

Agenda

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Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Date: **Monday 4 November 2013**

Time: **5.00 pm**

Place: **St Aldate's Room, Town Hall**

For any further information please contact:

Pat Jones, Principal Scrutiny Officer

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Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Membership

Chair **Councillor Val Smith**

Vice Chair

Councillor Gill Sanders

Councillor Stuart McCready

Councillor Sam Hollick

Linda Hill

Co-optee

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AGENDA

Pages

1 WORK PROGRAMME AND REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

1 - 4

Officer: Pat Jones Principal Scrutiny Officer will support the Panel with this debate.

Telephone: 01865 252191

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This presents for discussion by the Panel the forward work programme and the result of recommendations made.

2 PERFORMANCE MONITORING - HOUSING MEASURES, QUARTER 2.

5 - 6

Officer: Pat Jones Principal Scrutiny Officer will support the Panel with this debate.

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This item reports outcomes at Qtr. 2 for the set of performance indicators chosen by the Panel. They are grouped according to the themes chosen by the Panel:

- Welfare reform and the housing crisis.
- Housing supply.
- Estate regeneration.

At the meeting in September the Panel asked for further information on indicators CS002 and CS005 (processing times for new and changed awards of benefit). This information is included elsewhere on the agenda.

3 FOLLOW UP ON BENEFITS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

7 - 14

Officer: Helen Bishop Head of Customer Services will support the Panel with this debate.

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The Panel raised concern about performance at Qtr.1 for indicators:

- CS002 – time taken to process changes in circumstances for

benefit claimants.

- CS005 – time taken to process new benefit claims.

The following information was requested for these indicators:

- The detailed reasons why these indicators are off target.
- What are we doing to get them back on target and how will we sustain this.
- What is our bench marked performance for both indicators based on this result and what would it be if we performed to target.

4 NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

15 - 18

Notes of the meeting on the 3rd. September 2013.

DECLARING INTERESTS

General duty

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed "Declarations of Interest" or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your* employment; sponsorship (ie payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Declaring an interest

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest.

If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member "must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself" and that "you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned". What this means is that the matter of interests must be viewed within the context of the Code as a whole and regard should continue to be paid to the perception of the public.

*Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

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Agenda Item 1

Housing Scrutiny Panel Work Programme 2013 - 2014

Dates	Agenda Items
3 rd . September 5.00pm.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Housing Strategy Action Plan. 2. Long term affordable housing for homelessness prevention. 3. Allocations review and changes to the Allocations Policy. 4. Performance monitoring – Housing Measures – Qtr. 1. 5. Allocation Policies and how we communicate, give advice and take account of feedback. 6. Panel work programme.
3 rd . October 5.00pm.	Provisional – not used.
4 th . November at 5.00pm.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Performance monitoring - Housing Measures- Qtr. 2. 2. Report back on performance against CS002 and CS005 – Time to make benefit awards and changes in circumstances. 3. Follow up on benefits performance indicators.
5 th . December at 5.00pm.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Housing Strategy refresh. 2. Management arrangements – Temporary Accommodation? 3. Communications Strategy for the Allocations Scheme. 4. Outcome from review of the Mutual Exchange process. 5. Estate Regeneration – Scope.
15 th . January 2014 at 5.00pm.	Provisional <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Possible Asset Management Strategy – Oxford Standard. 2. Management arrangements – Temporary Accommodation?
7 th . February at 5.00pm.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Performance monitoring – Housing Measures – Qtr. 3. 2. Possible Asset Management Strategy – Oxford Standard.

