

**Benefit Administration**

**Recovery Plan**

**January 2017 to March 2018**

Laura Bessell

Benefit Manager

Financial Service

2nd June 2017 (version 2)

*Personnel*

Item Current Position New Proposal Desired Outcome Delivery Date Progress

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| Appraisals  **Laura Bessell & Team Leaders** | Appraisals are occurring however meaningful data on performance has not been used previously | Creation of targets around;   * Speed of Processing (to reduce Admin Delay on overpayments) * Accuracy of claim assessment * Behaviours of self-learning and not to delay processing due to ‘Senior’ Support * Team Leaders work together using management information for the wider service and not individual teams * Team Leaders undertake Benefit training to ensure that assistance can be provided to staff. * Team Leaders think about the focus of the processing and how this influences subsidy. * Ensure that all Academy releases are installed within 2 weeks of delivery from system. If this is not possible due to other service needs or fixes to be applied before installation, then a risk factor needs to be applied and all parties notified. * All staff are aware of Fraud and its role within Benefit administration. | To change the culture of Appraisal monitoring throughout the team. | Defined Targets  **March 2017**  Target Setting  **April 2017**  Appraisals  May 2017 to **Feb 2018**  Monitoring of Appraisals  **September 2017** | **Full training (Feb 2017) has occurred with all staff (HR present) to ensure that appraisals are meaningful.**  **Target setting of all staff has occurred.** |
| Universal Credit  **Laura Bessell & Tanya Bandekar** | Universal Credit is due for full implementation in October 2017. Full Roll Out is to be concluded by March 2022. | Reduced expenditure against a falling caseload will affect the Local Authority (LA) error threshold and will require careful management of errors made by Assessment Officers.  Process Mapping is required against the 12 categories of migration to DWP payments to estimate potential drop in expenditure.  With a reduced case load management of the staffing levels need to be considered. There will be Temp Accommodation claims, Pensioner Claims and CTR claims still within the OCC remit. Any projected staff savings will need to be reviewed as the change in administration is fully understood. | Better Forecasting of Benefit expenditure each month to be able to monitor the case load ‘drop off’ to match the overpayments created.  Staffing expenditure is monitored monthly and fixed term contracts, resilience contract, agency staffing and ‘natural wastage’ used to meet future staffing levels and balance the budget. Annually savings from UC are built into the medium term plan | Process Mapping  **June 2017**  Staffing Costs  **March 2018** | **Process Mapping has occurred and a project plan is in place.** |

