



Benefits

Team Plan 2015/16

Team Manager: **Christina Delaney**

Service Plan: Resources

Date signed off: 01/06/2015

Signed off by: **Nigel Smith, Revenues and Benefits Manager**

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Team Overview - Benefits

The Benefits Team undertakes a number of key roles for the Council. The key objectives and responsibilities of the team are:

- To administer Housing Benefit (HB) and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) in respect of eligible claimants in accordance with statute and regulations.
- To administer a Free School Meals module avoiding unnecessary duplication and increasing take up by improved information for schools and the catering service.
- Implementation of Welfare Reforms – Officer Working Group, Member Task and Finish Group, Stakeholders Group which have affected the service dramatically
- To continue the implementation of the Welfare reforms and provide information and support to residents adversely affected by the Welfare Reform Act 2012 by raising awareness of staff and partners to the impact of the changes
- Engage with the Welsh Government (WG) and the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP), Council Housing/Homelessness to prepare for the Universal Credit system and transition in service delivery.
- Engage with Customers to prepare for the Universal Credit system and transition in service delivery

The Team's broad functions are:

- To administer both efficiently and timely the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Housing Benefit for the Council.
- To meet and respect the needs of customers, colleagues and future generations.
- To implement good staff management practices and ensure there are sufficiently trained staff to provide services to meet customer needs
- To exercise robust financial management and explore all opportunities to improve efficiency and service quality including collaborative working.
- To promote and further develop Electronic service delivery / self-service where justified by a business case
- To manage the Council's assets and resources effectively and securely to deliver the service
- To work towards a smooth transition in service migration using clear timetables and responsibilities with minimum disruption for customers to comply with the Council's statutory requirements.
- Engage with relevant bodies in preparation for changes to alleviate any impact on service continuity and workforce

Our Contribution to Service Plan priorities 2014/15

Our contribution to the Service Plan priorities last year:

- Processing times and accuracy of claims can both impact on the perception/experience of our customers. In terms of average processing times for Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) both for new claims and change events, this was 7 days in 2013/14 and has reduced to 6 days during 2014/15. This contributes to the Corporate and Service plans of the Council by administering the Council Tax Reduction Scheme & Housing Benefit

Our Team Plan 2015/16

Service Outcome 2:		The Vale community benefits from the Council's sound and transparent decision-making through effective management of resources.						
Service Objective 3:		To optimise our resources, exercise robust financial management and provide effective relevant services and facilities.						
Ref.	During 2015-16 we plan to:	Success Criteria/ Outcomes we'll achieve from this action are:	High, Medium or Low priority	Officer responsible for achieving this action	Start date	Finish date	How will the work be resourced?	Progress
1	Undertake annual PDRS and review after six months	Identify key tasks and training needs	High	Christina Delaney	01/10/2015	01/12/2015	Complete Team PDRS	
2	Maintain/monitor levels of sickness absence Ensure staff awareness of sickness absence procedure Promote counselling service & occupational nurse	Implement sickness absence procedure in line with the Council's Management of Attendance Policy Promote through staff inductions and team meetings	High	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	RTW interviews	
3	Raise staff awareness and work within the Vales Equality Scheme of relevant quality issues both internally and for customers	Staff respond proactively to equalities issues both internally and externally	Low	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Team Meetings	
4	Continue to support home working	Increased efficiency and staff satisfaction with flexible working arrangements. Improves staff morale with flexibility which increases efficiency and staff satisfaction.	Low	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Maintain Home working option	

		Reduces sickness levels. Increases staff retention. No transport needed reducing carbon emissions						
5	Ensure staffing levels are adequate to deal with workload & extra staff available to cover exigencies generated Target resources and prioritise work loads	Complete work generated. Improve staff moral and meet customer needs	Medium	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Monitor staffing levels	
6	Ensure staff are trained in line with legislation to give correct advice consistently	Accounts are processed consistently and correctly. Ensures staff are polite, helpful and that correct advice is given to the customer	Medium	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Monitor staff training needs when new legislation is introduced	
7	Hold Team meetings/briefings to communicate with staff on issues that cause concern.	Praise staff for good performance and attendance. Improves staff morale	Medium	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Hold monthly meetings	
8	Update Internet, leaflets, posters in line with legislative changes from Welsh Government or Parliament	Ensure documents are double sided to reduce paper use and waste. Provide accurate information	Medium	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Monitor Documents & Web pages	
9	Introduce Academy Modules that improve Software efficiency	Increase efficiency when processing data and dealing with customer enquiries	Medium	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Upgrade system with software releases	
10	Promote Self Service & E-Billing for Council Tax, Business Rates & Benefits customers	Customers are able to view bills and accounts online	Medium	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Raise customer awareness	
11	Control Quality assurance tests in the	Measure the errors made using the system	Medium	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	DIP QC system control	

	document management and workflow system							
12	Continue to use DIP & Workflow to scan documents	Reduction in paper use and paper waste	Medium	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Upgrade system with software releases	
13 (RS/ A056)	Engage with Welsh Government and Department for Work and Pensions to prepare for Universal Credit as the replacement scheme of Housing Benefit. Report to Cabinet members, housing association, landlord forum, support workers, advice workers etc.	Smooth transition in service with minimum disruption for customers Vale residents are signposted to appropriate help and support. The Vale complies with its statutory requirements to maintain continuity. Financial impact of welfare reform is effectively managed.	High	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Government Welfare Reform and UC agenda	
14 (RS/ A056)	Support the development of a plan to manage the staff transitional implications	Effective management of workforce implications.	High	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Government Welfare Reform and UC agenda	
15 (RS/ A056)	Engage with Housing, Homelessness, WG and DWP to prepare for UC benefit changes.	Smooth transition in service with minimum disruption to customers	High	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Engage with Council and Government departments	
16 (RS/ A056)	Promote Benefits to raise public awareness using available communication channels	Raise awareness of Benefits & increase take-up and help people remain in accommodation	Medium	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Engage with customers	
17 (RS/ A056)	Arrange Internal Council workshops and external meetings to raise Benefit awareness for Housing Associations, Landlord	To gain an insight and understanding of work priorities reducing queries. Enables advice workers to	Medium	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Engage with agencies & providers	

	forums, Support Providers, Advisory Groups, when necessary, to raise awareness of Benefit issues	provide accurate advice						
18 (RS/ A056)	Work with CAB to raise awareness and promotion of the Benefit Scheme	Raising awareness and take-up of Benefit	Medium	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Engage with CAB	
19 (RS/ A056)	Review Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) policies and procedures.	Control DHP budget	High	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Allocate DHP on merit	
20 (RS/ A056)	Raise awareness of the DHP scheme amongst our customers and stakeholders.	Reduce rent arrears and debt for customers and help prevent homelessness	Medium	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Engage with customers	
21 (RS/ A056)	Deal with all appeals in relation to HB and CTRS.	Cases considered and response sent	High	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	To meet Tribunal deadlines	
22 (RS/ A056)	Complete HB Subsidy return for DWP. DA to finalise subsidy claim and Vale to implement any action.	Ensure accuracy of data DA recommendations and action plans agreed and implemented	High	Christina Delaney	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Ensure accurate expenditure to DWP	