

# Income & Debt

## Service Plan 2005/06



DRAFT

*'Working with and  
on behalf of local  
people'*

**Kettering**  
Borough Council



## 1. SERVICE SUMMARY & OBJECTIVES

### The Income and Debt Management Unit:

- Provides a comprehensive revenue billing, collection and recovery service for Council Tax and Business Rates to all of the Borough's householders and businesses.
- Administers the Housing and Council Tax Benefit schemes and makes payments to qualifying claimants.
- Investigates suspected fraudulent claims for benefit taking appropriate legal action where fraud is proven.
- Takes appropriate legal action to recover benefit overpayments, former tenant arrears and all sundry income owing to the authority.

### Service Plan Format

- A requirement of the National Performance Standards for benefits, jointly issued by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate is for authorities to produce separate business plans for benefits and counter fraud administration, which are approved by Members. These are a requirement of the Strategic Management Standard. We have chosen to incorporate these documents into the overall service planning process for the Income and Debt Management Unit, but in order to retain their separate identity and avoid having three separate documents. The benefits and counter fraud business plans are attached as appendices to the overall service plan for the unit. The appendices follow the format required by the Performance Standards.

### Our service aims are:

- To maintain top quartile performance in all benefits performance indicators.
- To enable a better quality of life for the residents of the Borough through the provision of a modern benefits service.
- To provide a revenues service that demonstrates best value, is cost effective, efficient and proactive not reactive in terms of change and responsiveness to customer needs.

### Our service objectives for 2005/06 are based on the following themes:

- Achieving best value in the delivery of revenue and benefits services.
- Working towards achievement of the new national Performance Standards in benefits.
- Improving communication with all our customers.
- Continuing to improve performance in the collection and recovery of all debts owing to the Council.

The aims and objectives of the Income and Debt Unit support the Council’s key corporate priorities. The action plan for the year (section 7) sets out how each element relates to the Council’s corporate priorities. The table below shows in general terms how the service aims support the Council’s key corporate commitments.

Theme	Quality of life	Environmental Protection	Economy and Regeneration	Democratic Participation	Equality and Access	Integrity and best use of resources
<b>Service Aim</b>						
<b>Short Term</b>						
Continue to improve the processing of Benefits. Maintain upper quartile performance achieved during 2004/05.	✓				✓	✓
<b>Medium Term</b>						
Continue the improvement in the collection of Council Tax to achieve upper quartile performance.						✓
Continue the improvement in collection of NNDR and achieve upper quartile performance.						✓
Continue to reduce the levels of corporate debt.	✓					✓
<b>Long Term</b>						
To enable a better quality of life for the residents of the Borough through the provision of a modern benefits service.	✓				✓	✓
To provide a revenues service that demonstrates Best Value, is cost effective, efficient and proactive not reactive in terms of change and responsiveness to the customers needs.	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

**Links to cross cutting themes:**

**Community Plan:**

The Community Plan for 2005 to 2008 is being consulted on with a view to strengthen the partnership working of organisations within the Borough, and to clarify the Local Strategic Partnership’s overall strategic aims. The Council’s commitments to the Community Plan are delivered via the Corporate Improvement Plan. The Social Inclusion Strategy, which sets out how the Council will improve its performance in promoting greater social inclusion within the Borough.

**Corporate Improvement Plan:**

The Corporate Improvement Plan will be updated in the spring 2005. This plan will act as a driver for prioritised improvement across the organisation over the next three years.

**Next Steps Programme and organisational improvement:**

The Council's next steps and organisational improvement programme activity will be intensified during 2005/06 including: the delivery of efficiency savings, the development of procurement, the establishment of systems that improve the delivery of services and supporting the implementation of major change initiatives.

**Asset Management Plan and Capital Strategy:**

The Council attained 'good' ratings for both The Asset Management Plan, and The Capital Strategy last time they were subject to external validation. The Capital Strategy will be reviewed / refreshed during 2005 with the overarching aim of continuing to identify opportunities for making best use of the Council's resources. Due to the strategic importance of the Council's asset portfolio and its links with the delivery of key priorities, such as economic development, all decisions that impact on the future use of the Council's land and buildings will be given strategic consideration, including discussion at SMT.

**E-government:**

E-government cuts across all service areas and aims to ensure that efficiency savings are made as a result of investment in technology, maximising access channels and choice and transferability of front-line staff.

**Social Inclusion:**

The work of the unit aims to address issues of equality and social inclusion and comply with corporate policies and procedures regarding equality of opportunity and all legislative requirements.

**The Housing Strategy**, which assesses housing needs within Kettering Borough and sets out a framework for meeting the need over the next three to five years.

## 2. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

### Our achievements since April 2004 include:

- Further reducing overall historic arrears levels by £1,118,000 in the first six months of the year.
- Improving council tax collection by collecting 0.4% more at the end of January 2005 than had been collected in the same period in the previous financial year.
- Improving business rate collection by 1.8% over the same period.
- Run successful campaigns to target benefit fraud and non-payment of debts.
- Improving fraud administration and undertaking and issuing sanctions for the first time.
- First successful prosecutions for benefit fraud
- A successful direct debit take up campaign
- Short-listed for IIRRV performance awards, in Excellence in Education and Development.
- Our benefits manager, short-listed for LGC. Local Government Manager of the Year Award.
- Successfully implemented DIPS into benefits section with no downturn in performance.
- DWP ended special monitoring regime as a result of continuing stable best quartile processing times.