*Assessment of Claims*

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| **Risk Based Verification**  **Laura Bessell & Michele Baldrick** | Policy needs to be signed off for its annual review in its current form. | Look at alternative products that are cheaper in the market. This product has not helped with identifying error within the database as the risk matrix applied within the product does not suit the Oxford caseload | A product that speeds up the processing whilst maintaining reduced error within the system. This is required to be signed off for Audit and subsidy purposes. | **October 2017** | **Documentation needs to be reviewed to encompass UC changes coming into effect this year.** |
| **Fundamental Service Review**  **Laura Bessell & Tanya Bandekar** | Corporate requirement | Review of the Benefits service, what efficiencies can be made, is there better working practices that would enhance the customer experience? Look at what the best are delivering on | Review of service whilst it is in transition | **October2017** | **Project Plan developed. SWOT analysis for team and managers is due for completion by the end of June. Looking for best practice sites to visit alongside learning from sites regarding UC roll-out. Involving staff at all stages. Focus groups being arranged** |
| **Training**  **Laura Bessell** | Training on claim assessment and wider issues such as Fraud is required. Staff have raised concerns that they are unable to process claims without Senior Officers assistance.  Staff have attended detailed courses on;  -Subsidy  -Persons from Abroad  -Students  -Self-Employed and Directors.  These courses were identified as areas of weakness from the types of LA error created. Following on from these courses further training needs have been identified. | Compulsory attendance at training provided both internally and externally. All staff are to attend an intensive Housing Benefit 6 day course to ensure that ‘simple’ errors are removed and that all staff have access to full notes. This is arranged for April 2017. | Giving staff confidence to assess the claim. Assessors to take responsibility  New procedures will be created to ensure that all assessments are consistent with the regulations  Remove the view that training and procedures are not provided which is why errors are being made. | **April 2017**  **June 2017** | **All formal Benefit Training has been completed. Test results are now back and further training needs are being identified.** |
| **Quality Checking**  **Laura Bessell & Team Leaders** | Internal review of 4% of decisions made. This is recorded and notice made for training requirements and feedback within the staff’s appraisals. This equates to approximately 3,300 checks in a year which is a quarter of the caseload. | * Automation of the current system to allow the Performance and Quality team to spend more time checking. * Review of the error trends early in the year to target where volume of LA error is occurring to focus more on the ‘type’ of claim. * Change in process of what is being ‘checked’. Currently 4% of each person assessments are reviewed on a random selection. From April 2017, it will be 4% of earning claims per assessor per day. | Targeting the checking around the subsidy claim form and not the whole claim. This is to reduce the financial loss within the financial year.  Consideration will need to be made at the end of 2017-2018 as to whether customer care has reduced as a consequence.  Purchasing a PMQA tool to allow automation of selection of cases for checking | **Daily Checking.**  **September 2017** | **Checking is on-going with the trend being an improvement on staffing accuracy from previous year.**  **Purchase of PMQA is currently at procurement stage.** |
| **Year End**  **Tanya Bandekar & Pauline Hull** | Year End Process is signed off.  Rent increases are correctly implemented at the time of automation. | Ensure that a robust process is in place and that this is signed off by all parties that all testing and completion of claim management is successfully concluded. | Reduced contact from the public for the Contact Centre.  Claims are correct at first point of assessment in April. This will reduce the number of claims that need adjustment to the mistake within the claim. This additional work is an impact to work that needs to be completed through normal change process and thus increases LA error if not actioned within the timeframe. | **April 2017** | **Item Complete.**  **Process was successful with rent increases being automated rather than manually adjusted, freeing up staff time and freeing up assessment staff time to focus on other work** |