6 th . March at 5.00pm.	Provisional
3 rd . April at 5.00pm.	Provisional

Housing Panel Recommendations

Allocation Scheme Review		
Housing Scrutiny Panel – 3rd. September 2013		
Recommendation	Outcome	Considered by
A Communication Strategy should be in place to explain the scheme as agreed, what it means for applicants alongside some general information on the likelihood of being housed. Communication should include the opportunity for feedback on the scheme itself and the understandability of it.	Agreed	City Executive Board 11 th . September

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Performance Summary
Housing Panel

Agenda Item 2

Trends compare relative performance with

Green = target met
Amber = within tolerance
Red = outside tolerance

Prd: previous month

Prev Year End: previous March

Sep-2013

Year on Year: the same period from the previous year

Measure		Owner	Result 2012/13	Latest Data		Year End Target 2013/14	Trends			Comments
Ref	Description			Target	Result		Prd	Prev Year End	Year on Year	
Estates Regeneration										
HC017	HC017: Tenant satisfaction with their estates	Stephen Clarke	Not Recorded	75 %	83%	75 %				A STAR satisfaction survey of OCC tenants was carried out in May/June 2013.
PC018	PC018: Satisfaction with our neighbourhoods	Hamera Plume	83.8%	87.0%	87.0%	89.0%				
FN024	FN024: Number of returned Social Housing dwellings through criminal proceedings	Carol Quainton	0 Number	2 Number	0 Number	4 Number				Criminal Offence of subletting became law today 15/10/2013. 2 cases of suspected subletting under investigation which now may result in criminal prosecution cases.
HC001	HC001: The % of Council tenants satisfied with landlord services	Stephen Clarke	87.00%	84.00%	88.00%	84.00%				A STAR satisfaction survey of OCC tenants was carried out in May/June 2013.
HC020	HC020: Percentage of properties failing to meet Decent Homes standard	James Carden	Not Recorded	0 %		0 %				
HC022	HC022: Percentage of tenants satisfied that OCC listens to their views and acts on them	Bill Graves	Not Recorded	63 %	64%	63 %				A STAR satisfaction survey of OCC tenants was carried out in May/June 2013.
HC024	HC024: Percentage of tenants satisfied with estate services	Bill Graves	Not Recorded	77 %	78%	77 %				A STAR satisfaction survey of OCC tenants was carried out in May/June 2013.
LP013	LP013: Increase satisfaction with parks	Ian Brooke	91.0%	90.0%	81.0%	90.0%				Results of the winter 2012 talkback show that satisfaction with parks has decreased to 81%. Whilst this is still high, we are back to 2009/10 figures. The poor summer weather could be a factor for the lower score.
CA027	CA027: Percentage of tenants satisfied with housing projects	Stephen Clarke	3%	0 %	0%	75 %				Tenants satisfaction surveys not completed as yet.
Housing Supply										
HC015	HC015: Capital investment in Council housing	Stephen Clarke	Not Recorded	£6,505 ,903	3450451.00 £	£19,054 ,000				
HC016	HC016: Number of affordable homes for rent delivered	Stephen Clarke	Not Recorded	4 Number	0.00 Number	4 Number				
CA001	CA001: Delivering a programme of new homes at Barton	Jane Winfield	3 Milestone	3 Milestone	3 Milestone	3 Milestone				Phase 1 sale launched yesterday. Section 106 to be signed off before Monday 21st October. Response to PQQ received from primary infrastructure. Retail strategy bid being worked up.
NI154	NI154: Net additional homes provided	Michael Crofton -Briggs	194 Number	108 Number	36 Number	220 Number				Housing completions are still sluggish, but a number of schemes are going through the planning process or have recently gained planning permission. It is anticipated that this will start to work through to increased construction activity in 2014.
NI 155	NI 155 Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)	Stephen Clarke	94 Number	4 Number	0 Number	4 Number				
Welfare Reform and Housing Crisis										
HC014	HC014: Number of new Rough Sleepers spending a second night on the streets (snapshot count)	Stephen Clarke	Not Recorded	0 Number	3.00 Number	0 Number				There was a rough sleeper count in August 2013 which counted 3 new rough sleepers spending a second night on the street. The total count was 14 (9 of which were new to rough sleeping).