### 3. STANDARDS OF SERVICE

Our service standards assist us in the measurement of how well we are doing in achieving our aims and objectives. They also help when assessing whether we are meeting corporate priorities. For example, our customer service standards help us to develop a service, which is based on the needs and requirements of our customers. In the same way, for staff, our standards support our Investors In People and people development priorities.

#### A. Corporate Customer Service Standards

- All our staff will be polite and helpful
- We will answer telephone calls within 15 seconds or 5 rings and answer calls professionally and courteously
- All our correspondence will be acknowledged within 3 working days and full responses provided within 12 working days. We will use jargon free language.
- We will return telephone messages within 1 working day
- We will acknowledge e-mails the same day providing a full response within 2 working days
- All staff will carry identification with a photograph and wear a name badge

#### In addition, we will endeavour to:

- Demonstrate a positive attitude at all times, showing care, empathy, courtesy, respect and a willingness to deliver a quality service.
- Give fair and consistent treatment to all our customers, treating them as individuals, to ensure they have equal access to our services.
- Work as a team on behalf of the customer, demonstrating ownership, accountability and commitment to follow-through.
- Communicate honestly and effectively in listening, questioning and understanding.
- Deliver on promises, keeping the customer informed at all times even when there is no news.
- Seek and act on feedback in pursuit of improving our performance.
- Challenge disrespectful behaviours and attitudes in colleagues that impact our goal of service excellence.
- We will always greet people in a professional and personal manner.
- We will own all phone enquiries and only use voicemail facility as a last resort.
- We will always ensure that there is a facility for a caller to leave a message.
- Say who and what number the caller can contact in our absence.
- We will always call back / respond to your messages on the same day.
- Present ourselves as Service Professionals being neat, clean, well organised and dressed appropriately to the type of work we are doing.
- Provide home visits for the elderly and infirm within 9 working days.
- Provide a translator or interpretation service for claimants who do not speak or read English.
- Provide private interview rooms and arrange appointments where required.
- Produce information leaflets on a range of benefit related issues.
- Deal with new claims for benefits within 14 days of receiving all the information required.
- Feedback the results of surveys and questionnaires and let you know what action we have taken.

#### For our staff, we will endeavour to:

- Provide an annual personal review for each member of staff.
- Provide training and development opportunities.
- Arrange an Income and Debt Management briefing every two months.
- Hold team meetings every week.

## 4. WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS SAY

### A. BVPI BENEFITS SURVEY 2003/04

The Benefits survey was carried out in two waves. The first wave was undertaken in October 2003 and the second in March 2004. Of the overall survey sample of 1,250 claimants surveyed, approximately 710 people returned a completed questionnaire, equal to an overall response rate of approximately **56%**. The following is a table showing the results. The results of those very or fairly satisfied in the previous survey of 2000/01 are shown in brackets.

3VPI	Service	Indicator	% Very/fairly Satisfied	% Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	% Very/fairly dissatisfied	Unweighted sample base
BVPI-80a (Q1)	Benefits	Satisfaction with the ways you can contact the benefits office	<b>76.1%</b> (81.9%)	<b>14.1%</b>	<b>9.8%</b>	<b>653</b>
BVPI-80b (Q3)	Benefits	Satisfaction with the experience of visiting the benefits office	<b>77.5%</b> (79.2%)	<b>12.6%</b>	<b>9.9%</b>	<b>538</b>
BVPI-80c (Q5)	Benefits	Satisfaction with the telephone service provided by the benefits office	<b>63.9%</b> (62.0%)	<b>15.2%</b>	<b>20.9%</b>	<b>158</b>
BVPI-80d (Q6)	Benefits	Satisfaction with the service provided by the staff in the benefits office	<b>79.4%</b> (83.2%)	<b>13.0%</b>	<b>7.6%</b>	<b>654</b>
BVPI-80e (Q7)	Benefits	Satisfaction with the Housing/Council Tax benefits claim form	<b>61.3%</b> (64.3%)	<b>24.0%</b>	<b>14.7%</b>	<b>662</b>
BVPI-80f (Q8)	Benefits	Satisfaction with the amount of time it took to determine whether claims were successful or not	<b>69.2%</b> (67.0%)	<b>7.9%</b>	<b>23.0%</b>	<b>684</b>
BVPI-80g (Q9)	Benefits	Satisfaction with the overall service received from the benefits office	<b>78.2%</b> (Not collected)	<b>8.7%</b>	<b>13.1%</b>	<b>693</b>

### B. CONSULTATION PLANS

The action plan for 2005/02006 contains proposals to undertake customer satisfaction surveys across all Income and Debt Services. An improvement plan will then be put in place to implement agreed service improvements.



