



19 January 2010

To: Councillors Ian Fowler and Tony Williams, Blackpool Council and
Roger Small and Albert Pounder, Fylde Borough Council

The above members are requested to attend the:

BLACKPOOL AND FYLDE JOINT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 28th January 2010 at 5pm
In Committee Room B, Town Hall, Blackpool

A G E N D A

1. APOLOGIES

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to declare any interests in the items under consideration and in doing so state:

- (a) whether the interest is personal or prejudicial; **and**
- (b) the nature of the interest concerned.

If any Member requires advice on declarations of interests, they are advised to contact the Head of Legal and Democratic Services in advance of the meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1ST OCTOBER 2009

To agree the minutes of the last meeting held on 1st October 2009 as a true and correct record. **(Pages 1-3)**

4. BENEFITS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS

Marie McRoberts to report.

(Pages 5-7)

5. REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT

Marie McRoberts to report.

(Pages 9-13)

6. REPLACEMENT OF IT SYSTEMS FOR REVENUES AND BENEFITS

Julian Kearsley/Marie McRoberts to report.

(Pages 15-19)

7. DELEGATED POWERS PREVIOUSLY HELD BY THE HEAD OF FINANCE

Adrian Robinson to report.

(Pages 21- 23)

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: To be determined

Venue information:

First floor meeting room (lift available), accessible toilets (ground floor), loop system, no-smoking building.

Other information:

For queries regarding this agenda please contact Pauline Higson, Democratic Services Senior Adviser, Tel: (01253) 477157, e-mail:

pauline.higson@blackpool.gov.uk

Blackpool and Fylde Joint Committee

Date	1 October 2009
Venue	Town Hall, St Annes
Committee members	Roger Small (Fylde) (Chairman) Ian Fowler (Blackpool) (Vice-Chairman) Albert Pounder (Fylde), Tony Williams (Blackpool).
Officers	Blackpool: Julian Kearsley, Marie McRoberts, Ann Bodis Fylde: Tracy Scholes, Allan Oldfield, Ian Curtis, Adrian Roberts

1. Appointment of chairman

Councillor Roger Small was elected as chairman of the committee.

2. Appointment of vice-chairman

Councillor Ian Fowler was elected as vice-chairman of the committee.

3. Declarations of interest

Members were reminded that any personal/prejudicial interests should be declared as required by the Council's Code of Conduct adopted in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000.

4. Overview of shared arrangements between Blackpool Council and Fylde Borough Council

Tracy Scholes (Director of Governance and Partnerships, Fylde BC) and Marie McRoberts (Head of the Shared Service) presented a report setting out the background to the joint revenues and benefits service and other services shared by Blackpool and Fylde. The report also contained detailed performance information for the joint service.

According to the report, Fylde revenues staff had co located at Westgate House October 2007 and transferred to Blackpool in April 2008. The restructure was completed August 2008 and would realise savings approximately £168,500 over 5yrs (after redundancy costs & pension strain).

Fylde benefits staff co located to Blackpool in August 2008 and transferred to Blackpool in October 2008. Although the service had been reorganised in April

2009, full and formal restructure was to be deferred until after new IT systems had been implemented.

The shared approach had resulted in a number of service improvements, including the following:

- Processes have been aligned between the two councils whilst still allowing for variances in policies. Best of both approach was used.
- Customer Services staff at Fylde can now input some council tax changes directly into Pericles whilst with the customer in the same way that Blackpool Customer First staff can.
- Post Office payment fees have been re-negotiated to bring Fylde charges into line with Blackpool. This should result in an annual saving of approximately £2,000 to Fylde.
- A benefits specialist is now based at Fylde Direct.
- Payments of benefit by BACS has been introduced for Fylde customers. This has resulted in a considerable reduction in administration for Fylde post staff.

The committee RESOLVED to note the range and scope of the joint arrangement between both councils to administer the revenues and benefits service.

5. Delegated powers previously held by Executive Manager (Finance)

Adrian Robinson (client officer, Fylde BC) presented a report which sought the delegation of a number of administrative functions presently exercised by the Chief Finance Officer of Fylde Borough Council to the Head of the Shared Service.

