

# QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT

**DIRECTORATE:** Corporate and Policy Directorate  
**SERVICE:** Exchequer and Customer Services  
**PERIOD:** Quarter 1 to period end 31<sup>st</sup> June 2008.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Monitoring Report covers the Exchequer and Customer Services first quarter period up to period end 31<sup>st</sup> June 2008. It describes key developments and progress against key objectives and performance indicators for the service.

The way in which traffic light symbols have been used to reflect progress is explained within Appendix 4.

## 2.0 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

### **Revenues & Benefits**

#### **Direct Debit Uptake**

Work continues to increase the percentage of people paying by Direct Debit, the work to date has seen an increase from 53.76% in April 2007 to 62.51% at 31.07.08

#### **Macmillan Cancer Support bid**

A successful bid was made by Halton to Macmillan for funding for two Welfare Rights Officers posts specialising in helping those affected by cancer in Halton. This is a group who significantly under-claim benefits. The PCT have agreed to fund the posts at the conclusion of the 3 year funding period. The post holders will work cross agency and have strong links to appropriate health services and other agencies (e.g. Delamere Suite at Halton Hospital, Halton Haven, Runcorn & Widnes Cancer Support Group

#### **Empty Property Rates.**

Empty Property Rates were introduced nationally in April. The effect of this change in legislation has seen a reduction in the collection rate for Business Rates. The collection rate at the 31.07.08 was 40.81% (42.10% if EPR was excluded). The situation is monitored monthly.

## **Customer Services**

### **Business Link North West**

From the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2008 the Contact Centre is now handling the out of hours calls on behalf of Business Link North West using the computer systems developed by the Council's ITC Division.

### **Mobile Phone Bills**

Staff are now able to view and submit their Council mobile phone bills on line dramatically cutting back on the amount of paper and time in the printing individual bills. Once an officer has identified a number as either 'Private' or 'Work' then all future bills will automatically default to their preference. Work is also continuing on this project with the objective to a fully integrated system with Trent thereby eliminating all double keying.

## **3.0 EMERGING ISSUES**

### **Revenues and Benefits**

The Division is investigating the merits of introducing an number of technologically advanced systems that should lead to efficiency savings

- **IDCS (Intelligent Data Capture System)**. This system automatically recognises written information on benefit claim forms pre-populate the IT system for checking. This would improve speed and accuracy and result in improved efficiency
- **VRA (Voice Recognition Analysis)**. The Division is exploring the advantages of introducing VRA during telephone claims with customers. This system is being trialled in other authorities and aims to highlight potentially fraudulent claims for Benefit.
- **Telephone Claims** The Division is exploring opportunities to introduce telephone claiming. If this was to be introduced it could be part of the VRA project.
- **LoCTA** tracing software for Council Tax Recovery. The Division is to trial LoCTA in a twelve month pilot. The system allows Council's to trace HB/CTB overpayments, council tax debtors and so aid recovery of debt that otherwise may have had to be written off.
- **BECS** The Division is exploring the opportunities to allow electronic claiming via the web. If introduced it will offer more choice to claimants and may also result in efficiency savings.

- **Telly Talk** The Division is exploring the advantages of introducing Telly talk to Job Centre Plus and RSL offices as a means of giving face to face (Via TV) access to customers at remote sites.
- **Workflow streams.** The Division is exploring the advantages of automated workflow streams for the recovery of council tax. The main advantage is such streams could potentially reduce some of the manual trawling of cases prior to court action.
- **Employment Support Allowance (ESA).** A major change to the Benefit system takes place in October with the introduction of the ESA which replaces Incapacity Benefit.
- **Debt Advice.** In the current economic climate the workload of the Welfare Rights Section as a whole is expected to increase substantially. Energy prices are set to rise quite dramatically and fuel poverty is expected to become a priority area. This is currently linked in to debt advice, and although a "marginal" team activity at the moment, it is set to increase in profile.
- **Key Lines of Enquiry.** The Division is carrying out extensive work on preparing for the new inspection regime, which is based on the for Benefits. These inspections will be carried out by the Audit Commission and not the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI), and is a much more rigorous inspection regime.




### **Customer Services**

- **Planning.** The development of HDL's system is now in an advanced stage for the Contact Centre to commence scanning of plans on behalf of the Planning Section.
- **National Indicator 14 (NI14).** Whilst this indicator, which comes in to force from the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008, has a major impact on HDL Customer Services it is a corporate issue and indeed effects many Divisions across the Council including Revenues & Benefit, Waste Management, Planning, Environmental Health etc. The indicator measures the 'Avoidable Contact' to the Council across all channels. The HDL system has already been amended to record Avoidable Contact but other areas of the Council will also have a responsibility to measure their Avoidable Contacts. Plans are being drawn up to ensure full compliance.