**Performance Summary
Housing Panel**

Trends compare relative performance with

Green = target met
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Red = outside tolerance

Prd: previous month

Prev Year End: previous March

Sep-2013

Year on Year: the same period from the previous year

Measure		Owner	Result 2012/13	Latest Data		Year End Target 2013/14	Trends			Comments
Ref	Description			Target	Result		Prd	Prev Year End	Year on Year	
NI156	NI 156: The number of households in Oxford in temporary accommodation	Stephen Clarke	120 Number	120 Number	114.00 Number	120 Number				On target. Significant external challenges, but performance across homeless prevention and housing needs functions remains good.
BV066a	BV066a: Percentage rent collected	Helen Bishop	96.83%	95.05%	94.26%	97.50%				
CS002	CS002: Time to process changes in circumstances	Helen Bishop	12 Days	10 Days	12 Days	10 Days				Our Change in Circumstances result for Sept at 10.53 is very close to the current year target. We are working hard to provide the very best service to our customers. We anticipate coming in under target at Year End for the first time in over a year.
CS005	CS005: Time to process new benefits claims	Helen Bishop	26.65 days	14.00 days	22.55 days	14.00 days				We are disappointed to see an increase in our processing time for new claims but firmly believe we will get back to our targets very soon. In September, we undertook a large programme of data cleansing which identified a number of claims that had not been paid but should have been. As a result, we had a larger number of claims consisting of high days than the average month. However, this exercise means that we do not expect any more of these type of claims to be found. Doing this work at this point in the year means that we still have 6 months to improve our Year To Date figures overall.
CS010	CS010: Total current tenant arrears	Helen Bishop	£1,137,805.00	Not Set	£1,361,215.00	Not Set				
CS011	CS011: Total former tenant arrears	Helen Bishop	£225,471.00	Not Set	£312,677.00	Not Set				
CS013	CS013: Total arrears of tenants owing more than 7 weeks rent	Helen Bishop	£450,415.00	Not Set	£461,458.03	Not Set				
CS014	CS014: Number of NSPs served on tenants in arrears YTD	Helen Bishop	760 NSPs	Not Set	383 NSPs	Not Set				
HC003	HC003: Homeless Acceptances	Stephen Clarke	104 Number	60 Number	57 Number	120 Number				
HC004	HC004: Homelessness cases prevented	Stephen Clarke	681 Number	270 Number	448 Number	540 Number				The figure does not include data from Shelter for the period Jul-Sep. The figure will be updated with this data when we receive it.

To: Housing Panel
Date: 4th November 2013
Report of: Head of Customer Services
Title of Report: Benefit Performance

↵

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To provide an update on the performance of the Benefits Service.

Executive lead member: Councillor Susan Brown

Recommendation(s): The Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the performance of the Benefits team, the work being undertaken to improve performance, and the challenges around delivering the Benefits Service.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – New Claims Processing Performance 2012/13 and 2013/14

Appendix 2 – Change of Circumstances Processing Performance 2012/13 and 2013/14

Introduction

- 1. The purpose of this report is to set out the performance of the Benefits Team in Customer Services, who are responsible for processing applications for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme. It also sets out the improvement programme which is being put in place.
- 2. In order to provide some context, the report details comparable performance in other authorities and challenges being faced.

Current Performance

- 3. The performance target for processing new claims is 14 days and 10 days for changes in circumstance. These targets were set following a consultation exercise carried out in 2010. The target for new claims is particularly stretching.
- 4. The chart at Appendix 1 shows monthly performance for 2012/13 and 2013/14 for processing new claims up to September 2013. The trend is one of gradual improvement. The cumulative year to date position at 30th September 2013 is 22.55 days compared to 22.87 days as at 30th September 2012 and 26.65 days as at the 31st March 2013.
- 5. The chart at Appendix 2 shows monthly performance for 2012/13 and for 2013/14 for processing changes in circumstance up to September 2013. Again the trend shows gradual improvement. The cumulative year to date position at 30th September 2013 is 11.70 days compared to 12.09 days as at 30th Sept 2012, and 12.35 days as at 31st March 2013.
- 6. The CIPFA Benefits Administration Benchmarking Club report for 2013 shows the following:

