



SERVICE PLAN 2023/24

The Leicestershire Partnership Revenues and Benefits (LRBP)

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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 provide residents with a choice of how to engage with services via access channels that ensure customer choice, safety and are covid compliant 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) To maximize collection rates whilst having due regard to the difficulties faced by some customers in making their payments. With reference to economic pressures presenting. 12) Develop our services through well trained, empowered and committed staff who are proud to work for the Leicestershire Revenue and Benefits Service. 13) To treat all our customers consistently and fairly. 14) To learn from compliments, complaints and ensure service delivery reflects such feedback 15) 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)	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 any discipline
Certification & audit of grant claims for all disciplines	Ad hoc financial support to our communities via government schemes e.g., Test & Test Isolation Support payments, Energy Rebate payments, Covid-19 grants etc. Not a planned service but undertaken by LRBP.

3. National & Local Agenda Items

There are new and existing matters that will need to be addressed during the latter part of 2022 and 2023 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 and unprecedented costs of energy
2. Continuation of the Housing Benefit Award Accuracy initiative
3. Reconciliation, post payment assurance and debt recovery linked to grants work
- 4 Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS)– Alternative Funding & Alternative Fuel payments (Domestic)
5. Business Rates revaluation effective 1 April 2023

6. Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief – Support for eligible retail, hospitality, and leisure businesses is increased from 50% to 75% business rates relief up to £110,000 per business in 2023-24.
7. Changes to service delivery brought about by unplanned changes beyond our control
8. Financial pressures on three constituent authorities, impacting on MTFs resulting in additional work streams linked to efficiencies and savings

Supporting communities

It's likely several national measures will be introduced to support businesses and individuals because of the cost-of-living crisis, 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 has announced a series of measures designed to support the most vulnerable in society. These include:

- Up-rating the state pension, benefits and the benefits cap in line with inflation (September CPI of 10.1%)
- Increasing the National Living Wage
- £650 one off Cost of Living Payment for those on means tested benefits and an anticipated payment of £900 in 2023-2024
- An additional one-off payment of £300 to pensioner households with a similar amount in 2023-2024
- Expanding the energy bills support scheme to reduce household bills by £400.

Whilst all these measures are welcomed it's 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

Over the past year we have seen a number of initiatives that have been administered by the partnership. Most recently we were responsible for setting up, establishing eligibility and arranging payment of the energy rebate schemes (both main and discretionary). Against a backdrop of ensuring that our 'business as usual work' was maintained this incredibly complex and resource hungry project was delivered as required for all three LA's

4 **KEY PROJECTS**

In addition to the 'business as usual' projects we are currently working on a number of new projects during 2023/24

Description	Key actions	Responsible Officer(s)	Critical Support
Embed the use of E-services to enable customers to self service	To include. E-Claim E-Change of circumstances Discount & Exemption module	Operational Managers	Academy/Systems/IT
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	Benefit Operational Manager	Academy/Systems
Destin Solutions	Fully utilising the functionality provided by the MI and reporting tool	Operational Managers	PMT, Systems,LRBP Teamleaders
Promotion & marketing the partnership	As directed by Management Board & Joint Committee	Head of Partnership	Comms team /Legal/finance
Consideration of a single employer	Project Delivery as led by CEX	Head of Partnership	All partners
Working with potential new partner (s) to	As descriptor	Head of Partnership	MB, PMT,legal,HR,finance

onboard and put together business case			
Direct Debit Automation	Testing and automating elements of the direct Debit process	Operational Managers	Academy/Systems/IT
Exploring the use of Robotics within revenues and benefits	Establish whether it can deliver: Lower costs Increased speed of processing Increased accuracy	Head of Partnership	MB, PMT, Systems

5. **CUSTOMERS**

Service Standards

- The Leicestershire Partnership aims to demonstrate its commitment to equality, diversity and fairness by:
 - Providing services which are accessible to all, and which meet customer needs. We do this by providing information in different languages, in large type or on tape or using British sign language where appropriate.
 - Promoting and demonstrating fairness and equality of opportunity in the employment of staff. This is achieved through a corporate approach to recruitment and staff retention that aims to be inclusive.
 - Being proactive in the promotion of equality and diversity with each council and all its operations.
 - Maintaining and improving turnaround times for new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support

6 **PERFORMANCE**

All targets will be reviewed following the 2022/23 out-turn. The setting of targets for the 2023/2024 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. We have reviewed several processes that deliver the same outcome but do not require an actual visit or for staff to attend the office (i.e., making payments remotely)	Head of Partnership
Failure to keep up to date or not complying with latest legislation and regulations such as Health & Safety policy could lead to damage to reputation and potential prosecution	Implement revised requirements of new H&S Policy once approved by Council Attend training and adopt policy Enforcement of existing H&S policy and procedures	Each partner authority has their own policies which are reviewed and implemented as required	Operational Managers
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

Reduced benefits subsidy from Central Govt. because of a high incidence of errors.	To introduce a revised Quality Checking Procedure within Benefits	Implementing the QA functionality within Destin to bring a consistent approach to QA within the partnership	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	Benefits Operational Manager
Failure to bring projects in on time	Effective Project management and forward planning of available resources	Adherence to project timetables	Head of Partnership
Partners do not involve LRBP 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	Following repeated incidents, 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 key projects/completion of statutory returns etc	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
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.