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**Harborough District
Council,**

**Hinckley and
Bosworth Borough
Council,**

**North West
Leicestershire District
Council,**

**Working in
Partnership to provide
better services...**

Meeting
Committee

Leicestershire Partnership Revenues & Benefits Joint

Time/Date

3.30 pm on Thursday, 18 JANUARY 2024

Location
Council

Council Chamber - North West Leicestershire District

Officer to contact

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Councillor P Beadle
Councillor S Bray
Councillor M Graves

Councillor K Lynch
Councillor A Woodman
Councillor M Wyatt

Recording of meetings

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Thank you

**LEICESTERSHIRE PARTNERSHIP REVENUES & BENEFITS JOINT COMMITTEE -
18 JANUARY 2024**

A G E N D A

6. SERVICE PLAN 2024 (Pages 1 - 12)

Report of the Head of Partnership.

Late item revised service plan 2024/25 received after preparation of the agenda.

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SERVICE PLAN 2024/25

The Leicestershire Partnership Revenues and Benefits (LRBP)

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5. CUSTOMERS
6. PERFORMANCE
7. RISKS

1 Councils' Aims and Priorities:



- Priority 1
- Priority 2
- Priority 3
- Priority 4

Harborough District Council

Place and Community: Community leadership to create a sense of pride and belonging
Healthy Lives: Promoting health and wellbeing and encouraging healthy life choices
Environment and sustainability: Creating a sustainable environment to protect future generations
Economy: Supporting businesses and residents to deliver a prosperous local economy



Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

A Borough to be proud of

- Priority 1
- Priority 2
- Priority 3

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

People: Helping people to stay healthy, active, and protected from harm.
Places: Creating clean and attractive places to live and work.
Prosperity: Encouraging growth, attracting businesses improving skills and supporting regeneration.



- Priority 1
- Priority 2
- Priority 3
- Priority 4
- Priority 5

North West Leicestershire District Council

Supporting Coalville to be a more vibrant, family town
Our communities are safe, healthy, and connected
Local people live in high quality, affordable homes
Supporting businesses and helping people into local jobs
Developing a clean and green district

2. OVERALL PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SERVICE	To provide a high-quality Revenues and Benefits service to our residents and businesses at an economical cost and in accordance with the principles of continuous improvement and changing customer requirements.
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To assess and pay Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support accurately and promptly. 2) As part of our DWP liaison role to ensure all referrals are made in accordance with the requirements of the DWP. 3) To issue accurate and prompt Council Tax and NNDR bills to maximise collection rates, and to deal appropriately with non-payers to minimise arrears, whilst supporting those in need. 4) To promote self-service whilst offering customers a choice of access channel where appropriate. 5) To widely publicise the availability of business rate grants, discounts, exemptions, reliefs, and housing benefit, and to provide proactive advice on all Revenues and Benefits matters. 6) To ensure that the service observes all statutory requirements including those governing the administration of Revenues and Benefits, Freedom of Information, Data Protection, Human Rights and Health and Safety. 7) To adhere to our commitment to promote equality and diversity among our residents and staff. 8) To provide and develop innovative services for all customers. 9) To communicate effectively with our customers and stakeholders, developing our services to meet their changing needs. 10) To provide accurate and timely services for our external and internal customers. 11) Develop our services through well trained, empowered and committed staff who are proud to work for the Leicestershire Revenues and Benefits Service. 12) To treat all our customers consistently and fairly. 13) To learn from compliments, complaints and ensure service delivery reflects such feedback 14) To provide Value for Money services by delivering both financial and processing efficiencies.

Scope of services provided by the Partnership

Council Tax Billing, Recovery & Enforcement	Housing Benefit administration
NNDR Billing, Recovery & Enforcement (including BIDs for both HBBC and NWLDC and the Freeport for NWLDC)	Council Tax Reduction Scheme Administration (Council Tax Support)
The investigation of Council Tax Support Fraud	Housing Benefit Overpayment enforcement
Provision of customer support and guidance	Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support advice and support
DWP Liaison in respect of Housing Benefit Fraud	Administration of hardship awards and reliefs in revs & bens
Certification & audit of grant claims within Revenues and Benefits.	Ad hoc financial support to our communities via government schemes.

