

# Agenda

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## Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee

Date: **Monday 26 March 2012**

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Time: **6.00 pm**

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

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For any further information please contact:

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# Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee

## Membership

<b>Chair</b>	<b>Councillor Stephen Brown</b>	Carfax;
<b>Vice-Chair</b>	<b>Councillor Scott Seamons</b>	Northfield Brook;
	<b>Councillor Mohammed Abbasi</b>	Cowley Marsh;
	<b>Councillor Michael Gotch</b>	Wolvercote;
	<b>Councillor Rae Humberstone</b>	Blackbird Leys;
	<b>Councillor Bryan Keen</b>	Cowley;
	<b>Councillor Sajjad Malik</b>	Cowley Marsh;
	<b>Councillor Stuart McCready</b>	Summertown;
	<b>Councillor Mike Rowley</b>	Barton and Sandhills;
	<b>Councillor Gwynneth Royce</b>	St. Margaret's;
	<b>Councillor Oscar Van Nooijen</b>	Hinksey Park;
	<b>Councillor David Williams</b>	Iffley Fields;

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## AGENDA

### Pages

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND AND SUBSTITUTIONS

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3 **STANDING ITEM: WORK PROGRAMME**

1 - 12

Pat Jones, Principal Scrutiny Officer, Tel: (01865) 252191,  
Email [phjones@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:phjones@oxford.gov.uk);  
Alec Dubberley, Democratic Services Officer, Tel: (01865) 252402,  
Email: [adubberley@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:adubberley@oxford.gov.uk)

<b>Background information</b>
The work programme needs to reflect the wishes and interests of the Committee. It is presented here and at every meeting to allow members to lead and shape their work.
<b>Why is the item on the agenda?</b>
To agree the lines of inquiry for forthcoming meetings and to take an overview of progress
<b>Who has been invited to comment?</b>
The Principal Scrutiny Officer, will present the work programme and answer questions from the Committee.
<b>What will happen after the meeting?</b>
The Chair and Vice-Chair will continue to monitor the Committee's work programme and report to future meetings.

4 **BENEFITS FUNDAMENTAL SERVICE REVIEW**

13 - 24

Neil Lawrence Performance Improvement Manager,  
Email: [nlawrence@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:nlawrence@oxford.gov.uk), Tel: 01865 252542

<b>Background information</b>
The Benefits Fundamental Service Review has been on the Committee's work programme for a long period. This report will conclude this particular strand of work.
<b>Why is the item on the agenda?</b>

This report details the outcomes from the benefits fundamental service review matched against the original lines of inquiry set by the scrutiny committee
<b>Who has been invited to comment?</b>
The Performance Improvement Manager and the Board Member will be invited to the Committee.
<b>What will happen after the meeting?</b>
This will be up to the Committee and any Scrutiny Committees formed after the May elections.

## 5 EQUALITIES

To Follow

*The report will be sent out on Monday.*

Lead Officer: Jarlath Brine, Equalities & Diversity Business Partner  
 Email: [jbrine@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:jbrine@oxford.gov.uk)

<b>Background information</b>
The Committee agreed to examine the Council's approach to equalities as part of this year's work programme.
<b>Why is the item on the agenda?</b>
This report will cover:  The results of the peer assessment carried out on Oxford City Council on the Qualities in Local Government Standard  Key measures identified as being important to achieving equality in the organisation – feedback and progress from service areas will be reported.
<b>Who has been invited to comment?</b>
Officers from the service will be invited to attending the meeting.
<b>What will happen after the meeting?</b>
This will be up to this committee and Scrutiny Committees formed after the May elections.

**6 MINUTES**

25 - 28

Minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2012.

## **DECLARING INTERESTS**

What is a personal interest?

You have a personal interest in a matter if that matter affects the well-being or financial position of you, your relatives or people with whom you have a close personal association more than it would affect the majority of other people in the ward(s) to which the matter relates.

A personal interest can affect you, your relatives or people with whom you have a close personal association positively or negatively. If you or they would stand to lose by the decision, you should also declare it.

You also have a personal interest in a matter if it relates to any interests, which you must register.

### **What do I need to do if I have a personal interest?**

You must declare it when you get to the item on the agenda headed "Declarations of Interest" or as soon as it becomes apparent to you. You may still speak and vote unless it is a prejudicial interest.

If a matter affects a body to which you have been appointed by the authority, or a body exercising functions of a public nature, you only need declare the interest if you are going to speak on the matter.

### **What is a prejudicial interest?**

You have a prejudicial interest in a matter if;

- a) a member of the public, who knows the relevant facts, would reasonably think your personal interest is so significant that it is likely to prejudice your judgment of the public interest; and
- b) the matter affects your financial interests or relates to a licensing or regulatory matter; and
- c) the interest does not fall within one of the exempt categories at paragraph 10(2)(c) of the Code of Conduct.

### **What do I need to do if I have a prejudicial interest?**

If you have a prejudicial interest you must withdraw from the meeting. However, under paragraph 12(2) of the Code of Conduct, if members of the public are allowed to make representations, give evidence or answer questions about that matter, you may also make representations as if you were a member of the public. However, you must withdraw from the meeting once you have made your representations and before any debate starts.