### **Telecommunications.**

- The current telephone infrastructure is now some 15+ years old and a program of work is being put together with the objective of ensuring the system is fit for purpose and to examine other new and emerging technologies to see if we can make better use of our telephone and data networks and improve efficiencies whilst delivering cost savings.

#### 4.0 PROGRESS AGAINST OBJECTIVES / MILESTONES




Total	9		9		0		0
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Progress against all of the objectives for the service has proceeded as planned and additional details are provided within Appendix 1.

#### 5.0 SERVICE REVIEW




There are no issues relating to service review to be reported for the first quarter period.

#### 6.0 PROGRESS AGAINST KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Total	4		4		0		0
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All of the key performance indicators for the service are on track to achieve annual target and additional details are provided within Appendix 2.

#### 6.1 PROGRESS AGAINST OTHER PERFORMANCE INDICATORS




Total	5		5		0		0
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Of the five remaining indicators for the service none require reporting by exception at this time.

#### 7.0 APPENDICES




Appendix 1 - Progress against Key Objectives/ Milestones  
Appendix 2 - Progress against Key Performance Indicators  
Appendix 3 – Financial Statement  
Appendix 4 - Use of traffic light symbols

## Progress against objectives/ milestones

Service Plan Ref.	Objective	Key Milestone (s)	Progress Quarter 1	Commentary
ECS O1	Home working	Have staff signed up for scheme by 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2008		Home working continues to be rolled out across the Division. Staff are still joining the scheme. The pilot has now finished and there are now 23 staff successfully working from home
ECS O2	Business Improvement Districts	Set up project team Staff training on legislation Purchase and install new BIDS software Staff training on software Bill properties in BID area		Implemented on time.  Business Improvement Districts were introduced in April at Halebank and Astmoor. Although payments were due in full at the end of April the collection rate at the 31.07.08 was 67% for Halebank and 56% in Astmoor. Recovery action is due to commence shortly
ECS O3	Implementation of Local Housing Allowance	Purchase new system software, install and test  Staff training on both system and legislation  General awareness for all key stakeholders (RSLs, local landlords, claimants etc.)		Project completed on time.

Service Plan Ref.	Objective	Key Milestone (s)	Progress Quarter 1	Commentary
ECS O4	Implementation of Empty Property Rating	Install new software  Test and train staff on system and legislation  Publicity for scheme to local businesses  Bill businesses		This project was successfully implemented on time for billing in April.
ECS O5	Move all staff to new Revenues & Benefits software (Version 6)	Plan of action for transfer  Train all new staff on new version of system  Assess and monitor impact of new system		Phase 1 completed although further work is necessary when another module of V6 is released in October.
ECS O6	Rollout NVQ to Cheshire LAs	Carry out presentations to interested Las  Assess current Halton staff on scheme		Completed. The Division is an accredited NVQ assessment Centre for the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation. The course of study has been offered to staff within the Division. 2008 also saw this being offered to staff from other LAs in Cheshire. The Division is to take another cohort of students in September

**APPENDIX ONE– PROGRESS AGAINST SERVICE OBJECTIVES (Exchequer & Customer Services)**

Service Plan Ref.	Objective	Key Milestone (s)	Progress Quarter 1	Commentary
ECS O7	To continue to promote and introduce more effective procurement	Further develop ongoing spend analysis identifying for potential saving		<p>A number of quick wins highlighted and reviewed from the Spend Analysis Report in 06/07 have resulted in a number of Corporate Contracts being implemented. Savings to date are shown below and are continually being monitored:</p> <p>Agency Workers – Savings £25k Apr 08 to June 08</p> <p>Rail Travel On-line bookings - Savings £7k Jun to Jul 08</p> <p>Further potential savings in Hotel Accommodation were identified which has led to the introduction of an on-line booking system being implemented at end of Qtr1.</p>
ECS O8	Continue to develop appropriate e-solutions in conjunction with ICT / Directorates to further enhance service delivery through HDL	Review available service options  Continue BPR		This is an ongoing project as the team are continuing to examine service delivery options to free back office resources through business process re-engineering.
ECS O9	Examine implications/implementation of “Government Gateway”	Feb 08 - Undertake risk analysis		Government Connect is a centrally driven common national infrastructure for government that HBC will be connecting into. It will allowing the authority to securely share, transfer and receive both corporate & personal data related to our employees and





**APPENDIX ONE– PROGRESS AGAINST SERVICE OBJECTIVES (Exchequer & Customer Services)**

Service Plan Ref.	Objective	Key Milestone (s)	Progress Quarter 1	Commentary
				<p>clients, (eg Benefits data between the Council and the DWP).  It mandates a set of guidelines and processes that define how we will use, access and store any and all data within HBC. "If" we wish to interact with any Government bodies into the future. A risk analysis has been undertaken and a working party led by IT heading the project .</p>