## 5. HOW WE PERFORM

**Best Value Performance Indicators**

The table below shows our performance for the last two years and our targets for future years.

Ref No.	Description	31 Jan 03/04	Year End 03/04	31 Jan 04/05	Year end Estimate 04/05	Target 04/05	Target 05/06	Target 06/07	Target 07/08
BVPI09	Council Tax collected	94.8%	97.2%	95.2%	98.0%	98.2%	98.4%	98.5%	98.6%
BVPI10	NNDR collected	93.7%	97.7%	95.5%	98.2%	98.5%	98.7%	98.9%	99.0%
BVPI76a	No of claimants visited per 1000 caseload	N/A	13.06	140	150	15	202	250	301
BVPI76b	No of fraud investigators per 1000 caseload	N/A	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.60
BVPI76c	No of fraud investigations per 1000 caseload	N/A	50.95	55.5	58	50	55	57	60
BVPI 76d	No of prosecutions and sanctions per 1000 caseload	N/A	0.75	2.33	2.5	2.5	4	6	8
BVPI78a	Avg. time to process new claims	56 days	52 days	30 days	32 days	36 days	30 days	28 days	26 days
BVPI78b	Avg time to process change in circumstances	17 days	15 days	8 days	10 days	8 days	14 days	12 days	11 days
BVPI79a	Cases processed correctly	98.9%	99.2%	99.2%	99.2%	99.0%	99.2%	99.4%	99.5%
BVPI79b (to delete)	Recovery of overpaid benefit	38.6%	43.4%	35.6%	44.0%	55.0%	60.0%	64.0%	68.0%
BVPI 79b(i) NEW	Overpaid H/B recovered as % of total amount of overpay identified during year.	New P/I from 05/06	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	55%	N/A	N/A
BVPI 79b(ii) NEW	Overpaid H/B recovered as % of total amount of overpay outstanding at start of year + amount identified during year.	New P/I from 05/06	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	40%	N/A	N/A
BVPI 79b(iii) NEW	Overpaid H/B written off during year as % of total amount of overpay outstanding at start of year + amount identified during year.	New P/I from 05/06	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2%	N/A	N/A
LPI66a	Average time to process council tax benefit claims once complete	21 days	18 days	7 days	8 days	12 days	8 days	7 days	6 days
LPI66b	Average time to process housing benefit claims once complete	21 days	19 days	6 days	7 days	12 days	8 days	7 days	6 days
LPI66c	Average time to process rent allowance claims once complete.	15 days	14 days	7 days	7 days	12 days	8 days	7 days	6 days
LPI70	Cost of collecting Council Tax per dwelling	£28.87	£24.84	£24.84	£24.84	£25.00	£24.95	£24.80	£24.65
LPI71a	Percentage of council tax payments by direct debit	55.4%	55.18%	56.07%	56.50%	59.0%	63.0%	66.0%	70.0%
LPI71b	The percentage of NNDR payments by direct debit	42.1%	43.53%	44.40%	44.04%	46.0%	48.0%	51.0%	55.0%
LPI82	Proportion of spending borne by Council Tax payer	43.0%	42.66%	42.75%	42.75%	43.0%	43.0%	43.0%	43.0%

## 6. HOW OUR PERFORMANCE COMPARES

The table below compares Kettering's performance in 2003/04 with a group of comparable authorities the Tamworth Group, near neighbours Top Quartile Authorities and also shows Kettering's performance ranked against the other Northamptonshire Authorities. The figures are the most up to date comparison figures available.

Performance Indicator	Kettering Performance in 2003/2004	Near Neighbour Average	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile	All England Average	All England District Average	Position in County
BVP09 Proportion of council tax collected	97.20%	97.47%	98.38%	97.37%	96.87%	97.70%	5 <sup>th</sup>
BVP10 Percentage of business rates received in year	97.70%	98.68%	99.03%	98.61%	98.36%	98.51%	6 <sup>th</sup>
BVP76a No of claimants visited per 1000 caseload.	13.06	152.57	301.48	46	210.18	202.73	7 <sup>th</sup>
BVP76b No of fraud investigators per 1000 caseload.	0.37	0.33	0.40	0.27	0.35	0.39	4 <sup>th</sup>
BVP76c No of fraud investigations per 1000 caseload.	50.95	47.51	48.45	33.40	43.58	49.61	2 <sup>nd</sup>
BVP76d No of prosecutions and sanctions per 1000 caseload.	0.75	4.64	7.75	1.975	3.81	4.39	7 <sup>th</sup>
BVP78a Average time taken to process a new benefit claim	52 days	39.63 days	33.35 days	50 days	43.54 days	40.55 days	5 <sup>th</sup>
BVP78b Average time taken to process changes in circumstance	15 days	11.84 days	8.53 days	13.75 days	12.89 days	11.42 days	5 <sup>th</sup>
BVP78c Percentage of renewal claims processed on time	61.00%	69.46%	74.71%	50.15%	66.83%	68.61%	3 <sup>rd</sup>
BVP79a Percentage of cases for which the amount of benefit due was correct	99.20%	98.43%	99.20%	97.78%	96.92%	97.55%	2 <sup>nd</sup>
BVP79b The percentage of recoverable overpayments (excluding CTB) that were recovered in the year	43.40%	46.76%	52.59%	41.5%	47.74%	49.11%	4 <sup>th</sup>

