

Financial and Customer Services

Service Statement 2018 – 2021

January 2018

Financial and Customer Services

Purpose

Financial and Customer Services provides the Council's front office face to face customer contact and contact centre telephony and also front line services to taxpayers, ratepayers and benefit claimants.

We endeavour to ensure that we maximise the use of resources. We look to challenge all of our services on their delivery to be lean and efficient and to embrace new ways of working that both minimises waste and removes duplication.

Key themes for our service include a direct link with the values of the council's organisational culture strategy.

- Ensuring our services are customer focused
- Supporting staff to embrace change and innovation
- Involving staff in decisions which affect them
- Creating a healthy and positive working environment for staff

Primary functions

The range of services is summarised below:

1. The billing, collection and enforcement of Council Tax;
2. The billing, collection and enforcement of non-domestic rates;
3. The assessment of entitlement to housing benefit and council tax support;
4. Payments of housing benefit;
5. The assessment of entitlement to Blue Badges;
6. The assessment to entitlement of Free School Meals
7. The assessment to entitlement to Concessionary Travel
8. The prevention and detection of fraud;
9. The collection of sundry debt income on behalf of the County Council;
10. Face to Face Customer Service at all Customer Information Centres;
11. Contact Centre Customer Services;
12. Recruit to pay services for the Council, schools and a number of external agencies;
13. Compliance with HMRC VAT, PAYE and NI requirements;
14. The payment of creditors;
15. Income management services;
16. Provision of insurance services to mitigate risks, handle claims, manage the internal insurance fund and reduce potential insurance losses;
17. The provision of general VAT advice to the Council;
18. Systems Administration of the Council's E-Business and travel expenses systems; including hierarchy maintenance, security rules are employed on spend and management of the online catalogues;
19. Provision of the statutory registration service for births, deaths and marriages for the County of Northumberland;
20. Coordinate the Cash in Transit contract;
21. The assessment to entitlement of Local Welfare Provision under the NETs scheme;

Service Parameters

The range of services is summarised below:

1. The billing and collection of £175 million in Council Tax for 151 thousand domestic properties in Northumberland;
2. The billing and collection of £83 million in non-domestic rates billing for 12.5 thousand business premises in Northumberland;
3. The assessment of entitlement to housing benefit and council tax support benefit and its payment for 31 thousand claimants;
4. The administration of 18,000 Blue Badges;
5. The assessment of entitlement to 6,500 Free School Meals;
6. The assessment to entitlement to Concessionary Travel;
7. The prevention and detection of corporate fraud;
8. The processing 125 thousand housing benefit payments per year;
9. The control £76.5 million sundry debt on behalf of the County Council;
10. Facilitation of 182,000 customer visits to the Customer Service Centres per annum;
11. Answering 350,000 telephone contacts at the Cramlington Contact Centre per annum;
12. The assessment of entitlement of 4,000 application to the NETS scheme;
13. Full recruit to pay process for the Council's 12k employees;
14. Payroll service for 54 external organisations;
15. Distributed 23,035 P60s and 3,400 P45s;
16. Pay 152,000 suppliers invoices, 162,000 housing benefit and 116,000 other payments per annum;
17. Managing 1.7 million incoming transactions through the Council's bank accounts;
18. Managing schools income and expenditure through their local accounts, processed 3,119 local account reimbursements and 2,989 income returns to the General Ledger;
19. Receive cash from schools 5 days per week prior to passing onto the Cash in Transit contractor;
20. Dealing with 1,145 insurance claims per annum;
21. Recover £40 million annually from HMRC for VAT.

Summary of Service Resources at 1 April 2017

	Number of posts FTE	Staffing Expenditure £'000	Non Staffing Expenditure £'000	Income £'000	Net Expenditure £'000	Capital Investment £'000
Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	239.77	7,043	1,754	-859	7,938	-
Transactional Financial Services	83.75	2,381	367	-878	1,870	-
Total	323.52	9,424	2,121	-1,737	9,808	-

External Validation

Inspections

The Benefits Service is subject to intensive annual audits and the Housing Benefit Subsidy claim is subject to External Audit sign off via the Department of Work and Pensions. No significant qualification has ever been made to the claim.

Each key financial system is subject to an annual inspection by Internal Audit which, in turn, informs the assurance placed on the Council's systems by its external auditors.

