

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**RESOURCES AND CENTRAL SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**17 MARCH 2005**

**SUBJECT: HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION UPDATE**

**REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF FINANCE**

**Abstract: This Report updates the Committee of the current position in respect of benefits administration. The Report also indicates the anticipated further improvements.**

**1 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

It is recommended that the Committee -

- i) note the improved position in respect of the number of completed claims awaiting processing.
- ii) note the improved position in respect of the number of claims awaiting further information.
- iii) note the improvement in the average number of days taken to process new claims.
- iv) note the improvement in the average of number of days taken to process changes of circumstances.
- v) note that the Department of Work and Pensions now includes changes of address as changes of circumstance and this has had an adverse effect on the number of days taken to process.
- vi) note the targets set for further improvement.
- vii) note that the caseload has increased by approximately 10% over 2003/04.

**2 BACKGROUND**

The Committee will recall Report No 779/04 dated 17 June 2004, which advised of the significant on-going changes in benefits administration and outlined the progress made during 2003/04. This Report details the further progress made during 2004/05.

It should be noted that the improvements detailed in the Report have been made against the background of an increase in caseload of approximately 10%.

**3 COMPLETE CLAIMS AWAITING PROCESSING**

The figures noted below are in respect of the number of completed claims (new, changes of circumstances etc) awaiting processing at the month end from the time of implementing the Governments Verification Framework on 1 July 2002. The figures in brackets relate to the new claims element of the total.

	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>
April	-	2103 (639)	1052 (192)
May	-	2633 (651)	982 (276)
June	963 (336)	1299 (626)	1158 (404)
July	1820 (674)	1108 (471)	1115 (467)
August	1486 (696)	1037 (394)	687 (215)
September	2140 (705)	901 (375)	464 (144)
October	2684 (886)	1100 (366)	656 (244)
November	2095 (1095)	1686 (648)	700 (240)
December	2768 (1141)	1611 (401)	350 (112)
January	2145 (851)	1146 (265)	468 (108)
February	2543 (894)	1439 (379)	
March	2476 (725)	1606 (377)	

The above figures show that the amount of claims awaiting processing is less than half of the figure prior to implementing Verification Framework and in volume terms equates to approximately one weeks work. The amount of new claims awaiting processing is less than one third of the figure prior to implementing the Verification Framework.

#### **4 INCOMPLETE CLAIMS AWAITING FURTHER INFORMATION**

Previous Committee Reports highlighted that approximately 80% of claims are incomplete when first returned. This figure has remained fairly constant. However, new procedures have been put in place. These procedures are designed to speed up the return of the required documentation and accordingly allow claims to be processed more quickly.

The current figure of 430 is less than half of the figure prior to implementing the Verification Framework and in volume terms equates to approximately one weeks work.

It should be noted that the time taken by claimants to supply the received documentary evidence is the largest proportion of the overall time taken to process claims.

#### **5 SPEED OF PROCESSING**

##### Average Days to Process New Claims

Processing times are calculated from receipt of the application form to the issue of the letter of determination after processing. As such the length of time taken by the claimant to produce the verification documentation in support of their claim has a significant bearing on the figures. (80% incomplete when first returned).

	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>
DWP Standard	36	36	36
Quarter 1	55	96	58
Quarter 2	69	80	57
Quarter 3	91	75	49
Quarter 4	101	54	
Annualised Figure	79	77	

The above figures highlight the continuing improvement trend during 2004/05 with the figures for Quarter 3 being less than the figure prior to implementing the Verification Framework.

#### Average Days to Process Change of Circumstances

This performance indicator measures the time taken from the date of receipt of written notification of the change to date the change was actioned by the Council.

	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>
DWP Standard	9	9	9
Quarter 1	16	19	17
Quarter 2	16	18	17
Quarter 3	21	17	14
Quarter 4	23	21	
Annualised Figure	18	19	

The Department of Work and Pensions has now included changes of address as changes of circumstances and this adversely affected the performance figure for Quarter 4 of 2003/04. Since then steady progress has continued to have been made with the figure for Quarter 3 being less than the figure prior to implementing the Verification Framework.

## **6 TARGETS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT**

The Committee will recall Report No 1497/04, which advised that a bid for a document imaging and workflow computer system had been made to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). The Report also advised that implementing this system would increase customer service and improve benefit processing times.

The DWP has advised that our bid has been successful and the procurement process is now underway. As part of the bid the Council had to intimate its anticipated processing times based on implementing the new system and these figures are noted below.

i) Speed of Processing

DWP Performance Standard	36 days
Position as at Quarter 3 of 2004/05	49 days
Anticipated Position as at 31 March 2005 (as per the Service Plan)	45 days
Anticipated Position as at 31 March 2006 (as per bid to DWP)	35 days

Current indications are that the target of 45 days by the end of March will be achieved. Achieving the anticipated position at 31 March 2006 will have the Council performing above the DWP's current standard of 36 days although it should be noted that the standard could change (either up or down).

ii) Change of Circumstances

DWP Performance Standard	9 days
Position as at Quarter 3 of 2004/05	14 days
Anticipated Position as at 31 March 2005 (as per the Service Plan)	9 days
Anticipated Position as at 31 March 2006 (as per bid to DWP)	7 days

As advised earlier in this Report the DWP has included changes of address as changes of circumstance and this has had an adverse effect on the number of days taken to process such changes.

The anticipated position at 31 March 2005 and 31 March 2006 is based on the original criteria and the targets are therefore unlikely to be achievable.

The DWP are currently reviewing the standard for this performance measure.

## 7 SUMMARY

During 2004/05 the benefits processing position has continued to improve and further improvements are anticipated especially with the introduction of a document imaging and workflow computer system.

## 8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no financial implications arising as a result of this Report.

## 9 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no human rights implications arising as a result of this Report.

**10 CONSULTATION**

- 10.1 The Chief Executive and the Director of Law and Administration have been consulted in the preparation of this Report.

**NOTE**

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

DSS/DSW/FC  
14 March 2005

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