Indicator	Oxford Result 2012/13	Benchmark Average 2012/13	Current Performance Year to date at 30.09.13
New claims	26.65	23.9	22.55
Change of circumstances	12.35	10.4	11.7

7. The oldest piece of work in the Benefits Section that has not been allocated for assessment is 2nd October 2013. Additionally, each week more claims are being processed than received. When a claim is received, if we do not have all the evidence required to process the claim we contact the claimant and the legislation allows the customer up to 30 days to provide this information. However, the processing times for claims start from the time the application is received, and thus processing times for claims can be severely affected if the additional information is not returned promptly. There are other older items of work pending, for example cases passed to the Fraud Team for further investigation.
8. So far in 2013/14 an average of 4,700 change events have been received each month. The 2012/13 average was 4,300. So in real terms not only is performance better, but it is better with a higher volume of work to process too.
9. From April 2013 to date we have dealt with 32 appeals and 308 reconsiderations. Our decision making is robust; we have only lost four cases at appeal in the last 30 months.
10. Collection of overpaid housing benefit as at 30th September 2013 stands at 85.21% compared to a target of 82%. Efficient recovery of overpaid housing benefit contributes positively to the local cost of housing benefit.
11. Awards of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are claimed back from central government via subsidy arrangements. The Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) audits all Local Authorities to ensure benefit is being paid correctly, and that the maximum amount of subsidy can be paid. In 2011/12 the loss was £800 against a claim for approximately £70 million. The 2012/13 subsidy claim is currently being reviewed by the auditors, and the results of their work will be known by the end of November 2013. Current indications for 2013/14 show that we are still in the maximum subsidy bracket. This improvement has been achieved by focussing on the quality of work, and the elimination of error. Regular 10% quality checks on all work are undertaken each month.

Challenges

18. A significant impact on work has been caused by the DWP's ATLAS project which began 2 years ago. ATLAS stands for the Automated Transfers to Local Authority Systems. This involves the transfer of data in relation to changes to Welfare Benefits claimed from DWP, and Tax Credits claimed from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. This has resulted in a substantial increase in workload. Although some of these notifications were already being received in a different format, the old information is still being received in the same way which adds to the time taken to process work. On average we receive about 700 notifications a week, which requires two full time equivalents (FTE) per day to deal with this workload.
19. In addition changes as a result of the Government's Welfare Reform agenda have been administered by the Benefits Team, including the removal of the spare room subsidy (bedroom tax) in April 2013 and the introduction of the Benefit Cap in July 2013.

Service Improvements

20. The overall improvement in performance so far this year has been due to a number of service improvements including the following:
- Automation of ATLAS information received from DWP, averaging 75% of all items received;
 - New claims and change of circumstances administration moved into a single team, to build resilience and capacity;
 - Change in working procedures for Benefit Assessors to telephone customers for additional benefit claim information rather than write, and to accept statements over the telephone; and
 - Change in strategy to work allocation to ensure backlog of work cleared and maintained.
21. Other work in progress to continue to improve the processing times and efficiency of the service include:
- The introduction of individual performance targets for Benefit Assessors from 4th November 2013.
 - The introduction of an electronic benefit claim form that will enable claimants to claim on-line, and increase capacity within the team to focus on assessing and deciding a case rather than data entry. This is planned to go-live by the end of December 2013;
 - The introduction of self-service, encouraging customers to look at their own account, and even elect to receive electronic benefit notifications. This is planned to go-live by the end of December 2013;
 - As from week commencing 21st October 2013, the Benefits Team will be telephoning customers to progress outstanding evidence to try and speed up the receipt of information and improve our speed of processing performance.
 - Re-tendering of overflow resilience contract for processing of claims; and
 - Better annual leave management throughout the year, so that September 2014 does not suffer as this year.