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## **Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee**

### **Work programme debate outcomes**

#### **General Principles**

After consultation with back-bench councillors the committee this year has decided to run its programme through a series of themes. Each theme will be led by a committee member sometimes supported by small group of colleagues.

The aim of the committee this year in setting themes is to approach its work in a more focused and searching way reducing the number of items on agendas allowing a “select committee approach” to be taken.

A Finance and Performance Panel has been set again this year to give a firm focus on budget delivery, performance and treasury management. Of particular interest to the panel this year will be the reform of council housing finance and the delivery of budget. The Panel will invite the attendance and views of a council tenant representative at appropriate times

The programme remains flexible and open to reorganisation by the committee. A complete review will be undertaken by the Chair and Vice Chair in January 2012

The information that follows shows:

- The themed draft programme and focus
- Current nominations
- Projected agenda schedules
- Forward schedule for the Finance and Performance Panel

## Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee

### Draft Work Programme 11/12

Theme	Area(s) for focus	Likely Status of Inquiry	Nominated/interested councillors
Asset Management	<p>Lines of inquiry</p> <p>To have an early view of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The draft document proposed for consultation with highlighted or listed areas that have changed</li> <li>• The achievements against the 2009 action plan with areas that remain unachieved highlighted with reasons for delay or change</li> <li>• The work done in order to identify the gaps and alterations needed based on changing circumstances and demands. Alongside this how these are addresses in the new plan</li> <li>• An update on the 2009 risk assessment (and any links to the corporate risk register) in particular sections set to ensure we provide maximum value from our asset base</li> </ul>	<p>Select Committee Inquiry:</p> <p>Target meeting date: 21<sup>st</sup>. November</p>	<p>Councillors van Nooijen and Gotch</p>
Benefits Service	<p>Focused reporting on progress and outcomes around value for money principles</p>	<p>Standing Panel. Report back to committee:</p>	<p>Councillors Brown, Royce, van Nooijen</p>

<p>Fundamental Service Review</p>	<p>Within all of these outcomes how we would compare nationally (if that is still possible)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Economy</b> - How the overall cost of the service to the local tax payer is being reduced. What the reduction target is, over what period and how we are performing against this. In considering this to see the full effect on our accounts split between subsidy, administration and debt provision</li> <li>• <b>Efficiency</b> - The target for the unit costs of the various process (new claims, change in circumstances etc) over what period and how we are performing against this</li> <li>• <b>Effectiveness</b> - The output measures, but the committee would like to see additions to the normal internal measures and include others that customers might see as a "whole service" so:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time taken to perform the various functions i.e. new claims and changes in circumstances</li> <li>- The number of appeals and success rates</li> <li>- Accuracy levels</li> <li>- Queuing times</li> <li>- Telephone response times</li> <li>- Abandoned call rate</li> <li>- Customer feedback on quality and attitudes of staff</li> <li>- Benefit take up measures with monetary targets</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Target dates: 7<sup>th</sup>. December and 26<sup>th</sup>. March</p>	<p>and Williams Lead Member: Councillor Brown</p>
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	<p>It is recognised that the "Economy Measure" above will be linked to the results of the analysis to determine the type of service we are to design. For the committee be told which service elements or outputs within the proposed service design are different from those generally delivered, why and the extra cost of these.</p>		
Finance and Performance Panel	<p>Standing Panel remit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current year budget delivery</li> <li>• Performance against service and corporate targets</li> <li>• To act as the "responsible body" within the CIPFA code for the Treasury Management Strategy and service</li> <li>• To understand and review the business planning and treasury management strategy set to meet the reform of council housing finance</li> <li>• To review budget proposals and Medium Term Financial Strategy</li> </ul>	<p>Standing Panel</p> <p>Agenda schedule below</p>	<p>Councillors Seamons, Rowley, Brown and Williams</p> <p>Lead Members: Councillor Seamons</p>
Environmental Services	<p>Reconfiguration of Environmental Health Services to reduce costs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The current range, status, cost and users of our services</li> <li>• Any links between these services and other targets and actions within the council</li> </ul>	<p>Committee Inquiry</p> <p>Target date: 12<sup>th</sup>. September</p>	<p>All committee members</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Options for reductions to meet the target</li> <li>• In particular what are the options for the noise nuisance service</li> <li>• Communication and winded down plans</li> </ul> <p>Houses in Multiple Occupation Licensing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targets within the extended scheme are met</li> <li>• Cost and charging base is controlled and reasonable</li> </ul>	<p>Committee Inquiry</p> <p>Target date: 26<sup>th</sup>. March</p>	
<p>Equalities</p>	<p><b>Service Delivery</b></p> <p>To understand the agreed equality objects and outcomes expected from these. To monitor direction of travel and change Service Plan link</p> <p><b>Oxford City Council as an employer</b></p> <p>No lines of inquiry agreed. Discussion with lead member underway</p> <p><b>Corporate Performance</b></p> <p>Outcome from the corporate assessment to achieve level 2 of the Equalities Framework for Local Government</p>	<p>Select committee inquiry</p> <p>Target date: 26 March</p>	<p>Councillors Royce and Rowley</p>

