

Report to	-	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	-	26 November 2018
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Housing Benefit Performance Update

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That the progress against the Benefits Service improvement plan be noted.

Head of Service: Robin Vennard, Assistant Director Resources

Introduction

1. As Members may recall, an improvement plan for the Housing Benefits service was considered at the June 2018 meeting and agreed by Cabinet in July 2018 (CB18/07 Minute refers). This report updates Members on progress against the key actions.

Progress

2. The improvement plan was organised into immediate, short term and medium term actions. It is pleasing to report that good progress is being made. The resilience contract with Reigate and Bansted Borough Council (RBBC) is now in place and operational. A small amount of work has been placed with them and performance in terms of speed and quality is being monitored closely. If RBBC performs well, further work will be directed to them. It is also good to report that Capita's performance has improved with higher quality officers being deployed to undertake the Council's work. Again this is being monitored closely to ensure performance is maintained.
3. The training for new staff that was put in place has been delivered and more training is being planned. Once the new staff have completed their training this will add capacity to the service and reduce reliance on external support. Work on improving processing efficiency (Lean) has recently commenced. Details of identified improvements will be provided in future updates for Members.
4. Appendix A shows a summary position for each of the actions.

Performance

5. The Housing Benefits service performance for the second quarter of this financial year is reported elsewhere on this agenda. This shows the processing times for the first two quarters as follows:

QUARTER	NEW CLAIMS	CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES
Quarter 1	41.51 days	34.33 days
Quarter 2	31.68 days	24.1 days
October 18	21.37 days	20.22 days

6. These basic statistics show the improvement in processing times in the second quarter of the year. Also shown above are the results for October which show further improvement. This improvement is reflected in the amount of work outstanding. As at the end of October, 261 items of work remained to be processed. In the month of October in excess of 5,900 items of work were processed by the team and the resilience support providers.

Conclusion

7. Whilst processing times have improved significantly from Quarter 1, officers continue to focus on achieving the actions in the improvement plan to ensure they can be sustained. Officers have also had recent discussions with the Department of Work and Pensions who are satisfied with progress that is being made thus far. Members are asked to note progress so far.

Malcolm Johnston
Executive Director

Risk Assessment Statement

If the Council does not consistently achieve an improvement to the processing times for housing benefit, it is possible that some of the most vulnerable residents in the community will eventually be affected through the late payment (or incorrect payment) of their housing benefit. The financial risk to the Council lies with the ability to recover any overpaid housing benefit as a result of the delay in processing benefits. There is also reputational risk as a result of the current poor processing times.

Appendix A

Timescale	Work stream	Lead Officer	Support /Team Members	Start	Original Completion date	Current status
Immediate	Capita Resilience Contract	C Watchman	R Vennard	01/06/2016	30/06/2016	Contract in place and now working well.
	Alternative Resilience Support	C Watchman	R Vennard	11/06/2016	30/06/2016	Contract in place with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council with effect from 01/10/2018.
	Training	C Betts	C Watchman	01/06/2018	31/10/2019	Nine days training provided by Capita in August 2018. Six days internal training booked in between 23 October - 7 November.
Short Term	Training Contract	C Watchman	C Betts	01/07/2018	31/10/2018	Nine days training provided by Capita in August 2018. Looking at procuring a training package for when we recruit to the vacant assessor posts.
	Staffing	C Watchman	M Benford	01/07/2018	31/03/2019	Mini team restructure completed 1/10/18. New Income Protection Manager in post from 1/10/18. Benefit Specialist in post 3/9/18. 2.5 Benefit Assessor posts vacant, one Senior assessor post vacant.
	Document Management System	L Ridgeway	C Watchman	01/07/2018	31/12/2018	Waiting on Northgate (software provider) to install latest system release.
Medium Term	Performance Management Framework	R Algar	C Watchman	01/09/2018	01/04/2019	Not Started.
	Lean	N Mitchell	TBC	01/10/2018	01/04/2019	Five process mapping sessions booked in between 16/10/18 - 22/11/18.
	Demand	TBC	TBC	01/10/2018	01/04/2019	Not Started.
	Online Services	J Waite	C Watchman	01/06/2018	01/04/2019	Demonstrations from suppliers completed, preferred product chosen, site visit undertaken, awaiting further information from supplier on integration into Academy.

Timescale	Work stream	Lead Officer	Support /Team Members	Start	Original Completion date	Current status
	CTRS	C Watchman		01/06/2018	01/04/2018	Public consultation closed 24/9/18. Responses being analysed, final modelling taken place, EIA, detailed scheme rules and Committee report being written.
	Learning From Others	C Watchman	R Algar	01/08/2018	01/07/2019	Due to commence January 2019.