**APPENDIX ONE– PROGRESS AGAINST SERVICE OBJECTIVES (Exchequer & Customer Services)**



## Progress against 'Key' Performance Indicators

Ref	Description	Actual 2007/8	Target 08/09	Quarter 1	Progress	Commentary
<b>Corporate Health</b>						
ECSLI 02 (BVPI 9)	Proportion of Council Tax collected	96.41	96.85	29.08		Qtr 1 shows an increase of 0.3% on the corresponding period last year
ECSLI 03 (BVPI 10)	The percentage of Business Rates which should have been received during the year that were received	99.93	98.85	31.34		Qtr 1 collection is slightly lower than the corresponding period last year following the introduction of the empty rate charge
<b>Service Delivery</b>						
ECSLI 05 (BVPI 78a)	Average time for processing new claims (Housing & Council Tax Benefit)	17.77 days	23 days	14.47 days		Performance is ahead of target
ECSLI 06 (BVPI 78b)	Average time for processing notifications of changes in circumstances	3.99 days	6 days	4.85 days		Performance is ahead of target

## EXCHEQUER AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

### Revenue Budget as at 30th June 2008

	Annual Revised Budget	Budget To Date	Actual To Date	Variance To Date (overspend)	Actual Including Committed Items
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b><u>Expenditure</u></b>					
Employees	5,685	1,411	1,368	43	1,368
Premises	550	48	39	9	39
Supplies & Services	1,001	242	226	16	226
Telephone System Costs	76	18	44	(26)	44
Insurance	1,954	1,673	1,709	(36)	1,709
Transport	103	26	22	4	22
Charitable Relief	103	0	0	0	0
Concessionary Travel	1,975	165	139	26	139
Asset Charges	258	0	0	0	0
Council Tax Benefits	9,430	9,430	9,443	(13)	9,443
Support Services	3,424	0	0	0	0
Non HRA Rent Rebates	166	42	16	26	16
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>24,727</b>	<b>13,055</b>	<b>13,006</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>13,006</b>
<b><u>Income</u></b>					
<b><u>Sales</u></b>	-13	-4	-2	(2)	-4
Halton Housing Trust	-19	-4	-17	13	-4
Fees & Charges	-2	-1	-5	4	-5
Support Service Recharges	-4,981	0	0	0	0
SLA to Schools	-46	-12	-15	3	-15
Telephone Recharges	-338	0	0	0	0
Insurance Recharges	-2,309	-39	-33	(6)	-33
NNDR Administration Grant	-169	0	0	0	0
Hsg Ben Administration Grant	-1,479	-370	-317	(53)	-317
Concessionary Travel Grant	-300	-75	-130	55	-130
Council Tax Benefits Grant	-9,248	-2,312	-2,303	(9)	-2,303
Liability Orders	-574	0	0	0	0
Non HRA Rent Rebates	169	-42	-20	(22)	-20
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>-19,647</b>	<b>-2,859</b>	<b>-2,842</b>	<b>(17)</b>	<b>-2,842</b>
<b>Net Expenditure</b>	<b>5,080</b>	<b>10,196</b>	<b>10,164</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>10,164</b>

### Comments on the above figures:

In overall terms spending is currently below the budget to the end of the first quarter. With regards to expenditure, employee costs are lower than budget due to vacancies within the Housing Benefits section, and it is expected that spending will be within budget at the year end.

## APPENDIX THREE– FINANCIAL STATEMENT (Exchequer & Customer Services)




## EXCHEQUER AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

### Local Strategic Partnership expenditure to 30th June 2008

	Annual Budget	Budget to Date	Actual to Date	Variance to Date
	£000	£000	£000	£000
<b>Local Strategic Partnership</b>				
Benefits Bus	150	37	14	23
<b>Net Expenditure</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23</b>

Regular monitoring reports are sent to the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in respect of all LSP projects and any areas of concern are dealt with throughout the year by the LSP support team and individual project managers. Some variances against the budget to date are expected, as the LSP have deliberately over-programmed in order to ensure that the full allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund grant is spent during the year.

The traffic light symbols are used in the following manner:

	<u>Objective</u>	<u>Performance Indicator</u>
<b><u>Green</u></b>	 <p>Indicates that the <u>objective is on course to be achieved</u> within the appropriate timeframe.</p>	<p>Indicates that the <u>target is on course to be achieved</u>.</p>
<b><u>Amber</u></b>	 <p>Indicates that it is <u>unclear</u> at this stage, due to a lack of information or a key milestone date being missed, <u>whether the objective will be achieved</u> within the appropriate timeframe.</p>	<p>Indicates that it is either <u>unclear</u> at this stage or too early to state whether the target is on course to be achieved.</p>
<b><u>Red</u></b>	 <p>Indicates that it is <u>highly likely or certain that the objective will not be achieved</u> within the appropriate timeframe.</p>	<p>Indicates that the <u>target will not be achieved</u> unless there is an intervention or remedial action taken.</p>