Leisure contact performance	<p>To scrutinise outcomes to target from the Fusion Leisure Services Contract across:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value for Money</li> <li>• Increased participation</li> <li>• Improvements in quality of service</li> <li>• Outreach work</li> <li>• Carbon Management</li> </ul> <p>The committee this year is particularly interested in outcomes from outreach programmes and interaction with partners around public health issues</p>	<p>Committee inquiry</p> <p>Target date: 21<sup>st</sup>. November</p>	<p>All committee members</p>
Additional item called from the Forward Plan Return of Park and Ride facilities to City Council management and operation	<p>Briefing to allow pre scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What events have culminated in the breakdown of the current park and ride management arrangements</li> <li>• What are the budgetary implications for the council and how will these be managed</li> <li>• What are the service implications for the council and those using park and ride facilities</li> </ul>	<p>Committee inquiry</p> <p>Target date: 12<sup>th</sup>. September</p>	<p>All committee members</p>
Additional item called from the Forward Plan Trading Strategy	<p>To pre-scrutinise the proposed strategy for trading our services outside the council. The 10/11 committee interest in particular lay in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A proper understanding of risks to the council in legal, financial and reputation terms</li> <li>• Striking the right balance between service delivery and trading and recognising “pinch points”</li> <li>• Governance arrangements</li> </ul>	<p>Committee inquiry</p> <p>Target date: 12<sup>th</sup>. September</p>	<p>All committee members</p>

Additional item called from the Forward Plan	To pre-scrutinise the Corporate Plan within the consultation period.	Committee inquiry Target date: 30 <sup>th</sup> . January 2012	All committee members
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## Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee Agenda Schedules

Dates	Slots and Items
21 <sup>st</sup> . June	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Destination Management Organisation – Business Plan</li> <li>2. Performance against target – outcome for 10/11</li> <li>3. Provisional budget outturn 10/11</li> <li>4. Fusion leisure contact – outturn against targets</li> </ol> <p><b>Meeting full</b></p>
12 <sup>th</sup> . September	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Trading Strategy</li> <li>2. Reconfiguration of Environmental Services</li> <li>3. Park and Ride operation and management (briefing)</li> </ol> <p><b>Meeting full</b></p>
21 <sup>st</sup> . November	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Asset Management – Select committee meeting</li> <li>2. Leisure Contract Performance</li> <li>3. Benefits fundamental service review progress and Panel view</li> </ol> <p><b>Meeting Full</b></p>
5 <sup>th</sup> . January Special meeting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Call-in of CEB decision on the – Call Handling Contract</li> </ol>
28 <sup>th</sup> . February Rearranged meeting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. HMO update</li> <li>2. Pre-decision scrutiny of the Asset Management Plan</li> </ol>
26 <sup>th</sup> . March	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Equalities – possible Select Committee</li> <li>2. Leisure – further in formation on outreach work</li> <li>3. Benefits fundamental service review. Final report linked to committee lines of inquiry</li> <li>4. Vacant slot</li> </ol>



## Finance and Performance Panel

**Members: Cllrs. Seamons (Lead member), Brown (VAP Chair), Rowley and Williams**

**Officers for this meeting: Pat Jones, Nigel Kennedy, Anna Winship, Tim Power, Jane Lubbock**

**Meeting Date:**  
**23<sup>rd</sup>. September at 2.00pm – papers deadline: morning of the 6<sup>th</sup>. September**

**Officers for this meeting: Pat Jones, Nigel Kennedy, Anna Winship, Tim Power, Jane Lubbock**

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>CEB link</b>	<b>Comment</b>	
1. 1 <sup>st</sup> . Qtr. Spending	<b>21<sup>st</sup>. Sept</b> Absolute deadline 13 <sup>th</sup> Sept (papers published)	The Panel want to report their comments and recommendations to the CEB meeting on the 21 <sup>st</sup> . Sept	
2. 1 <sup>st</sup> . Qtr Performance – to include reporting of service level targets			
3. Treasury management performance 10/11			Tenant representative not invited for item 5.
4. Treasury Management performance 1 <sup>st</sup> . Qtr. Including issues for 11/12 strategy			
5. Reform of Housing Finance			
6. Budget prospects 11/15			

**Date: 14<sup>th</sup>. November 2011**

**Panel only meeting to agree budget review outline**

**Date:**  
**29<sup>th</sup>. November at 5.30pm – papers deadline: morning of the 25<sup>th</sup>. November**

**Officers for this meeting: Pat Jones, Nigel Kennedy, Anna Winship, Tim Power(possibly), Jane Lubbock**

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>CEB link</b>	<b>Comment</b>
1. 2 <sup>nd</sup> . Qtr. Spending 2. 2 <sup>nd</sup> . Qtr. Performance– to include reporting of service level targets 3. 2 <sup>nd</sup> . Qtr. Treasury Management Performance including issues for 11/12 strategy 4. Reform of Housing Finance (progress)	<b>7<sup>th</sup>. Dec</b> Absolute deadline 29 <sup>th</sup> . Nov (papers published)	The Panel will want to report their comments and recommendations to the CEB meeting on the 7 <sup>th</sup> . December  The Consultation Budget and MTFS will be taken as part of the Budget Review Group. Lead Member to agree a timetable for discussion with the Board Member  Invite a tenant representative for item 4

**Dates to be agreed**

**Budget Review October/November to February – dates and outline to be agreed by the Lead Member**

Key dates as understood currently:

