

QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT

DIRECTORATE: Corporate and Policy
SERVICE: Exchequer and Customer Services
PERIOD: Quarter 1 to period end 30th June 2009

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This monitoring report covers the Exchequer and Customer Services first quarter period up to period end 30th June 2009. 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 3

2.0 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Revenues

Council Tax:

Halton achieved its best in year Council Tax collection at 96.77% this was the 3rd highest collection rate in Merseyside, only marginally behind St.Helen's and Knowsley. In addition, this collection rate fell into 6th position within the 16 CIPFA nearest neighbours model.

Business Rates:

Halton collected 99.95% of Business Rates despite the changes in Empty Property Rates. In comparison with 7 other Merseyside authorities this performance is the highest. In relation to the CIPFA nearest neighbour group Halton's figure is the highest rate of collection.

Benefits:

The 'Right Benefit' indicator is published monthly on the Department for Work and Pensions, (DWP), website and at the end of May 2009 shows Halton ranked 3rd in its peer group of 26 other LAs with 109.76 average changes per 1,000 caseload per week.

Due to national issues regarding the Right Time indicator, DWP have been unable to provide LAs with details of their performance and subsequently LAs have been unable to benchmark against this National Indicator.

Internally we have processes in place to monitor performance for speed of processing and can report that at the end of June we were processing new claims in 15.38 days and change in circumstances in 7 days.

Welfare Rights:

The impact of the economic downturn has been an increase in demand for the income maximisation and debt advice services provided by the Welfare Rights Service. Over £3 million in welfare benefits was brought into the borough by the team in the last financial year, which has both financially assisted many of those who would otherwise have lived in unnecessary hardship, and also boosted the economic well being of local businesses. The team provide a comprehensive welfare rights service, and the value of assisting with complex and detailed matters is illustrated by the fact that the team attended 115 benefits/ disability appeal tribunals last year with a 91% success rate. This is the only service of its type in Halton and demonstrably indicates that access to specialist advice and representation is invaluable if hardship is to be avoided.

Procurement & Finance Support**Invoice Scanning**

Invoice scanning and matching on the Agresso System has now been introduced across all directorates. This has reduced the time it takes to process an invoice for payment, to free up staff time.

Due North Electronic Contract Management System

Testing and implementation of this system has been completed. The system delivers fully auditable electronic Request for Quotes, Contract Advertising, OJEU Advertising, full Electronic Tendering and structured Contract Management. This is in advance of the Glover report recommendation that all councils will have such arrangements in place by 2012. Training has been undertaken for 60 officers.

Customer Services**HDL Statistics - Qtr 1**

QTR 1 Cases	2008	2009
Contact Centre	35052	50261
Widnes One Stop Shop	10805	12756
Ditton One Stop Shop	3706	4362
Halton Lea One Stop Shop	12559	12385
Runcorn One Stop Shop	5595	6411
	67717	86175

The table above shows the cases dealt with in the Contact Centre and the One Stop Shops. Overall there has been a 27% increase in volume in business conducted compared to the same period last year.

NI 14 Figures

This National Indicator was introduced to reduce avoidable customer contacts. However there is no national standard and the methodology used by individual LAs approach to record cases differ considerably. It is therefore difficult to set targets or indeed measure comparative performance. The results are being used to determine where improvements can be made and staff are currently working with Directorates to determine how to reduce the avoidable contacts in the various service areas. Statistics will be monitored and reported quarterly.

Cases	Avoidable Status			
	Avoidable	Unavoidable	Grand Total	%
Service Area				
Benefits	2918	12924	15842	18.42%
Childrens Duty	17	679	696	2.44%
Council Tax	2680	12617	15297	17.52%
EDT	130	1628	1758	7.39%
Education	104	591	695	14.96%
Environmental	383	2466	2849	13.44%
Health & Community	237	2103	2340	10.13%
HHT OOH	172	818	990	17.37%
HHT Unanswered	202	1552	1754	11.52%
Highways	270	1189	1460	18.49%
Landscapes	4	12	16	25.00%
Legal and Licensing	160	886	1046	15.30%
Planning	65	508	573	11.34%
Neighbourhood	2894	8068	10962	26.40%
Social Services	427	4359	4919	8.68%
Other	382	4141	4523	8.45%
Youth Service	1	3	4	25.00%
Total	11046	54544	65724	16.81%

3.0 EMERGING ISSUES

Revenues:

The Deferred Payment Scheme for Non-Domestic Rates came into force 31st July 2009. This may cause major problems nationally as it is a complicated scheme allowing ratepayers to defer payment of a % of their 2009/10 charge until 2010/11 and 2011/12. Software providers are aware of the changes however it is a very tight timescale to bring in the changes to the system.