## 7. OUR PLAN FOR PROGRESSING PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION	WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID1	Monitoring and Audit Committee.	Improving the collection and recovery of all debts owing to the Council.	Experiment with arrears chasing by phone and out of hours visits.	Sept 05	Rob Thompson	6A
<b>CUSTOMER FOCUS</b>			<b>RISK ASSESSMENT</b>			
<i>Impact</i>	<i>Measurable customer outcomes</i>		<i>Risk of failure</i>	<i>Consequence of failure</i>	<i>Risk Priority</i>	<i>Recommended action</i>
Low	To reduce debt levels in targeted areas.		Medium	Low	Low	Agree project plan for the review and nominate lead officer

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION	WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID2	Monitoring and Audit Committee.	Improving the collection and recovery of all debts owing to the Council.	Devise and implement a further campaign to increase the take up of direct debit.	Apr/ Oct 05	Rob Thompson	6A
<b>CUSTOMER FOCUS</b>			<b>RISK ASSESSMENT</b>			
<i>Impact</i>	<i>Measurable customer outcomes</i>		<i>Risk of failure</i>	<i>Consequence of failure</i>	<i>Risk Priority</i>	<i>Recommended action</i>
Low	Increase take-up of DD, more efficient use of resources by cutting cost of collection.		Low	Medium	Low	Agree timetable with housing and prepare joint project plan.

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION	WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID3	Monitoring and Audit Committee.	Improving the collection and recovery of all debts owing to the Council.	Devise and implement a further media campaign on debt payment.	Apr/ Sept 05	Rob Thompson	6A
<b>CUSTOMER FOCUS</b>			<b>RISK ASSESSMENT</b>			

<i>Impact</i>	<i>Measurable customer outcomes</i>	<i>Risk of failure</i>	<i>Consequence of failure</i>	<i>Risk Priority</i>	<i>Recommended action</i>
Medium	Raise public awareness of debt issues and help available.	Low	Medium	Low	Contact Viacom and book slots, plan artwork.

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID4	Performance Standards Self-Assessment, Next Steps.	Working towards achievement of the new National Performance Standards in benefits.	Undertake self assessment against new performance standards.			May 05	Robin Bates	1A, 6B
CUSTOMER FOCUS			RISK ASSESSMENT					
<i>Impact</i>	<i>Measurable customer outcomes</i>	<i>Risk of failure</i>	<i>Consequence of failure</i>	<i>Risk Priority</i>	<i>Recommended action</i>			
High	Improve service to the public, faster more accurate benefit delivery.	Medium	High	High	Put in place project plan to achieve compliance with new performance standards.			

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID5	Performance Standards Self-Assessment.	Working towards achievement of the National Performance Standards in benefits.	Continue to improve performance in counter fraud administration.			May 05	Robin Bates	1A
CUSTOMER FOCUS			RISK ASSESSMENT					
<i>Impact</i>	<i>Measurable customer outcomes</i>	<i>Risk of failure</i>	<i>Consequence of failure</i>	<i>Risk Priority</i>	<i>Recommended action</i>			
High	Prevention of fraud and error entering the benefits. Court action taken where fraud can be proven.	Medium	High	High	Fraud team restructured to provide additional resource and expertise.			

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID6	Performance Plan	Improving Communication with all our customers.	Devise customer satisfaction surveys for all services. Undertake surveys and implement improvements identified.			July 05	Rob Thompson	1A, 5A, 6B
CUSTOMER FOCUS			RISK ASSESSMENT					
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes		Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action		
Low	Better use of Council's resources to provide a more effective service to the public.		Medium	Low	Low	Identify key areas for improvement and target surveys to these areas.		

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID7	Legislation	Achieving best value in the delivery of revenue and benefit services.	Continue rolling programme to review all council tax discounts and exemptions.			Apr 05	Derry Wilson	6A
CUSTOMER FOCUS			RISK ASSESSMENT					
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes		Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action		
Medium	Protection of the public purse by improving fraud detection.		Low	Medium	Medium	Ensure programme set to review all discounts and exemptions during year.		

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID8	Monitoring and Audit Committee	Improving Communication with all our customers.	Continue to update and publish a series of information leaflets in plain English for revenues service.			June 05	Derry Wilson	1A, 5A
CUSTOMER FOCUS			RISK ASSESSMENT					

Impact	Measurable customer outcomes	Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action
Medium	Improved service to the public by well-trained and knowledgeable staff.	Medium	Low	Low	Set up project team to review and design leaflets.

	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID9	Monitoring and Audit Committee	Improving Communication with all our customers.	Review standard documents and forms, updating and introducing more user friendly versions			July 05	Deena Wilson Robert Thompson Robin Bates	5A
<b>CUSTOMER FOCUS</b>			<b>RISK ASSESSMENT</b>					
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes	Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action			
Medium	Ensure the public are treated in a confidential and non-discriminatory manner.	Medium	Low	Low	Set up review team to ascertain sections requirements.			