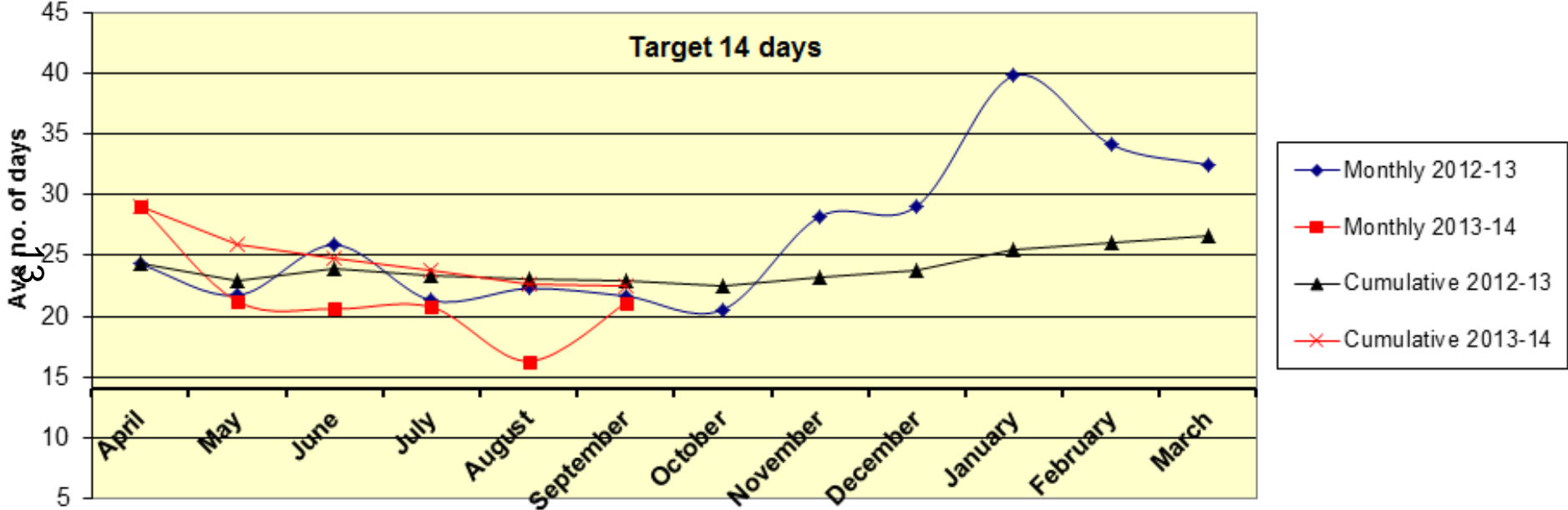
Name and contact details of author:-

Name Helen Bishop
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List of background papers: None
Version number: 1.1