Also this year the VOA have been preparing for the 2010 revaluation of all Non-Domestic properties. The draft list will be published at the end of September 2009 and the new rateable values will come into effect 1st April 2010. At this stage the Department for Communities and Local Government envisage that many businesses will pay less in rates next year because of the way rates are calculated, that is due to a reduction in the multiplier and transitional arrangements.

Benefits:

KLOE

Work towards meeting the requirements of KLOE continues to be developed and is being enhanced in light of newly published Audit Commission inspection reports. The key themes that are emerging from these reports are that the Audit Commission are looking for evidence of:

1. Clear and strong links between Benefits and Local Area Agreements
2. An in depth understanding of customers with a resulting customer focused Service
3. Value for Money activity
4. Action being taken in light of the economic climate

A project plan is being developed to ensure compliance.

Child Benefit Disregard

From October 2009, Child Benefit will be disregarded for the purposes of the HB CTB calculation. This will require a substantial amounts of work and resources to make necessary changes to the Benefits system, reassess all current HB CTB claims as well as try and reach those potential customers who, given the changes, may now qualify for HB CTB.

In and Out of Work Project

DWP are rolling out this project to all councils during 2009 and Halton is scheduled to go live with this new process on 28th September. Briefly the In and Out of Work Project involves Jobcentre plus acting as a single point of contact when people initially claim DWP benefits. In addition they will also collect relevant information to allow a claim to be made for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Jobcentre plus will pass this information electronically to the council thereby saving the customer and the council time.

Customer Services - 'Tell Us Once' Initiative

Tell Us Once is a cross-government programme hosted by the DWP, looking into the feasibility of people being able to inform Government just once, of changes in their circumstances such as a birth, death or change of address. It has been trialled in a number of local authorities and a decision whether to roll out the initiative nationally is expected in September.

Given that Halton already has a sophisticated Customer Service delivery system operating in the One Stop Shops and the Contact Centre, adopting the Tell us Once requirements should not be too difficult to achieve.

Procurement Savings.

The table below shows the Qtr 1 savings achieved following the introduction of corporate contracts across the Council.

Contract	2009 Qtr1 Contract Savings £
Agency Workers	59,224
Rail Tickets	10,791
Post	819
Office Furniture	2,477
PPE - Personal Protective Equipment New Contract commences January 09	1,268
Professional Uniform clothing	1,691
Civic Newspaper	2,923
MFD's	565
MFD's - Toner Savings	34,779
Total Qtr 1 Savings	114,538

A new initiative in terms of low value spend has resulted in a 45% saving by identifying proposed off-contract spend and advising purchasers to use existing or contract suppliers. Whilst amounts are small e.g. £5,715 savings against a potential spend of £12,500.

The Procurement team have been working with Liverpool City Council on re-tendering the Agency Framework and anticipates further savings and elimination of off-contract spend.

The Uniform Clothing Framework Agreement introduced in April 2009 enabled the Council to access a 50%+ discount from our main existing supplier. The Team is currently working with Major Projects, PR and the Print Unit and HR Occupational Health to identify better procurement solutions for those areas.

4.0 PROGRESS AGAINST KEY OBJECTIVES / MILESTONES



Total	14		14		0		0
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All key service objectives/milestones are presently on track and additional information is provided within Appendix 1

5.0 SERVICE REVIEW

There are presently no issues to be reported.

6.0 PROGRESS AGAINST KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Total	6		4		0		2
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Of those indicators that can be reported 4 are presently on track to achieve target. Both the processing of invoices and the processing of Housing Benefit changes in circumstances are both below target and additional details are provided within in Appendix 2.