The committee RESOLVED to delegate the following Fylde Borough Council functions to the Head of Shared Service:

1. The determination and administration of applications in relation to council tax, covering discounts and exemptions (including discretionary decisions), together with disabled persons allowance and housing and council tax benefit
2. The agreement of rating assessments of property not owned or occupied by the council
3. The recovery of council tax and business rates
4. Refunds of overpayments
5. The write-off of debts up to £5,000 (council tax) and £10,000 (business rates) including cumulative debts for individual debtors
6. The determination of applications for discretionary housing payments in line with agreed budget limits

7. The determination of applications for mandatory rate relief in relation to business rates

8. Replacement of IT system for revenues and benefits

Julian Kearsley (Executive Director of Business Services, Blackpool Council) reported on the work presently being done to procure an IT system for revenues and benefits administration to replace the present Pericles system, which was being desupported by its providers.

Blackpool and Fylde were seeking to procure a replacement system using the accelerated restricted procedure under the relevant EU regulations. The licence to use the new system would be for seven years. The procurement was being run jointly with Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council. The joint procurement exercise would ensure that all the councils involved received the best value for money from the project. So far as Blackpool and Fylde were concerned, the system would be jointly licensed, but Fylde would be given the right to continue to use the system beyond the lifetime of the current joint arrangement if it was terminated before the end of the licence period.

Tender invitations would go out to the three suppliers who had responded to the prior information notice within the next week. Mr Kearsley expected that the contract would be awarded by 11 December. Implementation could be expected to be begun in May, with Fylde being first.

Mr Kearsley explained that some downtime and consequent disruption to the joint service would be inevitable as a result of the implementation of the new system. Careful project planning and management would keep this to a minimum.

After detailed discussion of the implications and practicalities of the tendering exercise and implementation of the new system, member RESOLVED to note the progress being made on the replacement of the IT system and to seek an update report at the next meeting of the Joint Committee, which it was agreed would be held in January, at Blackpool Council.

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BUSINESS SERVICES (BLACKPOOL COUNCIL)	JOINT COMMITTEE – REVENUES & BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE	28 JAN 2010	4

BENEFITS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS

Public/Exempt item

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

Summary

The report outlines the results of a Customer Satisfaction Survey in relation to residents in receipt of Housing and Council Tax Benefits.

Recommendation/s

1. To note that satisfaction levels have improved across all areas and are significantly better in relation to speed of service and overall satisfaction with the service.

Report

2. Beacon Research was commissioned by a consortium of Lancashire and Greater Manchester local authorities to undertake a survey of Housing and Council Tax Benefit claimants during September / October 2009.
3. The broad objective of the survey is to establish bench mark levels of satisfaction, amongst Benefit Claimants, with the services they receive from the Council and to compare these, where appropriate, with similar surveys undertaken in 2003 and 2006.
4. Whilst no longer a statutory requirement, the contents and style of the survey follow many of the guidelines previously published by the DCLG when developing the BVPI Surveys.

5. A self-completion postal survey of Benefit Claimants was undertaken. This was based upon a sample of 1500 respondents for Fylde and 3000 for Blackpool. The overall response rate was 49.3% and 44.5% respectively, which was similar to 2006.
6. The profile of claimants who actually responded to the survey differs across the two areas:
In Fylde 56.4% were aged 55 or more, and 10.9% were aged 34 or less whereas in Blackpool 39.3% were aged 55 or more, and 21.3% were aged 34 or less. This reflects the claim profiles across the two Councils and supports the belief that older claimants were most likely to respond to the survey.
7. The results below show that compared to 2006, satisfaction levels are directionally higher across all seven key indicators, and significantly higher in some cases.