MTFS – 7<sup>th</sup>. December CEB

Consultation Budget – 7<sup>th</sup>. December CEB

Scrutiny Budget report complete by 27<sup>th</sup>. January

Budget proposals from CEB to Council – 8<sup>th</sup>. February

Council agrees budget – 20<sup>th</sup>. February

Reserved meetings – CEB and Council 23<sup>rd</sup>. February

**All based on published schedule**

**Date:**  
**3<sup>rd</sup>. February at 2.00pm – papers deadline: morning of 27<sup>th</sup>. January**

**Officers for this meeting: Pat Jones, Nigel Kennedy, Anna Winship, Tim Power(possibly), Jane Lubbock**

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>CEB link</b>	<b>Comment</b>
1. 3 <sup>rd</sup> . Qtr. Spending 2. 3 <sup>rd</sup> . Qtr. Performance– to include reporting of service level targets 3. 3 <sup>rd</sup> . Qtr. Treasury Management performance 4. Treasury Management Strategy 12/13 5. Final comments on “firm” budget proposals 6. Reform of Housing Finance	<b>8<sup>th</sup>. February</b> Absolute deadline 31 <sup>st</sup> . January (papers published)	The Panel will want to report their comments and recommendations to the CEB meeting on the 8 <sup>th</sup> . Feb  Invite a tenant representative for item 6

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**To:** Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 26 March 2012  
**Report of:** Business Improvement and Customer Services  
**Title of Report:** Benefits Fundamental Service Review

## Summary and Recommendations

**Purpose of report:** To present the outcomes of the Benefits Fundamental Service Review

**Key decision?** No

**Scrutiny Lead Member:** Councillor Brown

**Executive lead member:** Councillor Smith

**Policy Framework:** Efficient, Effective Council

**Recommendation(s):**

**For the Scrutiny Committee to note and comment on the outcomes from the fundamental service review of the benefits service**

## Introduction

This report details the outcomes from the benefits fundamental service review matched against the original lines of inquiry set by the scrutiny committee.

## Economy

How the overall cost of the service to the local tax payer is being reduced.

Cost reduction is being achieved through the following means;

- On direct costs through process improvements identified in the Review, reductions in external processing, staff reductions and improvements in productivity (e.g. reduced staff sickness rates)
- On overhead costs through reductions in Customer Services recharges. This is being achieved through improved economies of scale (more services accommodated leading to reduced proportion of recharges for existing services), channel migration (less contact dealt with leading to reduced demand for staff), quality improvements (improved processes leading to reduced demand for staff)

- On overhead costs through other Council initiatives; reduced office accommodation, energy savings, centralisation of ICT etc which result in reductions in other recharges

What the reduction target is, over what period, and how we are performing against this?

The target cost reduction for the review was £185,000 over two years (2011/12 and 2012/13). £115,000 has been achieved in 2011/12, and a further £109,710 identified for achievement within 2012/13.

An overall reduction of £925,000 has been estimated in the gross costs of the Service between 2010/11 and 2011/12.

In considering this, to see the full effect on our accounts split between subsidy, administration and debt provision

The costs of subsidy (shown as external income) and administration are set out in pages 14 & 15. Latest estimates are shown below

	01/04/2011
Gross Benefit Expenditure	£72,233,535
Estimated Subsidy Entitlement	-£68,698,315
CTB - Technical Overpayments	-£1,968,239
"Cost"	£1,566,981
Current Year Overpayments recovered	-£2,262,525
Collection rate	64.25%
Est. figure feeding into Local Cost of Benefits	-£695,544

## Efficiency

The target for the unit costs of the various processes (new claims, changes in circumstance) over what period and how we are performing against this.

The Review has used direct costs only (i.e. staff cost and time) to calculate the differences between current (As Is) processes and new (To Be) processes. The current and target unit costs identified in the costing model are as follows;

- New Claims (current £16.70, target £9.35 - a 44% reduction)
- Changes in Circumstance (current £9.32, target £7.03 - a 25% reduction)

A more comparable measure that includes all aspects of cost is the CIFPA benchmark, which deals only with new claims and uses a weighted model to account for difficulty levels of different claim types. The benchmark costs per claim are set out below;

- 2010/11 - £108.94 per claim
- 2011/12 - £80.60 per claim (using budget estimates)
- 2012/13 - £77.24 per claim (using 2011/12 budget and Review savings)

An aspiration for the service is to achieve the (2010/11) benchmark average cost per claim of £59

## Effectiveness

The 'output' measures, but the Committee would also like to see additions to the normal internal measures and include others at customers might see as a "whole service"

