstances
2016/17		
1 st April 2016	22.86	10.97
1 st May 2016	24.41	10.67
1 st June 2016	24.96	11.72
1 st July 2016	22.80	13.29
1 st August 2016	22.82	12.64
1 st September 2016	22.70	12.28
1 st October 2016	23.14	12.16
1 st November 2016	24.03	11.30
1 st December 2016	23.69	11.18
1 st January 2017	23.27	10.92
1 st February 2017	23.10	11.22
1 st March 2017	23.00	10.86
31 st March 2017	22.75	8.7
2017/18		
1 st May 2017	19.38	8.86
1 st June 2017	21.87	11.26
1 st July 2017	21.13	12.55
1 st Aug 2017	20.16	10.87
1 st September 2017	19.40	9.63
1 st October 2017		

- 5.2 Despite difficulties the Council's average processing time at the end of 2016/17 for assessing a new claim finished 0.75 of a day below the national average as identified by performance figures published by the DWP. In terms of processing changes of circumstances the Council's processing time finished 0.3 of a day below the national average.
- 5.3 The table below compares the council's performance against Council's with similar caseloads;

Authority	caseload	days per new claim	Days for change
Amber Valley	7071	16	5
Bassetlaw	7058	38	11
East Devon	6957	13	5
Gravesham	6805	17	6
North Herts	6951	23	6
West Berks	6915	23	9
Worcester	6774	25	13
Wyre	6838	19	8

- 5.4 Performance for 2017/18 is being monitored on a week to week basis with emphasis being put on areas where performance is not as expected.
- 5.5 Full roll out of Universal Credit will impact in December 2017. Despite the possible loss of new claimants, the authority will be required to support new claimants in making and maintaining applications for Universal Credit as well as assisting the DWP Assessment Centre in the assessment of any new claims. This will result in an increase in activity which attracts additional funding but is not subject these performance measures.
- 5.6 Since March IT/software issues have been alleviated by the installation of a new server. This has improved general response or processing times and we are liaising with our software suppliers to ensure that these remain.
- 5.7 In relation to current staffing issues the section has recently appointed 2 officers to vacant posts. Both these new officers will require training which will be undertaken by current members of staff.
- 5.8 Additional work that has been requested for the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) in terms of data matching is being supported by employing a temporary member of staff, thus removing the pressure of current staff having to do this work as well.

6. Proposals

- 6.1 For 2017/18, it has been agreed to reduce the target to less than 20 days for assessing new claims and less than 9 days for processing change of circumstances.
- 6.2 We will continue to monitor performance on a weekly basis and take the appropriate action when and where necessary.
- 6.3 We will continue to fill vacancies until such time as we know the results of the implementation/full roll out of Universal Credit.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Performance has improved with the number of days taking to assess a new claim being under 20 days. We are now focusing on the number of days taking to process a change of circumstances.
- 7.2 This is despite having staff vacancies, some software issues and the DWP asking us to do some additional work.

8. Appendices

None