BLACKPOOL	2006	2009
Satisfied with Ways of Contact	80%	84%
Satisfied with Experience of Visiting the office	79%	83%
Satisfied with Telephone Service	64%	76%
Satisfied with Staff Service	80%	84%
Satisfied with Claim Form	66%	73%
Satisfied with Time took to do Claim	72%	81%
Overall Satisfaction with Service	77%	85%

FYLDE	2006	2009
Satisfied with Ways of Contact	84%	87%
Satisfied with Experience of Visiting the office	85%	90%
Satisfied with Telephone Service	76%	82%
Satisfied with Staff Service	86%	91%
Satisfied with Claim Form	70%	76%
Satisfied with Time took to do Claim	74%	82%
Overall Satisfaction with Service	85%	89%

8. Within the detailed findings of the survey it is clear that there continues to be room for improvement in the clarity of forms and letters. This is traditionally, the least satisfactory element of the claims process, although the levels of satisfaction are significantly higher than 2006. Claimants using the Councils forms were more likely to agree that they were satisfied than claimants using Job Centre Plus or Pension Service

forms. A key facility of the replacement benefits software system will be the ability to tailor letters to individual customers and this will drive further improvements in this area of delivery.

9. Claimants at both Councils said they would find making a claim at a home useful and many felt making their claim over the phone would be useful. Again the introduction of the replacement system will facilitate progress in this area.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	None
Legal	None
Community Safety	None
Human Rights and Equalities	None
Sustainability	None
Health & Safety and Risk Management	None

REPORT AUTHOR	TEL	DATE	DOC ID
Marie McRoberts Assistant Director Revenues and Benefits	(01253) 478910	January 2010	

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS		
NAME OF DOCUMENT	DATE	WHERE AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BUSINESS SERVICES (BLACKPOOL COUNCIL)	JOINT COMMITTEE – REVENUES & BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE	28 JAN 2010	5

REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT

Public/Exempt item

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

Summary

This report outlines the performance position as at 31st December 2009 in respect of collection of Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates and speed of processing claims and changes for Housing and Council Tax Benefit

Recommendation/s

That the performance position be noted and any recommendations made as considered appropriate.

Report

1. Council Tax Collection rates stand at 82.71% for Blackpool and 86.52% for Fylde. Both figures are lower than the same period in 2008/09 by 0.42% and 0.20% respectively. Given the ongoing problems within the economy this position is in line with expectations and reflects the easement of payment options to assist customers struggling to maintain the normal 10 monthly arrangements.
2. Collection of arrears for previous is also below 2008/09 levels. Recession support to customers - affordable arrangements to clear arrears whilst extending in year payments over 12 months where appropriate - has contributed to this position.
3. For Blackpool the percentage of direct debit customers continues to increase. We attribute this success in part to the introduction of the paperless direct debit process, which simplifies this payment option for customers.

4. The position for collection of Non Domestic Rates has improved over the same period last year and shows an increase of 0.22% for Blackpool and 2.16% for Fylde. The number of customers paying by direct debit has also increased in both authorities.
5. The provision of tailored payment schemes for local businesses has provided assistance to businesses during the recession. The implementation of the new Business Rates Deferral Scheme has resulted in over £280,000 (Blackpool) and £76,000 (Fylde) being deferred.
6. The average number of days to process new claims for benefits stands at 23 days (Blackpool) and 22 Days (Fylde), both are within target.
7. Processing times for changes of circumstances have deteriorated slightly for Blackpool (14 days) but remain on target for Fylde (6 days). A significant rise in Blackpool workload in this area can be attributed to changes coinciding with the end of seasonal employment; increased numbers of changes of address and changes in the way child benefit is treated. The increased workload coupled with Christmas leave and the recent IT virus have exacerbated the situation, however it is expected that performance will be in line with target performance during quarter 4.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	None
Legal	None
Community Safety	None
Human Rights and Equalities	None
Sustainability	None
Health & Safety and Risk Management	None

REPORT AUTHOR	TEL	DATE	DOC ID
Marie McRoberts Assistant Director Revenues and Benefits	(01253) 478910	January 2010	

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS		
NAME OF DOCUMENT	DATE	WHERE AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION

Attached documents

Coastal Revenues and Benefits Service Performance Information – Revenues

Coastal Revenues and Benefits Service Performance Information – Benefits

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BUSINESS SERVICES (BLACKPOOL COUNCIL)	JOINT COMMITTEE – REVENUES & BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE	28 JAN 2010	6

REPLACEMENT OF IT SYSTEM FOR REVENUES AND BENEFITS

Public/Exempt item

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

Summary

To consider the latest position with regard to the selection and procurement of a replacement platform for administration of Council Tax and NNDR collection and benefits payment and recovery for the future.