During 2017-2018, 4 Transactional Services and 3 Revenue and Benefits audits were conducted and the final audit reports were issued with assurance levels as follows:

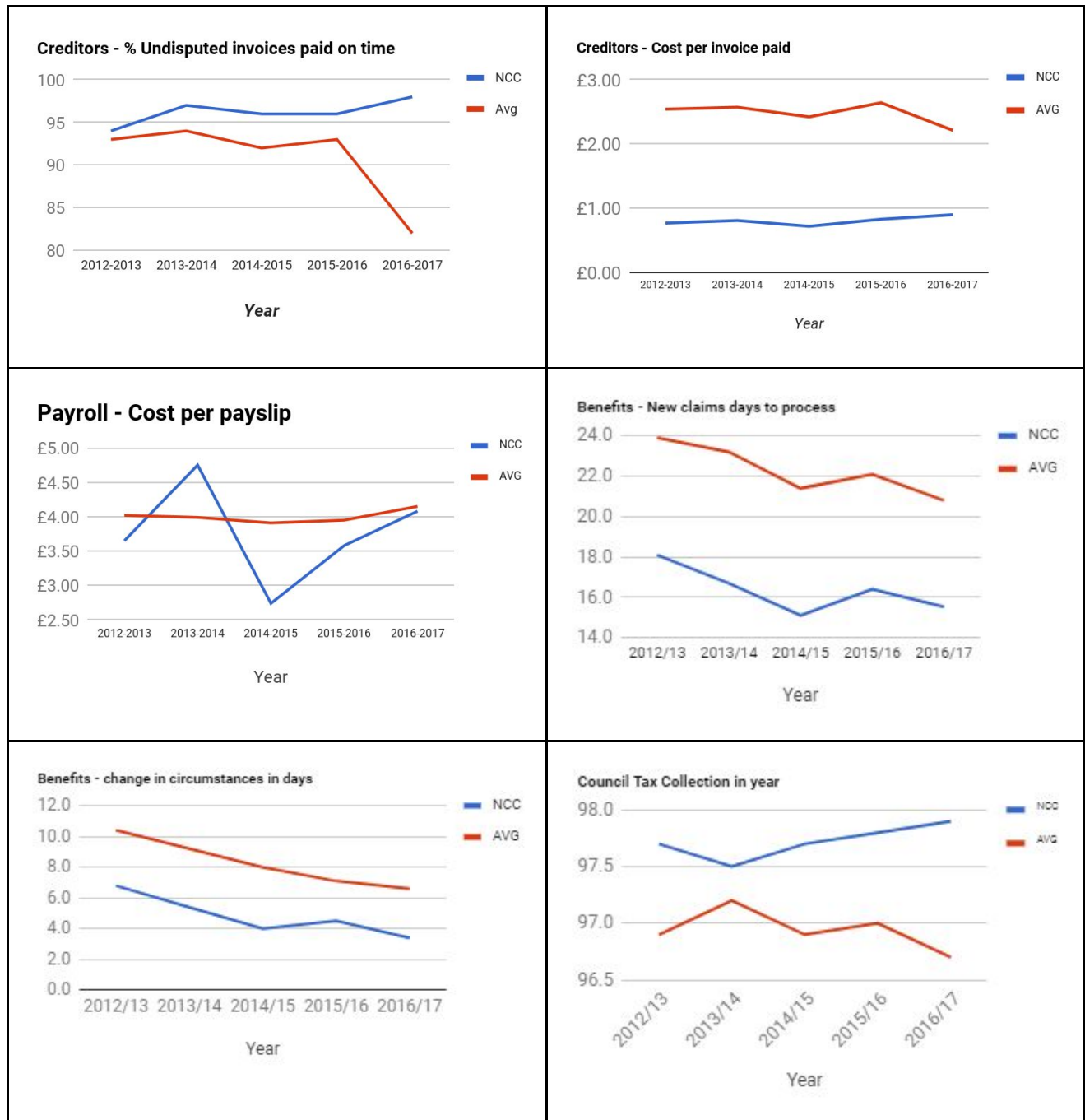
Audit	Assurance
Benefits - External Audit Review of Claim	No amendments
Cash and Bank	Significant
Creditors	Significant
Travel - Senior Officers and Members	Significant
Payroll - last done 2016 however 2018 has started	Moderate
Business Rates	Significant
Revenues & Benefits Northgate System Review	Moderate

Customer perception

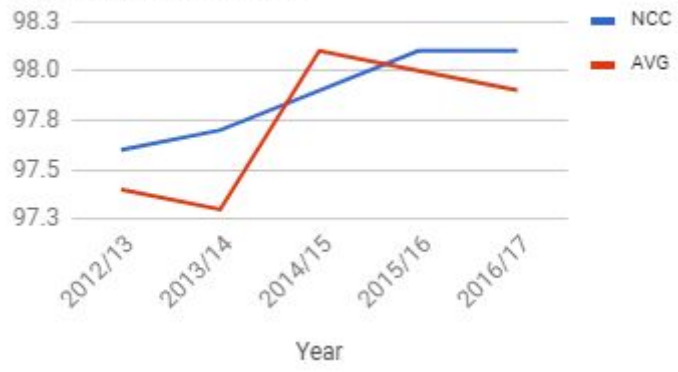
A recent survey of customers who attended each Information Centres across the county resulted in a satisfaction rating of 94%.