| **Academy**  **ICT & Pauline Hull** | Academy Releases are implemented to the database before legislation changes. | Planning and robust testing to occur before installation. When releases are available, there needs to be a test phase not solely with 1 member of staff but with a delegation of duties spread over the operational management team.  Clear notes of changes are to be made available to all staff before installation to allow work procedure to be changed if required. Thorough planning is required to liaise with ICT.  Consideration needs to be given to releases that cannot be installed at the required time and full notification to all affected parties for a risk assessment of the delay in installation to be given. | Ensure that claim processing is correct in accordance with the legalisation | **Annual** | **Currently there are no releases outstanding and all are up to date.** |
| **Review of Customer Information System (CIS) (DWP Data)**  **Laura Bessell** | Database of details with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is out of date.  2 examples in 2 years of DWP data breeches from Assessment Staff. | Update and re-alignment of duties is required to ensure that all staff are fully trained and complete the training with the data sharing guidance as provided by the DWP. | Ensure that no further breeches occur as the DWP have the right to remove access to CIS data which would cease all claim assessment within the corporate targets.  Ensure that the DWP are notifying the correct people should local procedures need to be changed from national policy.  Make the staff aware that breeches of DWP access are gross misconduct and will be treated in line with OCC disciplinary policy. | **March 2018** | **Transfer of details from Paul Wilding to Laura Bessell by the DWP has not occurred. This is a DWP delay in process.**  **The DWP have announced that access to CIS will cease in February 2018. A new system will need to be rolled out nationally. The expected delivery date has been amended** |
| **Management Information**  **Laura Bessell & Team Leader** | There is limited use of Management information within both Academy and Info@Work | Training on the new Capita SQL system is to be arranged. (Insight)  Use of Management Information to determine claims which will have predicted changes so that they can be monitored.  Use of the suspension report to ensure that Overpayments are not created unnecessarily | Improving good claim data. | **June 2017** | **Waiting testing of Insight to establish training requirements** |
| **Student Discount Council Tax Review**  **Laura Bessell & Team Leaders** | New for 2017-2018 this will be reviewing all cases where there is a single adult in the property with a discount due to a student status applied.  This project is being conducted by Fraud with Revenues support. | Will affect HB and CTR as this is an area of concern raised at Audit Report. These accounts should not have CTR is correctly applied and receive HB as a qualifying student claim if there are children in the house.  May impact upon LA error for in year if found that accounts are in correct. | Opportunity to review all Lone Parent student cases.  Better subsidy/audit assurance for this income type. | **September 2017** | **Investigations Team to lead and advise of start date** |
| **Single Person Discount Review**  **Laura Bessell & Team Leader** | SPD project is now an annual project run through Fraud. Need to assist this project each month  This has been resourced within the department for 2016-2017 for the first time. | Review of the SPD mismatch report and ensure that adequate training of the Benefit Staff to ensure that Council Tax legislation is adhered too.  Review of Benefit and Council Tax database to ensure that a consistent approach is applied throughout the Financial Service.  Greater working with Revenues and Fraud staff to implement the required changes to the Council Tax database for CTR entitlement  Implication to increased expenditure for CTR. | Saving across the Council  Correct data held to comply with Data Protection Act.  16/17 Project completed | **May 2017 onwards** | **Awaiting timescales from the Investigations Team** |
| **Oxford Assured Lettings/Direct Payments Project**  **Michele Baldrick** | Housing project to move people in being responsible for managing their rent and possible Universal Credit payments in the future. |  |  | **Pilot until 2019** | **Weekly meetings being held** |
| **Oxford Private Housing Company**  **Laura Bessell & Tanya Bandekar & Katie Ball** | New Scheme | Creating private lets from HRA. Transferred 5 properties in 2016-2017. A further 5 are to be transferred in 2017-2018 along with properties from Barton. | Additional work load due to changes in subsidy coding, will become business course as the scheme develops further | **March 2018** | **Updates to the Academy system are going to be required for management of this project to identify these properties and report separately on them. Future operational issues must involve the team.** |