7.0 RISK CONTROL MEASURES

During the production of the 2009-10 Service Plan, the service was required to undertake a risk assessment of all Key Service Objectives. No 'high' risk, treatment measures were deemed to be necessary

8.0 PROGRESS AGAINST HIGH PRIORITY EQUALITY ACTIONS

As a result of undertaking a departmental Equality Impact Assessment no high priority actions were identified for the service for the period 2009 – 2010





9.0 DATA QUALITY

The author provides assurance that the information contained within this report is accurate and valid and that every effort has been made to avoid the omission of data. Where data has been estimated, has been sourced directly from partner or other agencies, or where there are any concerns regarding the limitations of its use this has been clearly annotated.







10.0 APPENDICES

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

Progress against key objectives/milestones





Service Plan Ref.	Objective	Key Milestone(s)	Progress Quarter 1	Commentary
ECS 01	Ensure continuing service delivery remains effective through the implementation of new working arrangements in response to central government initiatives.	<p>Roll out the new hardware, that meets Co-Co requirements, to existing home workers by June 2009</p> <p>Roll out new version of Citrix to existing home workers to improve speed of access by July 2009</p> <p>Monitor and evaluate new working arrangements Sept 2009</p> <p>Continue with home working rollout programme by progressing outstanding requests from staff to work from home October 2009</p>	   	<p>New Code of Connection compliant hardware has now been successfully installed for existing home workers.</p> <p>New Citrix system rolled out slightly ahead of schedule.</p> <p>Testing of revised ICT above has commenced and will continue during August to ensure systems remain sufficiently robust</p> <p>Further roll out of programme when testing complete</p>

Progress against key objectives/milestones




Service Plan Ref.	Objective	Key Milestone(s)	Progress Quarter 1	Commentary
ECS 02	Ensure compliance with new national framework by recording and reporting nationally prescribed performance indicators in line with required timeframe and continue to develop and improve service delivery mechanisms in line with the modernisation agenda	Provide DWP with data Undertake regular performance monitoring (monthly)		Data is being sent but problems at the DWP have meant that national comparison data has not yet been made available.
		Carry out self assessment using Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry December 2009		Due for completion in December 2009 Report to be sent to Management Team
		HDL & Revenues and Benefits gain accreditation for Customer Service Excellence March 2010		On going - Corporate CSE group established
ECS 03	Continue to identify and exploit the potential for further efficiency gains by enhancing the authority's approach to procurement of goods and services	Continually monitor and analyse spend and identify areas of potential savings (ongoing)		This is an ongoing task. See main body of report for savings achieved
		Adopt and integrate the Framework for Collaborative Procurement March 2010		On target
		Develop and introduce a corporate Tendering and Contract Management Tool September 09		A system has been acquired and is due to go live in August

APPENDIX ONE – PROGRESS AGAINST KEY OBJECTIVES/ MILESTONES (Exchequer & Customer Services)




Progress against key objectives/milestones

Service Plan Ref.	Objective	Key Milestone(s)	Progress Quarter 1	Commentary
ECS 04	Continue to investigate and develop sustainable and appropriate e-solutions to further enhance the delivery of services to local residents	Undertake a review of service options and report findings March 2010		Ongoing
		Continue to investigate opportunities for service remapping March 2010		Ongoing
		Roll out invoice scanning October 2009		Invoice scanning has now gone live across the Council
ECS 05	Maintain the continuity of service delivery by ensuring that the Council's telephony services are fit for purpose and meet the needs of the Council and its stakeholders	Establish working group and investigate and report upon future options September 2009		Ongoing

Progress against Key Performance Indicators




Ref	Description	Actual 2008/9	Target 09/10	Quarter 1	Progress	Commentary
Corporate Health						
<u>ECSLI 01</u>	The percentage of undisputed invoices which were paid in 30 days	97.63	98.00	96.87		<u>Directorate Performance</u> C&P 96.68% C&YP 94.10% H&C 98.69% Env 98.02%
<u>ECSLI 02</u> (BVPI 9)	Proportion of Council Tax collected	96.77	96.00	29.19%		Slightly up on the corresponding quarter last year
<u>ECSLI 03</u> (BVPI 10)	The percentage of Business Rates which should have been received during the year that were received	99.95	97.75	32.08%		Slightly up on the corresponding quarter last year