Benchmarking

Revenues, Benefits and Transactional Services take part in annual CIPFA Benchmarking Clubs. The most significant results are included below:



Business Rates in year collection



Priorities for 2018 – 2021

Priority Area	Key Milestones
1. Implement staff survey Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Circulate results of the 2017 survey ● Agree Action Plan with staff from the 2017 survey results ● Complete actions identified in the plan by the timelines due
2. Deliver E-Business Cloud implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deliver all modules in line with the Project Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CRP1 - Assessment ○ CRP2 - Design ○ CRP3 - Design and validation ○ Training for all ○ Transition and go live
3. Support the delivery of Back Office Shared Services with Newcastle City Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Investigate and review requirements 2018
4. Increase take up of portal usage once Northgate replacement for Gandlake Citizens Account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Project Plan ● Project Team inc IT ● Implementation ● Training ● Go live
5. Look at options for a revised CTS scheme for 2019-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Utilise Northgate modelling tool ● Options appraisal ● Identify preferred option for scheme
6. Implement all GDPR requirements across all functions - May 2018 changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Complete data asset audits for the DPO (Jan 18) ● Review storage retention policy ● Update all Service Level Agreement documentation to reflect GDPR requirements
7. Implement version 5.1 (web-based) Information at Work release onto Revenues and Benefits document management system by July 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Install release 5.1 into test system ● Complete test plan ● Evaluate new functionality ● Train staff (inc Customer Services) ● Install on live system ● Go live
8. Carry out consultation for the amended council tax support scheme for 2019-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify consultation process ● Liaise with Policy Team over methods of consultation ● Identify stakeholders ● Set up events ● Complete events ● Compile and evaluate responses ● Respond to consultation responses
9. Play an integral role in preparation for the roll out of Universal Credit in Northumberland from November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set up UC Steering Group ● UC presentation to Members

2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure coordination within Council Departments ● Work with DWP Partnership Manager
14. Ensure performance levels remain at or exceed targets for 2017-18 for the services key performance indicators shown below	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monitor monthly performance ● Look at reason for performance deterioration ● Take remedial action where required to address performance issue
15. Evaluate technological capability of Netcall system by September 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Look at the technological capabilities ● Assess effectiveness/efficiencies for staff and customers ● Evaluate cost and efficiencies of implementation
16. Review contact centre shift patterns against demand to ensure current patterns are fit for purpose on an ongoing basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Run report of calls received ● Compare with current shift patterns ● Evaluate effectiveness of current arrangements ● Implement any change with 4 weeks notice to staff
17. Review service provision in Customer Information Centres/Libraries at the conclusion of the review that is being carried out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consider outcome of review ● Evaluate impact of staffing and service provision ● Take appropriate action
18. Expand the verification process for Right To Buy applications for Registered Social Landlords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engage with RSL's ● Negotiate fees for service ● Set up processes ● Implement procedure ● Monitor results ● Report to Audit Committee
19. Work collaboratively with the Insurance Team to identify and reduce fraudulent insurance claims against the Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set up referral process ● Work with Insurance Team ● Investigate details of claim ● Feedback results ● Potential prosecution

Performance Framework

Measure	Outcome			Target
	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Percentage of Council Tax collected in-year	97.8%	97.9	98.0	98.0
Percentage of National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) collected in-year	97.6%	98.1	98.1	98.1
Arrears of Council Tax collected £millions	£4.4	£4.4	4.5	£4.4
Average time for new claims to benefit (days)	16.22	15.53	15.40	16.0
Average time for changes of circumstances (days)	4.35	3.39	3.21	5.0
Average time taken to process Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support new claims and charge events (days)	5.11	4.10	3.89	6.0
Cashable savings achieved by the Corporate Fraud Team	N/A	N/A	N/A	£100k
Non cashable savings achieved by Corporate Fraud Team initiatives	£1.99m	£2.512m	£1.944	£2.0m
BVPI 8 payment of supplier invoices within 30 days of receipt of invoice	97.5%	97.58%	97.62%	97.5%
Cost per invoice paid (CIPFA benchmark)	£0.85	£0.90	Due July 18	£0.90
Proportion of AP payments made by electronic means	95%	96.31%	96.77%	96%
Percentage of public liability insurance claims responded to in 5 working days of receipt	100%	100%	100%	100%
Overpayments made to employees as a percentage of the number paid	0.05%	0.03%	0.04%	0.05%
To answer calls received into the contact centre in 120 seconds	N/A	52.2%		75%
Proportion of Payroll payments made by electronic means including Pensioners	99.50%	99.50%	99.89%	99.50%