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID10	E Government Strategy, Next Steps	Achieving best value in the delivery of revenue and benefit services.	Undertake review of electronic document management within revenues. Plan and implement use of workflow capabilities.			May 05	Rob Thompson Deena Wilson	5A, 6A, 6B
<b>CUSTOMER FOCUS</b>			<b>RISK ASSESSMENT</b>					
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes	Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action			
High	Improve customer services and satisfaction levels.	High	High	High	Draw up project plan specify requirements and deliverables.			

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID11	Performance Indicators, Next Steps	Improving performance in the collection and recovery of all debts owing to the Council.	Promote debit and credit card payments through response centre and monitor impact of on line payments.			June 05	Rob Thompson	5A, 6A
CUSTOMER FOCUS			RISK ASSESSMENT					
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes		Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action		
Medium	Ensure records are up to date and the public are billed correctly receiving the benefits that are due to them.		Low	Medium	Low	Set up monitoring mechanism and agree marketing strategy.		

	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID12	E Government Strategy, Next Steps	Improving Communication with all our customers.	Facilitate on line billing for council tax and NNDR.			Sept 05	Rob Thompson Deena Wilson	85A, 6A, 6B
CUSTOMER FOCUS			RISK ASSESSMENT					
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes		Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action		
Low	Improve the quality and scope of information available to the public		High	Medium	Low	Agree requirements with supplier and set up project implementation team.		

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID13	E Government Strategy, Next Steps.	Improving Communication with all our customers.	Continue to develop on line-form capability for revenues and benefits			Sept 05	Deena Wilson Kirsty Gilbert	1A, 5A, 6B

CUSTOMER FOCUS		RISK ASSESSMENT			
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes	Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action
Medium	Improve communication with the public to provide information in plain English.	Medium	Medium	Low	Identify best practice, implement and update web site.

	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION	WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID14	Performance Indicators	Improving performance in the collection and recovery of all debts owing to the Council.	Continue to work with legal to develop and implement county court recovery procedures on the IKEN system.	July 05	Rob Thompson	6A, 6B
CUSTOMER FOCUS		RISK ASSESSMENT				
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes	Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action	
High	Improve use of resources to provide a better service to the public.	Medium	High	Medium	Work with legal services and suppliers to develop basic workflows and procedures.	

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION	WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID15	Performance Standards Self-Assessment, Next Steps.	Working towards achievement of the National Performance Standards in benefits.	Extend monitoring and quality control checks within benefits to include checking prior to notification letters being dispatched.	Sept 05	Robin Bates	1A, 6B
CUSTOMER FOCUS		RISK ASSESSMENT				
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes	Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action	
Medium	Improved use of resources to provide a better service to the public.	Medium	Medium	Medium	Set up procedure and monitoring arrangements to link with DIP workflows.	



REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID16	Performance Indicators, Next Steps	Working towards achievement of the National Performance Standards in benefits.	Identify further bidding opportunities for funding from Performance Standards Fund.			Ongoing	Robin Bates	1A, 5A, 6B
CUSTOMER FOCUS			RISK ASSESSMENT					
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes		Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action		
Low	Improved use of resources to provide a better service to the public.		Medium	Low	Low	Identify potential projects for funding, i.e. mobile benefits bus, extended RSL Pilot.		

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID17	E- Government Strategy, Next Steps	Improving performance in the collection and recovery of all debts owing to the Council.	Develop recovery module and management reporting suite on new Academy NNDR system			Ongoing	Rob Thompson Kirsty Gilbert	5A, 6A, 6B
CUSTOMER FOCUS			RISK ASSESSMENT					
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes		Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action		
High	Better use of resources to give improved standard of service to customers.		High	High	High	Ensure sufficient resource available throughout lifetime of project.		

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID18	Performance Indicators	Improving performance in the collection and recovery of all debts owing to the Council.	Review bailiff services, internal and external			July 05	Rob Thompson	5A, 6A, 6B
CUSTOMER FOCUS			RISK ASSESSMENT					
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes		Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action		
Medium	Better use of resources to give improved standard of service to customers.		Medium	Medium	Medium	Review use of internal/external bailiff provision. Undertake SWOT analysis. Report on findings and implement agreed actions.		

REF:	SOURCE OF ISSUE	PERFORMANCE ISSUE	ACTION			WHEN	WHO	CORPORATE PRIORITY
ID19	Performance Indicators	Working towards achievement of the National Performance Standards in benefits.	Progress equality action plan			April 05	Robin Bates	1A, 5A
CUSTOMER FOCUS			RISK ASSESSMENT					
Impact	Measurable customer outcomes		Risk of failure	Consequence of failure	Risk Priority	Recommended action		
Medium	Equal access to services for all customers.		Medium	Medium	Low	Implement agreed actions in service action plan.		

## 8. RESOURCE AND RISK ASSESSMENT

A summary of the service unit budget for 2005/6 is set out below.