3. National & Local Agenda Items

There are new and existing matters that will need to be addressed during the latter part of 2023/4 and 2024/5 to meet both central government objectives and the Partnerships.

The items are:

1. The financial impact on individuals and businesses arising from the Cost-of-Living crisis, unprecedented costs of energy, and interest-rate rises.
2. Continuation of the Housing Benefit Award Accuracy initiative
3. Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief – Support for eligible retail, hospitality, and leisure businesses is maintained at 75% business rates relief up to £110,000 per business in 2024-25.
4. Changes to service delivery brought about by unplanned changes beyond our control including changes to systems and loss of key personnel.
5. Financial pressures on partner authorities, impacting on the medium term financial strategy (MTFS) resulting in additional work streams linked to efficiencies and savings
6. The impact of the expected general election on authority and service priorities.

7. Legislative changes affecting Revenues and Benefits.
8. Universal Credit Migration

Supporting individuals and communities

There remains the possibility that further national measures may be introduced to support businesses and individuals because of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, and the Partnership will support other teams as required. This is a significant pressure on the partnership and becomes more of a pressure due to difficulties in recruiting to substantive roles and the cost of temporary staff.

The financial impact on individuals

Central Government have announced a series of measures designed to support the most vulnerable in society. These include:

- Uprating the state retirement pension by 8.5%,
- Working age benefits to increase by 6.7%
- Support for private renters on UC or HB who will be in the region of £800 better off because of changes in the Local Housing Allowance
- Low-income households to receive a £299 cost of living payment
- Up to £600 winter support for pensioners

Whilst all these measures are welcomed its highly likely that a significant number of households and businesses will struggle to pay their priority debts so we need to be mindful that this may well impact on our collection rates

Changes to Service Delivery

Although we are not currently aware of any forthcoming initiatives on the scale of recent years, local authorities remain the go-to for delivery of national schemes. Against a backdrop of ensuring that our 'business as usual work' is maintained we need to be mindful of the potential for further demands.

4 **KEY PROJECTS**

In addition to the 'business as usual' projects we are currently working on a number of projects during 2023/24 which will continue into 2024/25

Description	Key actions	Responsible Officer(s)	Critical Support
Review the E-forms to ensure they are delivering as required and an enabler to self serve	To include. E-Claim E-Change of circumstances Discount & Exemption module	Operational Managers	Academy/Systems/IT
Finalise automation of benefit file transfers into LA systems (UCDS)	Testing to ensure that DWP data is updated as required and not compromised	Benefit Operational Manager	Academy/Systems
Compliance with GDPR and data removal/retention	Testing and removal of data	Head of Partnership	GDPR officer/Legal/systems
Business Process re-engineering	Fully utilising the functionality provided by the Capita product	Operational Managers	Academy/Systems
Review court costs	Increase by inflation	Revenues Operational Manager	Team leaders
Review the product provided by Destin Solutions.	Investigation of additional functionality provided by the product.	Operational Managers	PMT, Systems,LRBP Teamleaders
Completion of the move to a single employer	Project Delivery as led by CEX	Head of Partnership	All partners

Finalise Direct Debit and Refund Automation	Finalising the testing and automating elements of the Direct Debit and refund process	Operational Managers	Academy/Systems/IT
Review and reduce the number of documents no longer required prior to migration to Sharepoint.	Each officer responsible for the management of their own document areas	All officers	IT/Team Leaders/Systems
Align processes across partners	Including write-offs, refunds, discounts, and premiums.	Operational Managers	PMT/Team Leaders/Critical Friend
Review and implement policies for high level recovery and enforcement	Including insolvency, charging orders, orders for sale.	Head of Partnership	PMT/Team Leaders
Develop new protocols for phone contact through Teams as opposed to Jabber	Roll out timetable and training requirements determined	Operational Managers	
Cleansing and review of Housing Benefit Overpayments	Determine the most appropriate means of recovery and amend stationery as required	Operational Managers	Systems/ICT staff as required
Upgrade the Enterprise system to the latest version	Installation, implementation, training.	BD&S	
Consider undertaking an SPD review	Agree process, schedule, deliver.	Operational managers	S151 officers , LRBP partners and LTA input

