

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

20 November 2019

COUNCILLOR SARAH BUTIKOFER - CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES

For the period September 2019 to November 2019

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Benefits

The speed of processing target for change of circumstances is 14 days and at the end of Q2, our performance is 8 days. We are continuing to look at introducing a new Verification Policy to aid in reducing this figure further and providing a better service to our customers.

The target for new claims is 20 days and at the end of Q2, our performance is 14 days. The pilot for Benefit Officers dealing with customers face to face when making a new claim has ended but Officers are continuing to take responsibility for the new claims end to end and this is continuing to make the process much more efficient for the customer and the council. We are continuing to look at introducing a new Verification Policy to aid in reducing this figure further and providing a better service to our customers.

Benefits launched a Customer Service survey on 18th October 2019, which will help us understand what the customer expectations are of our service. The survey will provide feedback on the customer service delivery across Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services. The survey will currently run up to 31st March 2020. The survey is being publicised on the Revenues and Benefits web pages, Open Portal. Social Media and on Benefit Notifications. Customer Service Assistants will be asking customers to complete the survey over the telephone and face to face and Benefit Officers are also completing the survey with customers over the telephone. If customers wish to take part in the survey at a later date, then they are being diverted to our web page. This is a good opportunity to engage with our customers, listening to and acting on what they are saying.

Benefit Officers are continuing to have debt recovery training, since Housing Benefit Overpayments debt has moved across into the department. This training is ensuring our staff have the knowledge to be able to advise and support customers in the recovery of the debt but also ensuring income is maximised for the authority.

Eastlaw and Information Governance

NNDC's performance for responding to FOI requests (FOIs) within the required timescales remains above 95% (national target 90%) and a 100% performance rate for responding to individual's subject access requests (SARs).

Democratic Services

The team provided support for the progression of the Corporate Plan through Overview & Scrutiny, Cabinet and then Council including an additional meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 9th October.

Work is ongoing on improving engagement and working practices – with the drafting of a Cabinet / Scrutiny Protocol, a Scrutiny Guide and a Protocol for Member Champions.

Two school visits took place in early November. The school council for St Mary's, Roughton visited on 5th November to learn about the Council and how decisions are made. Woodfields School, Sheringham made a return visit on 8th November after a very successful visit in 2018. They practiced their debating skills and used a ballot box to decide their preferred outcome.

Training for officers on writing committee reports is scheduled for 14th November. This complements the training provided to Members during the induction process on how to read reports quickly and effectively.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Benefits

The Benefit Service are piloting joint working with Revenues in November and December whereby the council tax account will be updated by the Benefits Team at the same time their Benefit claim is updated. Following the pilot being successful, it is hoped this will be rolled out to further Benefit Officers as this will allow for a more efficient customer service for the customer and for the authority.

Ernest Youngs are due to be undertaking our HB subsidy audit 2018/19 in the months of December and January. This has been delayed as this usually starts in November, but this is a nationwide delay by the auditors and the Department for Work and Pensions are looking at a nationwide contingency plans.

The Benefits Service are looking to send out expressions of interest for our Quality Assurance team, Housing Benefit Overpayments and Team Leader Support, along with a job advert for a new job role of a Benefits Performance Officer. The expression of interests will provide resilience and support across the service and the Benefits Performance Officer will be responsible for the development and presentation of performance reports benchmarking activities, providing business

intelligence and data analysis, to ensure the continual development and embedding of a performance culture throughout the service.