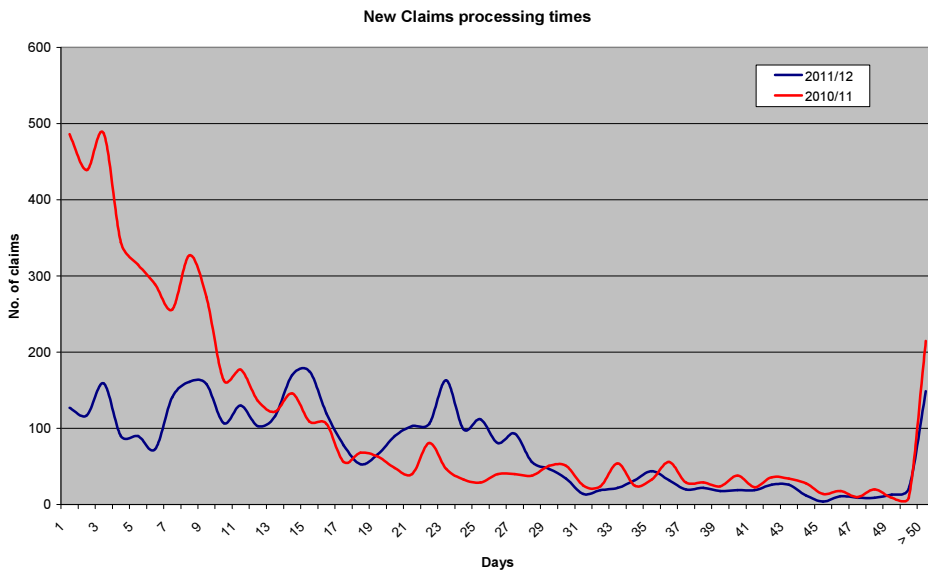
- **Time taken to process new claims**

The latest national comparative data available from the DWP is for Q2 2011/12 which showed the national average processing time to be 24 days compared to Oxford's performance of 17 days (at that time).

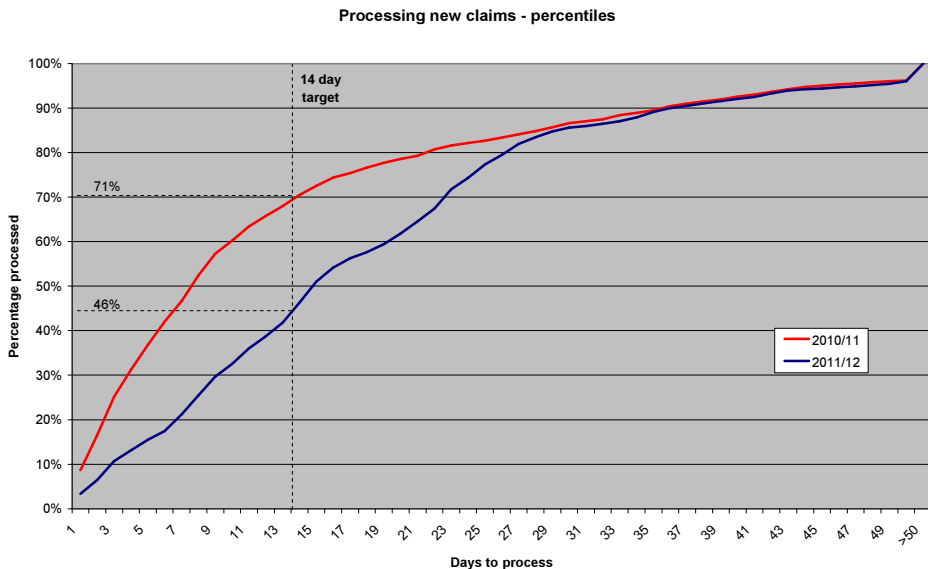
An analysis was undertaken on data from 2010/11 (July 2010 to March 2011) and 2011/12 (April 2011 to November 2011) to identify trends and issues.

Processing times for new claims are distributed over a wide range, with performance slower in 2011/12 and with greater variance in the time taken to process;

- 2010/11 - 14.9 days processing (standard deviation of 19.32 days).
- 2011/12 – 19.7 days processing (standard deviation of 36.6 days).

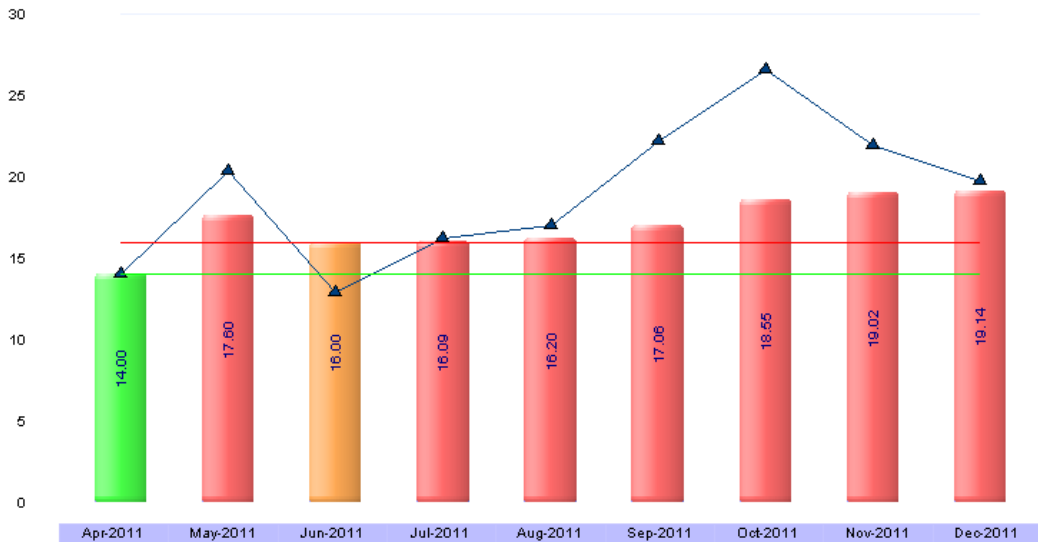


The proportion of new claims determined early has deteriorated in 2011/12. Using the 14 day processing time target for 2011/12 as a benchmark just 46% of claims were determined within this time compared to 71% in 2010/11.