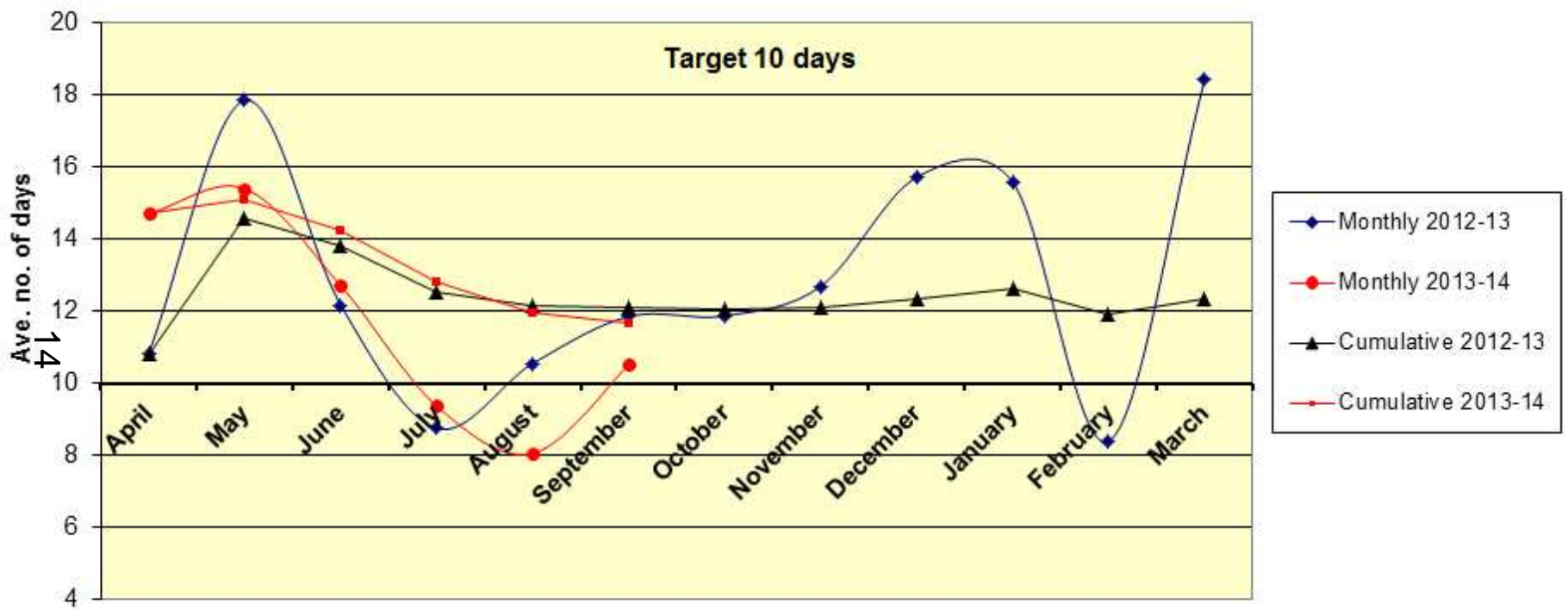
Appendix 1 New Claims Processing Performance 2012/13 and 2013/14

New Applications 2012-13 and 2013-14



Change of Circumstances Processing Performance 2012/13 and 2013/14

Change Events 2012-13 and 2013-14



Agenda Item 4

HOUSING PANEL (PANEL OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)

Tuesday 3 September 2013

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Smith (Chair), Seamons, Hollick and McCready.

Linda Hill Tenant Co-optee

20. PANEL SCOPE AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel agreed the following:

- To amend their start time to 5.00pm. If for any reason Cllr. Hollick cannot make this then the meeting will be moved back to 6.00pm.
- Noted the working principles.
- Confirmed their scope and discussed the items yet to appear in the programme (see below).
- Confirmed the dates for forthcoming meetings.

On the issue of inquiry yet to be scope they decided:

- To consider using Blackbird Leys regeneration as a case study when considering estate regeneration (to be discussed further at the next meeting).
- To note that a stock condition survey was underway to inform an asset management plan for the stock. This will be the vehicle to decide, agree and plan for an "Oxford Standard" for our properties. This work is likely to report after Christmas with the Asset Plan due in April 2014. The Panel want to be part of the development of this work if possible in partnership with the Tenants Scrutiny Panel.

21. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Stephen Clark updated the Panel on the results of the recent survey:

HC017 – Tenant satisfaction with estates – 83% (target 75%)

HC001 – The % of tenants satisfied with landlord services – 88% (target 84%)

HC022 - % of tenants satisfied that OCC listens to their views – 64% (target 63%)

HC024 - % of tenants satisfied with estates services – 78% (target 77%)

These represented good results.

Benchmarked positions on these results were not available at the Panel. These results will be used to set targets for the 13/14 round.

HC014 – New rough sleepers spending a second night out.