	Budget 05/06
	£000
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	
Employees	1,224,500
Premises	0
Transport	12,500
Supplies & Services	261,500
Third Party Payments	0
Transfer Payments	13,910,700
Support Services	841,700
Capital Charges	100,700
<b>GROSS EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>16,351,600</b>
<b>INCOME</b>	
Grants, Fees & Charges	14,608,700
Recharges	0
<b>GROSS INCOME</b>	<b>14,608,700</b>
<b>NET EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>1,742,900</b>

### Delivering economic, efficient and effect services

Kettering Borough Council is committed to increasing the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the services it provides in order to continually improve value for money in service provision.

It is the Council's aim to exceed the 2.5% efficiency target set by the Government. The Income & Debt Unit will continue to identify and deliver efficiency savings in its operations. A number of actions set out in this Service Plan aim to deliver more economic, efficient and effective service delivery. For example:

- Staffing resource will be kept under review
- Staff productivity will be continually developed
- The new IT systems (electronic document management and NNDR) implemented during 2004/05 will be further utilised

In order to comply with the requirements of the new national efficiency framework, the Council will set out more specific information relating to the delivery of efficiency savings in its Annual Efficiency Statement. This will be published in April 2005 in line with national timetable.

### Additional resources information

Most of the action planning activities can be met within existing financial resources, as they represent a realignment of existing services or they will result in efficiency savings.

Staffing resources within the services areas have been reviewed over the past eighteen months. The purpose of the review was to establish and put in place the resource required to improve performance and maintain it at a level that places the authority amongst the top twenty five percent of authorities nationally.

## 9. CONTACT INFORMATION

### Customer Contact Information

**Income and Debt Help-line number** Tel: 01536 534235

**Head of Income and Debt Management** - Cathy Hipkin Tel: 01536 534327  
Email: [cathyhipkin@kettering.gov.uk](mailto:cathyhipkin@kettering.gov.uk)

### Benefits

**Benefits Manager** - Robin Bates Tel: 01536 532428  
Email: [robinbates@kettering.gov.uk](mailto:robinbates@kettering.gov.uk)

### Revenues

**Revenues manager** – Rob Thompson Tel: 01536 532449  
Email: [robertthompson@kettering.gov.uk](mailto:robertthompson@kettering.gov.uk)

### Policy & Performance

**Business Support Manager (Acting)** – Deena Wilson Tel: 01536 534190  
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# Benefits Service Business Plan

## 2005 - 2006

## The Benefits Service Mission Statement

We will work to improve the quality of life in the Borough and reduce poverty by providing quick, easy and efficient access to services.

### *The Benefits Service Vision*

- Maximise access to benefits for the people of Kettering in line with current legislation
- Ensure we actively work towards protecting public funds by detecting fraud and error within the system and recover overpayments where applicable
- We will work with local welfare agencies, partners and registered social landlords in order to improve benefit administration and knowledge
- We will assess claims in an accurate and timely manner and work towards removing any barriers to work
- Implement systems and procedures to ensure completion of claims for benefit are quick and easy
- Implement quality control systems in line with the national performance standards in order to ensure the integrity and security of the benefit system
- Increase our presence in the community to enable better understanding of the benefit system
- Encourage the take up of benefit, particularly in relation to the elderly and vulnerable.

### Key objectives for 2005/2006

- Implement and monitor service standards with the Customer Service Centre and the Housing Department through effective liaison and maintenance of the Departmental Service Level Agreement.

**Action required:** Working agreement being updated in line with the introduction of the new corporate contact centre.

- Achieve further improvement in the best value performance indicators in line with Local and national targets.

**Action required:** Reduce impact of changes in Legislation, relating to changes in circumstances by continually monitoring the effect these changes bring.

- Enhance speed and accuracy of processing through increased streamlining of processes and procedures.

**Action required:** Review current practices and work with internal and external partners to improve overall service delivery.

- Continue to monitor staff absence through the Councils absence policy to identify potential problems within the workforce.

**Action required:** Reduction in staff absence and improvement in work life balance.

- Continue to monitor staff performance against agreed targets and review performance monitoring routines from April 2004.

**Action required:** Increase in staff productivity by 25% over the next 2 years (first year measured (2002/2003 at 2.5 cases per hour). Targets based on the national average for processing of claims.

2002/2003	-	2.5 per hour achieved
2003/2004	-	2.8 per hour (12.5% increase achieved)
2004/2005	-	2.9 per hour (Target not yet met)

Figures compiled February 2005.

- Implement further improved training plan for new starters and work with staff to identify existing training needs.

**Action required:** Review current methods and implement plan based on best practice material and benchmarking.

- Work with the Councils Equality project to ensure compliance with BVPI2 (equality standard). See Appendix 2

**Action required:** Comply with Councils strategies to prescribed timelines.

- Increase the Benefit service presence in the community.