After a promising start, average processing times for new claims during 2011/12 have shown a steady deterioration up to October 2011 when an improvement in monthly processing times were observed. The cumulative effect of backlogs has impacted on the measure overall.





- **Time taken to process changes in circumstance**

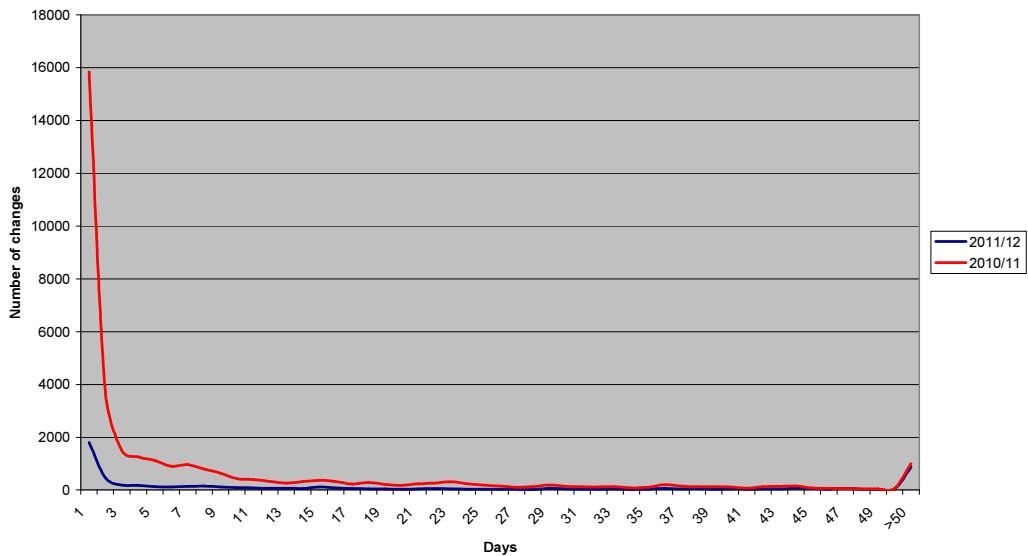
The latest national comparative data available from the DWP is for Q2 2011/12 which showed the national average processing time to be 11 days, which matched Oxford's performance at that time

Processing times for changes are distributed over a narrow range, with performance slower in 2011/12 and with greater variance in the time taken to process;

- 2010/11 – 9.05 days processing (standard deviation of 16.5 days).
- 2011/12 – 20.8 days processing (standard deviation of 27.9 days).

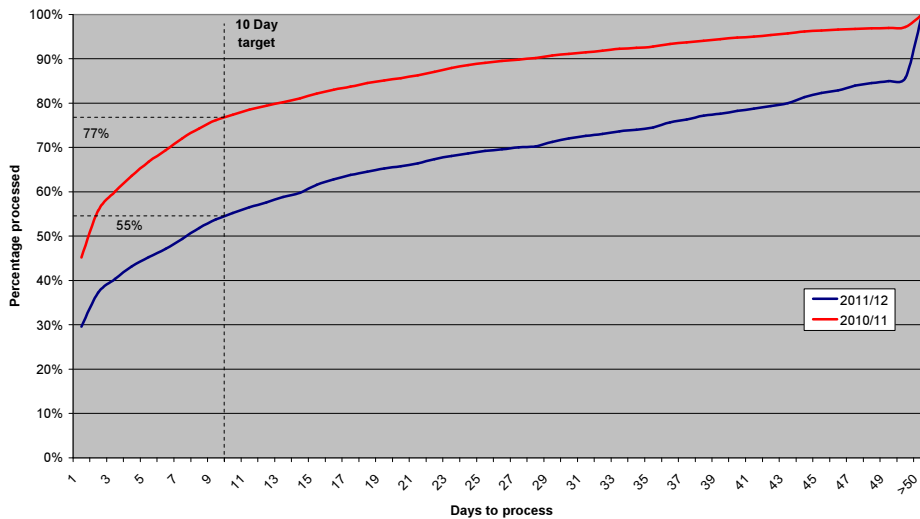
Processing times for changes in circumstance show a marked difference from those for new claims, with a high numbers determined within the first few days;

Changes in circumstance processing times

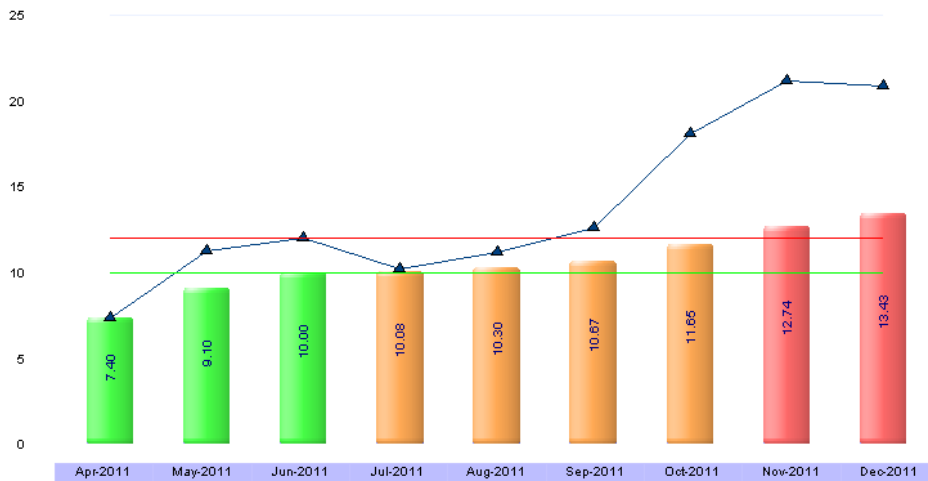


The proportion of changes determined early has deteriorated in 2011/12. Using the 10 day processing time target for 2011/12 as a benchmark just 55% of claims were determined within this time compared to 77% in 2010/11.