Recommendation/s

That the progress be noted and any recommendations made as considered appropriate.

Report

1. Following the acquisition of Anite by Northgate in October 2008, the Council, along with over 20 other Pericles users, were advised that the system would be 'de-supported' with effect from December 2010.
2. The Council issued invitations to tender via the EU accelerated restricted procedure to 3 suppliers with a closing date for submission of 09 November 2009. Submissions were received from all 3 suppliers. The suppliers were asked to submit on the basis of a single provision for Blackpool and Fylde under a single contract held by Blackpool on behalf of the two Councils.
3. The evaluation of the submissions has been undertaken using the following scoring process

Quality Score	65%
Cost Score	35%

4. The Quality Score has been established using separate components comprising:-

- System Functionality – based upon supplier answers to each functionality question (1305 in all)
- Conversion Methodology - based upon responses regarding project assurance, training provision, data quality assurance, estimated conversion downtimes, ongoing support.
- Demonstrations including specific scenario tests
- References taken from and visits to existing user sites - the supplier response was tested and negative scoring applied for any discrepancies with the submission responses.
- Added Value / Efficiency Savings Opportunities – based upon supplier meeting a number of aspirations regarding enhanced shared service opportunities, customer focussed functional enhancements and reduced costs for shared working.

5. At the time of submitting this report Alcotel letters have been issued to notify the 3 suppliers of the outcome. Procurement rules require a 10 day “standstill period” to allow the unsuccessful suppliers to challenge the decision if necessary. Given the robust nature of the selection process it is not anticipated that any challenge will be forthcoming. A verbal update confirming the selected supplier will be given at the meeting.

6. The next stage will involve final contract negotiations and agreement with the preferred supplier and to determine the timetable for conversion for both Blackpool and Fylde. The key factor in determining the timetable will be the availability of supplier resources to ensure a quality conversion for Blackpool and Fylde in a year when several other authorities are migrating to the chosen system. The project is scheduled for completion by November 2010.

7. It is still anticipated that the implementation at each partner authority will be scheduled to facilitate shared working on backlog busting and other conversion tasks.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	The costs associated with the replacement of Pericles fall into two categories: one off capital costs for purchase and implementation of the replacement system, and ongoing system maintenance and support costs. Provision has been made in the medium term financial strategies for Fylde and Blackpool .
Legal	The new software will be subject to a joint agreement running for a seven year period.

Community Safety	None
Human Rights and Equalities	None
Sustainability	None
Health & Safety and Risk Management	A full project risk analysis and register has been produced in respect of the project. Risks will be monitored and managed within the Blackpool Method Project Management regime (Prince 2 based)

REPORT AUTHOR	TEL	DATE	DOC ID
Julian Kearsley Executive Director Business Services	(01253) 477005	January 2010	

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS		
NAME OF DOCUMENT	DATE	WHERE AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION

Attached documents

Appendix A System Evaluation Matrix

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	Northgate	Capita	Civica			
CTAX and Benefits	2976	3316	3174			
NDR and BIDS	3066	2900	3070			
	<u>6042</u>	<u>6216</u>	<u>6244</u>	25%	Maximum Score:	8538
Percentage	17.69	18.2	18.28			
Section 9 Added Value	<u>25</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>15</u>	15%		
Percentage	13.39	15	8.03			
Section 10 Conversion Methodology	<u>109</u>	<u>185</u>	<u>136</u>	35%	Maximum Score:	252
Percentage	15.13	25.69	18.88			
Official Demos	<u>5893</u>	<u>9846</u>	<u>9085</u>	25%	Maximum Score:	1284
Percentage	11.47	19.17	17.68		0	
Total Percentage	57.68	78.06	62.87			
Quality Summary (65%)	37.49	50.73	40.86			
Price (35%)	17.25	34.35	35.00			
	<u>54.74%</u>	<u>85.08%</u>	<u>75.86%</u>			

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS (FYLDE BOROUGH COUNCIL)	JOINT COMMITTEE – REVENUES & BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE	28 JAN 2010	7

DELEGATED POWERS PREVIOUSLY HELD BY THE HEAD OF FINANCE

Public/Exempt item

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

Summary

The report seeks Committee approval for the delegation to to the Head of the Shared Service to authorise write offs up to a prescribed limit in relation to benefit overpayments.

