

## REVENUE DIVISION SERVICE PLAN

### ANNUAL REPORT (2005/06)

#### SERVICE DESCRIPTION

The Division is responsible for the collection and recovery of Council Tax and the National Non-Domestic Rate, the administration of the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Scheme along with the provision of remittance processing facilities and the administration of the Concessionary Fares (Goldcard) Scheme.

#### THE YEAR IN CONTEXT

2005/06 has been another year in which the Revenue Division has met the majority of the performance standards it set itself. Performance for the year against BVPIs has been monitored on a quarterly basis by the Finance and Management Committee and a detailed report is attached at **Annexe 'A'**

Work has continued, albeit at a very slow pace, on the introduction of the replacement Revenues and Benefits computer system. However, the future of this project is now in question and alternative arrangements may have to be made.

The Housing and Council Tax Benefit function has continued without a significant backlog although processing times have increased due to the introduction of the Verification Framework scheme. We continue to offer a high level of service to our claimants with complete applications being dealt within short timescales.

The authority has been a key player in the introduction of the on-line Benefit calculator and the launch was arranged in partnership with BBC Radio Derby and Joint working with the Pension Service on benefit take-up, etc. has been introduced.

The provisions of the Benefit Verification Framework were introduced and are now part of the standard procedures.

The use of debit/credit card payments throughout the authority has continued to increase and facilities are available on the web-site along with a "touchtone" telephone payment service. All other e-government requirements were met in accordance with the agreed timetable. Further initiatives included the introduction of a text reminder service for Council Tax payments has been introduced.

The year has, in the main, proved to be a successful one and the service has been prepared for the challenges to come.

#### KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- The increase in the collection rates for Council Tax (from 97.97% to 98.82%) and Non-Domestic Rates (from 98.13% to 99.46%).
- The fraud investigation function was enhanced as a result of the CPA inspection and the HB/CTB Performance Standards. The Unit is pursuing cases in accordance with the Business Plan and there is increased performance in the area of sanctions and prosecutions.

- The Benefit Service was assessed against the Performance Standards which resulted in a Level 4 (excellent) rating being achieved – an action plan is in place to maintain and improve this score.
- The introduction the provisions of the Verification Framework was achieved, on time, with effect from 1 April 2005.
- The e-government agenda saw the introduction of e-billing, e-balances (for Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates) and e-benefits.

#### **TASKS AT RISK OF NON DELIVERY DURING THE YEAR**

| <b>ACTION</b>  | <b>EXPLANATION</b>  |
|--|---|
| Implement the new Revenues and Benefit Software  | The transfer of data to the new system has been more difficult than anticipated and has lead to continuing delays in the implementation of this major project |
| Plan developments to follow the introduction of the new software (e.g. Further joint working arrangements) | Follows on from above   |

#### **LOOKING FORWARD TO 2006/07**

The main challenge for 2006/07 is responding to the "Efficiency Challenge" paper issued by the Audit Commission. This formed the subject of a report submitted to the Finance and Management Committee on 4 May 2006 and work will be taking place to investigate the issues raised in the report. A number of wide reaching proposals are expected to flow from this work and will be presented to Members at future meetings.

The work on the replacement of the existing software for Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates and Benefits will again be a major project during the year although there may be a fresh approach following the failure of the current project and investigations being carried out under the "Efficiency Challenge" project.

It will be important to maintain, and improve, the performance of the Division during the year and take full advantage of the introduction of revenue functions into the Customer First project. This will ensure that we continue to offer a high quality service to our customers.

The Division is the sponsoring body for the national roll-out of a product to trace absconded benefit overpayment cases. In excess of £1m has been awarded by the Department of Work and Pensions and, as lead authority, it is hoped that the roll-out to over 400 authorities can be achieved by January 2007.

The Revenue Service is always open to identifying and considering new ways to deliver the service and to embrace new technology. Examples of developments under consideration are:

- The introduction of "paperless" Direct Debits
- The introduction of a benefit fraud Text service
- Joint working arrangements with a neighbouring authority for the inspection of void properties in the district
- Revised recovery procedures for the collection of Council Tax, National Non-Domestic Rates and Benefit Overpayments.