Changes in Circumstance - percentiles



After a promising start, average processing times for changes in circumstance during 2011/12 have shown a steady deterioration through the year up to November 2011 when the impact of the resilience contract can be seen to take effect.



- **The number of appeals and success rates**

In the last year we have taken 47 appeals to a hearing, and 3 of those have resulted in a change being made to our original decision (a 94% success rate)

- **Accuracy levels**

Quality for 2010/11 was 83.1%, and for 2011/12 it is currently 78.9%

- **Queuing times**

Data for February 2012;

Templar Square Office

- New Housing Benefit Claims: 107 appointments with an average wait of 2 minutes 30 seconds
- Change of Circumstances for Housing Benefit: 287 appointments with an average wait of 3 minutes 12 seconds

St Aldate's Chambers Office

- New Housing Benefit Claims: 203 appointments with an average wait of 2 minutes 54 seconds
- Change of Circumstances for Housing Benefit: 397 appointments with an average wait of 2 minutes 48 seconds

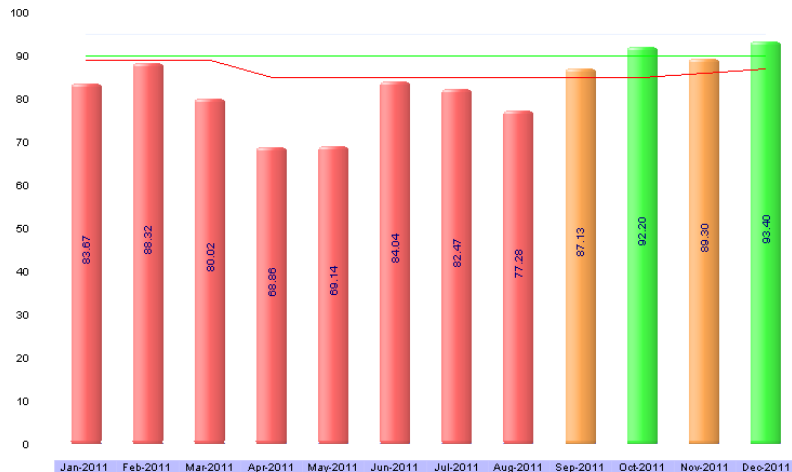
The overall average wait time for face to face shows as 21 minutes 42 seconds - but this reflects the housing needs average wait times which tend to be drop-in visits and therefore wait longer to be seen.

- **Telephone response times**

Data for February 2012 shows that the average answered wait time for Housing Benefit callers was 2mins 39 seconds

- **Abandoned call rate**

Performance has shown a marked improvement since the establishment of a single contact centre, with 93.4% of all customers now able to get through first time. The recruitment of additional staff and the establishment of a multi-skilled team that can move between front of house and telephone work as demand requires has assisted this improved performance.



- **Customer feedback on quality and attitudes of staff**

### Customer consultation

The consultation survey identified that there was a good level of satisfaction with the benefits service, but with room to improve;

- 82% rated the service they received as above average, with 25% giving a maximum score
- 60% had contacted the service between 1-6 times in the last 6 months, with 14% more than 6 times.
- 12% believed they currently waited too long for the phone to be answered, to get an appointment and waited past their appointment time.
- 8% were unsure of whom to contact within the service or what benefits may be available to them.
- Where English was not a first language this was seen to be a barrier.
- Forms and letters used by the service were identified as being too complicated.

Current targets for making decisions are largely in line with the customers' views;

- 34% said 11- 15 days for a new claim was acceptable
- 36% said 6-10 days for processing a change in circumstance was a reasonable time scale.

Main priorities for improvements (in order of priority) were;

- Improve the speed of the service (answering telephones and making decisions)

- Staff being more helpful/ courteous
- Make forms and letters simpler/shorter
- Deal with same person each time they contact the service
- Provide more advice on other benefits/entitlements
- Introduce the ability to make claims on-line
- More money being available for claimants
- Put more info on the council's website/ on-line

### **Voluntary Sector and Housing Association consultation**

It was perceived that there had been a recent deterioration in the quality of the Benefits service. Six months ago Oxford City Council had a "very good" Benefits Service but the service had "gone downhill" – particularly over the last 3 months. Specific areas cited were:

- Call waiting times have increased. Tenants can't afford the credit on their phones to wait for this long.
- There were issues with the automated phone system. It was not clear which button to press. There was a dislike of the music and when reaching the end of the queue and it goes dead/cuts off.
- It is apparent that staff are reading from scripts to deal with queries.
- The lack of an ability to build a personal relationship with a council staff member was missed. Advantages included quick responses to queries on the phone and by email
- There have been delays to appointments.
- Some clients had waited 2-3 weeks for a response.
- Council staff were perceived as being very helpful and friendly. Customer service staff in Templars Square were cited as being very good.
- There was a lack of consistency on the way claims were processed. Verbal advice may be incorrect and there is no proof of the advice when given in this way.
- The system finds it difficult to cope with transitions (changes in circumstances) where good communications are essential.