*Fraud*

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| **Specified Point of Contact (SPOC)**  **Laura Bessell** | As the DWP gave limited funding for this position, it was decided that a SPOC should not be created as the funding was minimal. | Create a SPOC with administration skills and not assessment skills to deal with queries from the DWP and OCC fraud. | This will be managed closer to ensure that delivery of fraud files/outcomes does not impact upon criminal proceedings for both organisations. | **September 2017** | **Completed**  **Senior Officer within the team has been allocated as part of development** |
| **National Fraud Initiative (NFI)**  **Laura Bessell & Rob Ducker** | This is due for January 26th delivery. This is a 2 year exercise, however the first year since the removal of Housing Benefit investigations since the creation of the Fraud and Error Service (FES) | Careful management of these claims need to be processed, in order to ensure that the department does not have 2 referrals (one from the DWP for HB and one from OCC for Council Tax Reduction (CTR). | Streamlined Info@Work-Process mapping needs to be in place, with both organisations (OCC and DWP) | **September 2017** | **Files have been sorted and we are awaiting outcomes from the Investigations Team before amending claims** |
| **Training**  **Laura Bessell** | There is limited understanding within the Assessment team of the role of fraud and the completion of the documentation required for the DWP. | Training and a workshop with the DWP to ensure that all parties understand each method of working. The DWP staff that used to work for OCC, have now left the organisation for a min of 2 years and processes have changed following their transfer. | Better working between the 2 parties with a shared agenda of protecting the public purse. | **June 2017** | **Complete.**  **This occurred in May 2017 and is now part of corporate training. Created new training module which will be compulsory for all staff from April 2017.** |
| **Service Level Agreement**  **L Bessell & S Warner** | This is due for review | Have a local agreement in line with National agenda on Fraud prevention. | Better working between the 2 areas with a shared agenda of protecting the public purse. | **April 2017** | **Complete.** |
| **Prosecution Policy**  **Laura Bessell & Scott Warner** | Review of the policy | * Consideration needs to be given to Joint Working with the DWP from 2018. * Consideration of the use of Administrative Penalties after Universal Credit roll-out October 2017. * Signing off process for all sanctions where there is DWP involvement. | The Benefit Manager needs to be added to the document as an authorised signatory for Ad-Pens | **April 2017** | **Review is at final draft with Investigation Manager for submission to Audit Committee.** |
| **Procedures**  **Laura Bessell & Pauline Hull** | Review/creation of payment procedures. Currently payments made through Benefit expenditure are not checked before processing to the Bank accounts.  Examples this year have been where claims have been incorrectly paid of a significant amount and then classified as LA error later in the year.  There has also been a rise in complaints that payments have been made to the Claimant where there are arrears of more than 8 weeks and should be paid to the Landlord. | Need to put in place procedures to check payments over £2500 before the payment is made.  Check that all BACS documentation is completed prior to the payment transfer to reduce duplicate payments (£0 subsidy) and complaints are reduced. | To reduce cases where LA error has occurred on claims incorrectly determined.  To ensure that payment directions are correct in line with the regulations | **July 2017** | **Complete.**  **Weekly checking occurs of large payments being made over £2500.**  **Further review of payments is underway- e.g. payments to multiple bank accounts** |
| **Overpayment from Fraud Referrals**  **Laura Bessell & Pauline Hull** | Overpayments are currently classified as Claimant Error where fraud has occurred receiving 40% subsidy. There is a considerable delay in the fraud referral process from the DWP and this is resulting in loss of subsidy claimed. | Discussion is currently underway with the DWP upon making overpayments where a DWP fraud referral has been made and there is official delay that this is classified as Official Error and is reimbursed at 100% subsidy level | Reduced expenditure loss. | **April 2017** | **Complete.**  **Changed documentation and added to Info@Work to reflect change in work procedures.** |

System

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| **Controls in Place**  **Laura Bessell & Team Leaders** | Reliance on systems to ensure that the claim management is working. Often this ‘falls over’ and this stops staff processing claims and poor customer service. | Robust date management for certificates expiring. Access for Team Leaders/System team to install these requirements.  Good communication with ICT to ensure that priority is given to our system requirements.  Upgrades to be applied as a ‘package’ for both homeworkers and office staff so that staff can apply these changes in one go and not needs ICT to manually intervene. | Speed of Process and reduced down time. | **July 2017** | **Working with ICT and Benefits Team Leaders to allocate responsibility for working on each element to ensure that system functionality is continuous.** |
| **ICT Resilience**  **Tanya Bandekar** | 1 member of ICT staff is proficient at dealing with each system. | Work with ICT on ensuring that there is not a single point of failure within ICT. Try to have more than 1 person who is able to resolve problems as they arise | System continuity | **Daily escalation of issues when required** | **2 Financial Services Senior Managers are now points of contact for the ICT system issues and for escalating issues. A new system of reporting ICT downtime has been introduced through an alert system which is helping to manage expectations.**  **Working with ICT to bring greater resilience on system issues.** |
| **Connect**  **Pauline Hull** | New system facility | Wider use of Connect for the public to use E-channels. | More people to be e-channelled. | **September 2017** | **E-notifications at testing stage** |
| **IQ Manager**  **Pauline Hull** | New system facility | To enable the staff to be able to amend notification letters on Benefit entitlement and for these to be e-mailed. This ideally will also include Info@Work Letters also | Savings for cost of Critiqom project as letters can be e-mailed and not use paper option.  Staff will have a new skill to amend letters | **September 2017** | **Awaiting test facility from service provider.** |
| **E-Landlord Notification/**  **Portal**  **Pauline Hull** | Ensure that all Landlords have their notification letters and schedules electronically, as currently they are sent in paper format | Add notification letters as schedules has been successful. 6 Landlords are successfully on-line. | Reduce the paper and postage costs. | **September 2017** | **Communications Team are preparing a leaflet to promote the portal** |