**Action required:** Work with partners to improve services in the community relating to benefit take-up.

- Continue to implement and improve areas outlined in the BFI CPA report in the following:
  - Improve procedural guidance,
  - Conduct management checks to DWP standards,
  - Improve benefit take up through campaigns,



- Update and improve benefit application form taking into account local minority groups,
- Improve information held on the Kettering Borough Council website,
- Provide a Landlord information pack and information on the website,

**Action required:** Continue progress to the standards set out by the Department of Work and pensions.

- Implement improvements as outlined in the internal audit report dated January 2004 in the following areas:

- Formulate proper and regular management controlled balancing and reconciliation of journals to the corporate financial management system,
- Complete risk assessment in order to ascertain which cases are to be checked during monitoring routines,

**Action required:** Implement new routines in 2005/2006 alongside new AGGRESSO financial management system. Risk assessment routines to be extended and enhanced during 2005/2006.

- Build on pilot home working practices currently employed by Senior managers to all areas of benefit administration.

**Action required:** Conduct benchmarking with other "live" sites and complete trial. Consider funding through performance standards.

- Implement RSL verification scheme from April 2005.

**Action required:** Await decision on funding through performance standards fund.

- Analyse management-training needs and commence management-training program.

**Action required:** Await decision on performance standard fund bid

- Utilise the performance standard fund by evaluating any performance improvement measures available through the fund.

**Action required:** Complete all planned bids and implement the result of any funding into working practices during 2005/2006.

- Implement a set of staff and management service and performance delivery expectations.

**Action required:** Prepare outline document and consult with senior manager and staff on issues around staff and management promises.

- Enhance speed and accuracy of processing through increased streamlining of processes and procedures.

**Action required:** Review current practices and work with internal and external partners to improve overall service delivery. Consider assessment function being partially transferred to the customer service centre.

Appendix 1			
BV code	Indicator	Target	Definition
BVPI2	The level of the Commission for Racial Equality's 'Standard for Local Government' to which the authority conforms.	Local	<p>Levels are defined in the CRE document "Racial Equality means Quality" and "Auditing for Equality" pages 15, 33 to 37. Authorities should report the level they have reached as follows:</p> <p>Level 1: The authority has written a racial policy statement.</p> <p>Level 2: The authority has an action plan for monitoring and achieving its racial equality policy.</p> <p>Level 3: Results of ethnic monitoring against equalities and consultations with local communities are used to review overall authority policy.</p> <p>Level 4: The authority can demonstrate clear improvements in its services resulting from monitoring, consulting with local communities, and acting on its equal opportunities policy.</p> <p>Level 5: The authority is an example of best practice in the way that it monitors and provides services to ethnic minorities, and is helping other authorities/forces to achieve high standards. Confirmation that the authority has reached this level must have been provided by the CRE.</p> <p>To report these levels, an authority must have adopted the CRE's "Standard for Local Government". If the authority has not adopted this standard, it should report the following:</p> <p>"This authority has not adopted the CRE Standard for Local Government."</p>

## Fraud Investigation Section Business Plan 2005/06

In addition to supporting the Benefits Service key objectives, the fraud Investigation Section has produced a business plan in order to outline how the section will develop during the current financial year. This will ensure that Kettering Borough Council is **working with and on behalf of local people in order to reduce fraud and error in the community.**

Kettering BC Housing/Council Tax Benefit Anti-Fraud Policy provides a clear and challenging commitment to:

**Actively promote initiatives for the prevention and detection of fraud in the community.**

The Housing/Council Tax Benefit Anti Fraud Strategy and the corporate Sanctions Policy will outline the measures available to the Council to deliver on its commitment to the Community.

### 1 Key objectives

- The Benefit fraud team will work to maximise subsidy via sanctions and prosecutions as a deterrent to fraudulent activity and has set the following targets for performance under the amended safe scheme:
  - To Carry out proactive detection of fraud and error in order to maximise the reward subsidy available. The target for 2005/2006 based on results from 2004/2005 will be £35,000,
  - A 5% increase is also projected against WIB rewards identified in 2004/2005 through fraud prevention,
  - To achieve sanction rewards of £20,000 in 2005/2006,
  - To continue successful joint working with the DWP to secure further sanctions in 2005/2006,
  - To actively seek successful prosecutions in 2005/2006 and secure additional publicity as a deterrent,
  - Continue to build relationships with Local authorities during 2005/2006,
- Ensure that all officers have undertaken both PINS and BTEC higher Diplomas in Fraud prevention and detection by the end of 2005/2006.
- Commitment has been made to extend the staff resource in the fraud section from two investigators to the following:
  - Two full time investigators,
  - One Senior Investigation Officer,
- Investigate and invest in the adaptation of a room within the Customer service centre for use for Interviews under caution. This will be to the standard of PACE (Police and Criminal Investigations Act).
- Work on behalf of other Departments of the Council to adopt a corporate procedure for prosecutions and sanctions.
- Continue to develop the new fraud case management system to enhance the performance of the fraud team.
- Support will also continue from the Housing Benefit Manager who will take overall responsibility for the section.

- Introduce SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) key work objectives to all fraud staff during 2005/2006. This will be completed following the appraisal cycle.
- Update job descriptions for Enquiry officers to ensure current duties are consistent with current Legislation and working framework.
- A full and concise set of procedures will be introduced during 2005/2006 that incorporates the many changes made during 2004/2005.
- Obtain resource within Income and Debt to provide the provision of administrative support for fraud officers.