There was a perception however that Oxford City Council's service is much better than a franchised service; Cherwell and South Oxfordshire were given as examples. Friendly and helpful staff were also cited as assets to the service.

### **GovMetric Data**

General satisfaction data for Customer Services is collected via GovMetric on a monthly basis and reported as a corporate target. January 2012 data shows 85.2% satisfaction overall (using a weighted model to account for low response rates).

Latest data from GovMetric for Benefits (14/2/12 – 14/3/12) shows the following;

- |                |               |                |
|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| ▫ Face to Face | 65% satisfied | 34 respondents |
| ▫ Telephone    | 80% satisfied | 74 respondents |

- **Benefit take up measures with monetary targets**

This was not within the scope of the Review

Which service elements or outputs within the proposed service design are different from those generally delivered, why and the extra cost of these

It is not possible to give a comprehensive answer to this question because;

- Available benchmarking does not cover differences in process, only in performance and cost
- It is not possible to subdivide accurately the cost of delivering individual aspects of the service in a way that would produce comparable cost data.
- The configuration of services between councils will vary; some will carry out their own customer interface and others will use a centralised service like Oxford

We are aware that 16 authorities currently use risk based verification, and that now the DWP have issued guidance on its use many more are seeking to implement it. We have no data on how many authorities use eClaims.

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## VALUE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 28 February 2012

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillors Brown (Chair), Seamons (Vice-Chair), Abbasi, Fooks, Gotch, Humberstone, Keen, Malik, Rowley, Royce, Van Nooijen and Williams.

### **35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor McCready with Councillor Fooks attending as substitute.

### **36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

### **37. STANDING ITEM: WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended) updating the Committee on the work programme for the current year.

The Principal Scrutiny Officer provided a brief overview of the work completed by the Committee and its panels. Members noted the work that was still outstanding and that the next and final meeting would be taking place at the end of March.

Resolved to note the report.

### **38. STANDING ITEM: REPORT BACK ON THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD AND ON MATTERS OF INTEREST TO THE COMMITTEE**

The Committee noted recommendations to the City Executive Board as well as responses received on the following items:

- Benefits Fundamental Service Review
- Asset Management Framework
- Housing Revenue Account Business Plan
- Corporate Plan Performance
- Budget and Performance.

Councillor Seamons provided members with a brief overview of the work of the Finance and Performance Panel.

Resolved to note the report.

### **39. HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION - UPDATE**

The Head of Environmental Development submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) updating the Committee on progress made with the introduction of a scheme to license all Houses in Multiple Occupation in the City.

Members briefly discussed the report and the following points were made:-

- There had been a rush of applications since Christmas and the scheme was performing in “cash term”
- As Oxford was the first authority to introduce such a licensing system there was no data or trends to compare the performance of the scheme.
- It was important that accurate information is provided to landlords on how the scheme works and that the correct properties are targeted as potential HMOs
- The Committee was given information on the steps being taken by officers to enforce the scheme and told that a non-compliance officer had been appointed to deal with reports of non-licensed properties.

The Committee requested an additional report be submitted to the next meeting which addressed in greater detail the Committee’s lines of inquiry. It was felt that the report before the Committee did not address the points in detail.

Resolved to:-

(1) Note the report

(2) Request that an additional report be submitted to the next meeting that addressed in full:

- The financing and resourcing arrangements for the scheme
- The detailed processes and aims of the scheme
- The robustness of the processes to handle evasion

#### **40. DRAFT ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Head of Corporate Assets submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) presenting the draft version of the Council’s Asset Management Plan.

The Head of Corporate Assets introduced and summarised the document saying that the Plan would be released for public consultation following agreement by the Board Member. Following the introduction the following points were made:

- It was felt that further more measurable targets should be included in the document.
- A brief discussion on “community assets” versus “investment properties” took place. It was explained that the Council careful classified its assets so that maximum community use could be exploited.

- The Committee felt that the plan would benefit from having more explicit links to the overall corporate aims and objectives of the Council particularly on pages 7 and 8 where achievements to date were recorded.
- Members felt that targets, even if just aspirational, were required for the number of operational assets the council wanted to classify as good, satisfactory, poor or bad.
- Councillor Fooks and Van Nooijen agreed to form a panel to examine the draft plan in detail outside of the Committee. Their conclusions would be reported directly to the Board Member.

Resolved to:-

- (1) Recommend that further targets are included in the plan, with particular focus on the overall corporate aims and objectives of the Council; and
- (2) To appoint a Panel consisting of Councillors Van Nooijen and Fooks to examine the detail in the plan and report any recommendations/comment to the Board Member and Head Corporate Assets in advance of the public consultation period.

**41. MINUTES**

Resolved to approve, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2011 and the special meeting held on 5 January 2012.

**42. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

26 March 2012.

**The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.42 pm**

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