The Panel asked for an explanation of this result:

It was estimated that we may have a community of about 50 rough sleepers all of whom will not be out every night. This count was of the new rough sleepers spending their 2nd. Night out. This indicator was to align with the no second night

out policy which was proving to be very successful with Oxford having fewer rough sleepers than similar cities.

In response to a question about the effect on the rough sleeping community of night shelters focusing on the no second night out officers said this hadn't caused problems. Some tweaks in the service had happened around release from prison and hospital but move on services were still robust and working. These services are currently being recommissioned and it seems likely that we will not see any reduction in service levels. The 10% budget reduction is likely to be found through efficiencies.

CS002 and CS005 – Time to process new benefit claims and changes in circumstances.

These indicators remain off target and the Panel asked for information from the Head of Service at the next meeting outlining:

- The more detailed reasons for these indicators being off target.
- What action is in place to bring them back to target and sustaining performance?
- What is our benchmarked position on these indicators on our current performance and what would it be if we performed to target.

22. ALLOCATION SCHEME REVIEW

The Panel discussed the proposals contained within the Allocations Review and agreed with the Head of Service that changes would be made to the final document to provide clarity in the following areas:

- Oxford City Council's principal Housing Objectives – To write in a clearer form what is intended for members of the armed forces.
- Qualification for inclusion on the Housing Register (final paragraph of point 3.3.3 and Qualification for inclusion on the transfer list (final paragraph) – to cross reference where the "certain circumstances" definition can be found in the scheme.

A discussion took place on the 5 year exclusion from the register of those guilty of antisocial behaviour. The view was expressed that 5 years was too long a period and these people may find it hard to demonstrate they have sustained a tenancy for this period. It was agreed that given that the scheme allowed exceptions to be made to this rule were this proved necessary this condition was acceptable.

Consideration was given to how we actively manage the register and whether we should have a band 5 on the basis that these applicants if they remain here are never likely to be housed by the Council.

The Panel heard:

- The arguments for and against having a “band 5” and the likely hood of extra work through appeals being raised by excluding these applicants.
- Having a register of “all comers” was a good indication of housing need.
- That the register was self-reviewing in that those registering were required to renew this every year. Some 3,000 chose to do this.

It was accepted that we do need to communicate effectively and regularly on the scheme and what it means.

The Panel agreed to make a recommendation to the City Executive Board:

A Communication Strategy should be in place to explain the scheme as agreed, what it means for applicants with some general information on the likelihood of being housed. This communication should include opportunity for feedback on the scheme itself and the understand ability of it.

A discussion took place on the conditions applied to those who foster and how this affects their housing need. Of particular concern to the Panel were those relatives who take care of children for the long term sometimes without any formal transfer of parental responsibility. It was felt that these were penalised by having to wait 3 years for this position to be reflected in their housing need. The Panel was reassured that should it prove necessary a situation of this sort could be considered by the Exceptional Circumstances Panel. Evidence would be needed but mostly a social worker would be involved and evidence could be taken from them. The wording in the proposed scheme had been changed to reflect this concern.

23. ALLOCATIONS POLICIES - HOW THE COUNCIL COMMUNICATES

See notes on the previous item.

24. LONG TERM AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

The Panel were generally supportive of this scheme.

Concern was raised about the use of these properties as temporary accommodation because of the difficulties we currently have in securing permanent move on accommodation. How many of these properties are likely to be blocked because of lack of move on accommodation.

Officers reassured members that our numbers in temporary accommodation have been static for a number of years. We will continue to move people on from temporary accommodation to Council tenancies, the private rented sector and accommodation outside of the City.

The purchase number has been arrived at on the basis of a needs analysis. It's not exact but an estimate based on what we know so far.

The Panel asked to see details of the management arrangements for these properties before they are agreed.

25. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN - 2012-2016

The Panel found this Action Plan to be much improved. It now presented a more understandable, clear and realistic appraisal of actions.

The Panel discussed issues around estate regeneration and the “Oxford Standard” and decided to plan their inquiries in these areas to fit with the timelines outlined in the Action Plan.