5. CUSTOMERS

Service Standards

- The Leicestershire Partnership aims to demonstrate its commitment to equality, diversity and fairness by:
 - Providing services which are accessible, and meet customer needs.
 - Promoting and demonstrating fairness and equality of opportunity in the employment of staff. This is achieved through a corporate approach to recruitment, training.
 - Being proactive in the promotion of equality and diversity with each council and all its operations.

6 PERFORMANCE

All targets will be reviewed following the 2023/24 out-turn. The setting of targets for the 2024/2025 financial year will be reported back to Joint Committee for approval

7 Risks

It is our intention to manage our business risks in a consistent and cost-effective manner.

Risk	Mitigating Actions in place	Actions put in place	Owner
Insufficient Business Continuity arrangements/plans: could prevent ability to deliver services	Business continuity plans in place Risk Assessment to prioritise resource against priority/critical services using generic corporate risk assessment	Like most LA's we are experiencing difficulties in recruiting to key positions within the Partnership. One of the key benefits that we can offer potential recruits is the ability to work flexibly (from home/office), however we may need to consider an enhanced pay package (budget allowing) to attract the right candidate.	Head of Partnership
Failure to keep up to date or not complying with latest legislation and regulations such	Implement revised requirements of new H&S Policy once approved by Council	Each partner authority has their own policies which are reviewed and implemented as required	Operational Managers

as Health & Safety policy could lead to damage to reputation and potential prosecution	Attend training and adopt policy Enforcement of existing H&S policy and procedures		
Failure to improve sickness absence causes reduced capacity leading to failure/inability to deliver services/objectives efficiently	Continue to set absence targets and monitor against targets Compliance with Management of Absence arrangements Monthly monitoring of absence statistics provided by HR Setting of targets. Continued focus on long-term absence management and alternative options i.e., rehabilitation	The appropriate sickness absence monitoring framework is adhered to and reported monthly to the Management Board	Operational Managers
Effects of the cost of living crisis on collection and increase in Benefit Claims: need to deal with new claims and change of circumstance as quickly as possible to relieve financial hardship and avoid benefit overpayments	Regularly report on performance to Management Board.	As a result of the increasing cost of living we will continue to promote the availability of Council tax Support and discretionary discounts. Increased use of automation and electronic applications will reduce the time taken to process claims	Operational Managers
Failure to bring projects in on time	Effective Project management and forward planning of available resources	Adherence to project timetables	Head of Partnership
LRBP are not always considered in planning stage of projects, therefore meaning either BAU is compromised, or we are unable to support partners	All partners contribute to the LRBP service plan effectively and consider impact on LRBP.	All asked to contribute to the service plan, direct requests for resource via HoP	LRBP Management Board
Capita's failure to deliver critical software releases on time potentially impacting on	Effective management of the escalation protocols within Capita and project management of our resources	Adherence to project timetables and maintain effective lines of communication with our account manager	Head of Partnership

key projects/completion of statutory returns etc			
Inability to recruit to roles or authorisation not given to recruit to vacant roles	Robust business case provided to recruit to full time roles as appropriate.	Liaison with Comms and HR to attract candidates and advertise in the correct place. Whilst noting there are problems in all service areas with recruitment	ALL

How?

- Maintain a robust and consistent risk management approach that will identify and effectively manage strategic, operational, partnership and project risks
- Ensure accountabilities, roles and responsibilities for managing risks are clearly defined and communicated
- Consider risk as an integral part of service improvement planning, key decision-making processes, and project and partnership governance
- Communicate risk information effectively through a clear reporting framework
- Increase understanding and expertise in risk management through targeted training and the sharing of best practice.

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