## 2 Monitoring arrangements

- Monitoring of the fraud caseload will be monitored and reported to all areas of the Local Authority on a quarterly basis as follows:
  - Referrals received by source, allegation, benefit type,
  - Referrals accepted for investigation by source, allegation, benefit type,
  - Referrals rejected for investigation by source, allegation, benefit type,
  - Successful investigations by source, allegation, benefit type,
  - Successful sanctions by source, allegation, benefit type,
  - Referrals received by postcode, age group and gender,
  - Referrals accepted for investigation by postcode, age group and gender,
  - Referrals rejected for investigation by postcode, age group and gender,
  - Successful investigations by postcode, age group and gender,
  - Successful sanctions by postcode, age group and gender,
- Performance issues and indicators are reported to Senior Management Team. Performance returns are made through the Councils Corporate Performance Team.
- The Fraud Investigation Sections performance will be benchmarked through Local liaison groups to compare performance and adopt best practice. Additional training and the provision of site visits will also be utilised during the Period. These groups include:
  - CFIS,
  - LAIOG,
  - IPF CIPFA,
  - IRRV,
  - NAFN,
  - AUDIT (NFI),
  - HBSD.

## 3 Quality of investigations

- Regular case reviews will be made of investigation cases as laid out in the Monitoring procedure. Individual errors and omissions will be fed into team meetings, training plans and the appraisal cycle.
- Guidance on how to complete a fraud referral and step, by step information on fraud will continue to be available to all staff and the success of this monitored on a regular

basis as set out in the Monitoring Procedure. Feedback and errors will be addressed through individual feedback, team meetings, regular fraud updates and the appraisal cycle. Monthly and quarterly updates will continue to be circulated to Kettering Borough Council employees.

#### 4 Internal Liaison

- This will be developed and maintained by ensuring that all Kettering Borough Council staff received relevant information on fraud activity within the community and comprehensive Fraud Awareness Training will be provided to all sections dealing with Housing/Council Tax Benefit customers. Liaison with the corporate training officer will look at the possibility including fraud awareness training in the corporate core-training prospectus.

#### 5 Partnership / closer working

- The Benefit Section will continue to work together with The Counter Fraud Investigation Service (DWP) on joint sanction and prosecutions.
- We will work with other departments of the Council who use Sanctions as an effective deterrent to develop each other understanding and share resources where possible.

#### 6 Internal Audit

- If a benefit fraud investigation involves a Council employee.

#### 7 Legal and Democratic Services

- We will work with Legal in order to develop our relationship with regards to sanctions and prosecutions and work towards successful in house prosecutions.
- The need to establish a swift and robust prosecution process has been identified in 2004/2005 as a priority for 2005/2006 and underpins the potential future success of the fraud team.

#### 8 DWP Performance Standards

- The Fraud Investigation Section will continue to work towards full compliance of the Performance Standards and further develop existing practice to improve areas of existing compliancy.
- We will continue to make quarterly returns of performance standards as specified in the performance standards handbook.
- Funding is available through the performance standards fund. However this is restricted to data cleansing and although this will be considered it is not currently an issue with KBC systems of administration.

### Risk analysis of key improvement objectives

Improvement point	Impact on customer of failure	Key points	Risk to Authority of failure
1/ maximise subsidy via sanctions and prosecutions as a deterrent to fraudulent activity.	<b>Low</b>	Implication on budget if fail to meet sanction targets, which pay for the cost of fraud prevention and detection. Weekly incorrect benefit is also an indicator of how successful we have been at identifying error in the benefit system.	<b>High</b>
2/ Qualifications obtained in PINS and BTEC higher Diploma in Fraud prevention and detection and recruitment of additional staff resource.	<b>Low</b>	Failure to meet the Legal requirements of investigations, Lack of expertise to complete prosecution process, failure to detect fraud committed, loss to public funds, Limited capacity to maintain caseload and failure to meet Government BVPI's	<b>High</b>
3/ Adapt interview room to enable interviews under caution and sanction interviews to be compliant with the standards required in PACE (Police and Criminal Investigations Act).	<b>Medium</b>	Non – compliance in law (we currently use rooms at the Jon centre)	<b>High</b>
4/ Adopt a set of procedures that can be recognized and followed by all KBC departments in a format agreed with Legal and Democratic services.	<b>Low</b>	Procedures for benefit fraud are being updated and in a user friendly format an opportunity exists to do this corporately.	<b>Medium</b>

## Reference Documents

### Corporate

Kettering BC mission statement  
Best value performance plan  
Equalities Policy  
Performance management procedures  
CPA self assessment and final report  
Kettering BC prosecution policy and strategy  
Performance Plan  
Next steps program

### Income and Debt Management

Final subsidy claim 2003/2004  
Training Plan 2005/2006  
Fraud business plan  
Benefit and fraud ongoing action plans  
DWP performance standards

### Income and Debt Service Plan 2005/2006

Internal audit report  
Monitoring and performance management results