Recommendation/s

1. Delegate the decision making power in relation to the additional function listed in Appendix A to the Head of the Shared Service (or designated representative)

Report

1. The two Councils have committed to a Revenues and Benefits shared service that achieves efficiency savings and represents value for money, whilst providing customer service in line with best practice.
2. Fylde Borough Council's Constitution contains powers delegated to the Head of Finance, who has a range of important responsibilities under the Council's financial regulations.
3. The Director of Governance and Partnerships in consultation with the Operational Finance Manager considers that efficient and effective administration at the Council, in relation to Revenues and Benefits, would be assisted and improved by delegating certain powers to the Head of the Shared Service (or designated representative).

Continued....

4. These administrative functions were considered at a previous meeting held on 1st October 2009 and the decision making power for tasks detailed in Appendix A was delegated by the Joint Committee to the Head of the Shared Service. Unfortunately the report omitted to include reference to the write off of benefit overpayment where appropriate.
5. For write offs, a regular and effective review of outstanding debts by the shared service team enables both Council's to achieve prompt collection of all debts in line with audit recommendations.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	The delegation of the power to write off benefit overpayments up to a prescribed level would ease the administrative function in carrying out duties relating to benefits and allow these minor decisions to fall within the discretion of the Head of the Shared Service, thus removing any technical uncertainty as to responsibilities.
Legal	The original delegated powers of the Head of Finance are included in the Council's Constitution. (Part C of Appendix 2)
Community Safety	None
Human Rights and Equalities	None
Sustainability	None
Health & Safety and Risk Management	None

REPORT AUTHOR	TEL	DATE	DOC ID
Tracy Scholes Director of Governance and Partnerships	(01253) 658500	January 2010	

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS		
NAME OF DOCUMENT	DATE	WHERE AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION
Revenues & Benefits – Delegations to Specified Officers		Town Hall, St Annes

Attached documents

Appendix A showing proposed delegated powers

Appendix A

Delegated power sought to authorise to the Head of the Shared Service (or representative) to determine:

The write-off of debts up to £5,000 (Housing Benefits), including cumulative debts for individual debtors.

Debts over these limits and up to £25,000 will be authorised for write off by the Section 151 Officer (or deputy) for the relevant authority, but will be reported to Cabinet for information purposes.

Debts in excess of £25,000 will be authorised for write off by Cabinet.

Previous delegation granted, authorising the Head of the Shared Service (or representative) to determine: (Joint Committee – 1 October 2009)

1. The determination and administration of applications in relation to Council Tax, covering discounts and exemptions (including discretionary decisions), together with disabled persons allowance and Housing and Council Tax Benefit.
2. The agreement of rating assessments of property, not owned or occupied by the Council.
3. The recovery of Council Tax and Business Rates
4. Refunds of overpayments
5. The write-off of debts up to £5,000 (Council Tax) and £10,000 (Business Rates) including cumulative debts for individual debtors.

Debts over these limits and up to £25,000 will be authorised for write off by the Section 151 Officer (or deputy) for the relevant authority, but will be reported to Cabinet for information purposes.

Debts in excess of £25,000 will be authorised for write off by Cabinet.

6. The determination of applications for Discretionary Housing payments in line with agreed budget limits.
7. The determination of applications for Mandatory Rate Relief in relation to Business Rates.

Specific to Fylde BC, the approval of rate relief (Business Rates) on the grounds of hardship, S44A applications for partial relief and Discretionary Rate Relief will be determined by the Section 151 Officer, or in absence, the Deputy Section 151 Officer (Fylde).

In addition, applications for discretionary relief (Council Tax) will be determined in the same way.