Progress against Key Performance Indicators

Ref	Description	Actual 2008/9	Target 09/10	Quarter 1	Progress	Commentary
<u>NI 14</u>	Average number of customer contacts per received customer request.	12.4%	20%	16.81%		<p>The requirement to report this indicator only commenced on the 1st October 2008. Initial measurements showed avoidable contact across 98,641 contacts as 12,235 (12.4%) .</p> <p>Measuring has since become more refined and Qtr 1 figures are shown in the main body of the report as 16.81%</p>
<u>NI 180</u>	Changes in HB/CTB entitlements during the year.	750.9	2675	N/A	N/A	<p>The DWPs “rules” on these indicators were not very clear and some authorities included data that others did not. We were in the latter category and so our returns were understated. The revised targets reflect this.</p> <p>The DWP supply this figure based on the scans HBC send them. This is not yet available from them</p>
<u>NI 181</u>	Time taken to process HB / CTB claims and change events (days)	8.86	15	N/A	N/A	
Service Delivery						
<u>ECSLI 05</u> (BVPI 78a)	Average time for processing new claims (Housing & Council Tax Benefit)	16.16	20 Days	15.38		Performance is on target
<u>ECSLI 06</u> (BVPI 78b)	Average time for processing notifications of changes in circumstances	5.63	5.5 Days	7.07		Performance is slightly below target. There are a number of vacant posts in the section which are impacting on processing times.

Explanation of Traffic Light Symbols

The traffic light symbols are used in the following manner:

	<u>Objective</u>	<u>Performance Indicator</u>
<u>Green</u>	 <p>Indicates that the <u>milestone/objective is on course to be achieved</u> within the appropriate timeframe.</p>	Indicates that the <u>target is on course to be achieved</u> .
<u>Amber</u>	 <p>Indicates that it is <u>unclear</u> at this stage, <u>whether the milestone/objective will be achieved</u> within the appropriate timeframe.</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.
<u>Red</u>	 <p>Indicates that it is <u>highly likely or certain that the milestone/objective will not be achieved</u> within the appropriate timeframe.</p>	Indicates that the <u>target will not be achieved</u> unless there is an intervention or remedial action taken.

EXCHEQUER AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

Revenue Budget as at 30th June 2009

	Annual Revised Budget £'000	Budget To Date £'000	Actual To Date £'000	Variance To Date (overspend) £'000	Actual Including Committed Items £'000
<u>Expenditure</u>					
Employees	6,550	2,020	1,782	238	1,785
Premises	1,409	931	926	5	926
Supplies & Services	902	308	264	44	264
Telephone System Costs	215	54	54	0	54
Insurances	529	264	276	(12)	276
Transport	382	314	297	17	297
Charitable Relief	103	0	0	0	0
Concessionary Travel	1,968	329	335	(6)	335
Asset Charges	96	0	0	0	0
Council Tax Benefits	10,630	10,630	10,630	0	10,630
Support Services	6,490	806	806	0	806
Rent Allowances	40,643	10,157	10,220	(63)	10,220
Non HRA Rebates	176	0	0	0	0
Total Expenditure	70,093	25,813	25,590	223	25,593
<u>Income</u>					
	-13	-4	-2	(2)	-2
<u>Sales</u>					
Halton Housing Trust	-19	0	0	0	0
Fees & Charges	-56	-2	-10	8	-10
Support Service Recharges	-8,607	-1,336	-1,336	0	-1,336
SLA to Schools	-48	-12	-18	6	-18
Telephone Recharges	-338	-84	-84	0	-84
Insurance Recharges	-2,183	-655	-660	5	-660
NNDR Administration Grant	-168	0	0	0	0
Hsg Ben Administration Grant	-1,486	-371	-368	(3)	-368
Concessionary Travel Grant	-300	-88	-88	0	-88
Rent Allowances	-40,820	-10,832	-10,832	0	-10,832
Council Tax Benefits Grant	-10,445	-2,393	-2,450	57	-2,450
Other Grants	-53	-13	-39	26	-39
Liability Orders	-484	-121	-110	(11)	-110
Non HRA Rent Rebates	-176	-44	-36	(8)	-36
Total Income	-65,196	-15,955	-16,033	78	-16,033
Net Expenditure	4,897	9,858	9,557	301	9,560

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 the Contact Centre. There has also been a large saving on Employee Insurance costs of £140k.