

**MISSION STATEMENT**

***To Improve the Quality of Life  
For Those Who Live and Work in The District***

21 August 2006

Dear Councillor

You are hereby invited to a meeting of the **Economy Board** to be held in **Committee Room 2**, Civic Centre, Portholme Road, Selby on 29 August 2006 commencing at **4.00pm**.

The agenda is set out below.

**PUBLIC SESSION**

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** and Notice of Substitution
2. **DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST**

To receive any disclosures of interest in matters to be considered at the meeting in accordance with the provisions of Sections 94 and 117 of the Local Government Act 1972 or the National Code of Local Government Conduct.

3. **MINUTES**

To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Economy Board held on 13 June 2006 (previously circulated).

4. **CHAIR'S ADDRESS TO THE ECONOMY BOARD**

5. **DATE AND COMMENCEMENT OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE ECONOMY BOARD** – Verbal report of the Head of Service for Planning and Economical Development.
6. **ECONOMY BOARD 2006/2007 PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT: APRIL 2006 – MAY 2006** - Report of the Head of Service - Policy and Performance (pages 6 to 13 attached).
7. **BUDGET MONITORING REPORT TO 30 JUNE 2006-** Report of the Head of Service for Finance and Central Administration (pages 14 to 21 attached).
8. **GROWING THE ECONOMY**
- 8.1 **STRATEGIC ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT AND SUB REGIONAL INVESTMENT PLAN** – Report of the Head of Service for Planning and Economical Development (pages 22 to 31 attached).
9. **COMMUNITY INVESTMENT BUILDING**
- 9.1 **CIPs UPDATE** - Report of the Head of Service for Planning and Economical Development (pages 32 to 34 attached).
- 9.2 **SELBY DISTRICT URBAN RENAISSANCE PROGRAMME - PROGRESS UPDATE** - Report of the Head of Service for Planning and Economical Development (pages 35 to 40 attached).
10. **RURAL ECONOMY**
- 10.1 **LEADER + REPORT** - Report of the Head of Service for Planning and Economical Development (pages 41 to 51 attached).
11. **BENEFITS**
- 11.1 **BENEFITS – VISION AND STRATEGIES** - Report of the Head of Service for Planning and Economical Development (pages 52 to 104 attached).
12. **PRIVATE SESSION**

**It will be recommended that in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, the meeting be not open to the Press and public during discussion of the following items as there will be disclosure of exempt information as defined in Section 100(1) of the Act as described in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Act.**
- 12.1 **PARTNERING UPDATE** - Report of the Head of Service for Planning and Economical Development (to follow).

## REPORTS FOR INFORMATION

1. North Yorkshire Building Control Partnership Statement of Accounts 2005/2006

A copy of this report is available in the Members' Room



M Connor  
Chief Executive  
21 August 2006

### **DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST – GUIDANCE NOTES:**

- (a) Members are reminded of the need to consider whether they have any personal or prejudicial interests to declare on any item on this agenda, and, if so, of the need to explain the reason(s) why they have any personal or prejudicial interests when making a declaration.
- (b) The Democratic Services Officer or relevant Committee Administrator will be pleased to advise you on interest issues. Ideally their views should be sought as soon as possible and preferably prior to the day of the meeting, so that time is available to explore adequately any issues that might arise.

### **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE ECONOMY BOARD**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Start time</b>
03 OCTOBER 2006	19 SEPTEMBER 2006	4.00pm
13 NOVEMBER 2006	27 OCTOBER 2006	4.00pm
10 JANUARY 2007	22 DECEMBER 2006	3.00pm
13 FEBRUARY 2007	31 JANUARY 2007	3.00pm
11 APRIL 2007	27 MARCH 2007	4.00pm

**MEMBERSHIP OF THE ECONOMY BOARD**  
**11 MEMBERS**

Conservative

J Ashton  
D Bain-Mackay  
W Norton  
C Pearson  
B Percival (Chair)  
R Sayner

Labour

R Packham  
N Martin  
W May  
R Wilson

Independent

R H Sweeting

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## DESCRIPTIONS OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6. Information which reveals that the authority proposes –
  - (a) to give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
  - (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

**AGENDA ITEM NUMBER:**

**PUBLIC SESSION**

**TITLE : ECONOMY BOARD 2006/2007 PERFORMANCE  
INDICATOR REPORT: APRIL 2006 – MAY 2006**

**TO : ECONOMY BOARD**

**DATE : 29 AUGUST 2006**

**BY : HEATHER WATTS, HEAD OF SERVICE - POLICY &  
PERFORMANCE**

**AUTHOR : MELANIE NETTLESHIP - POLICY & PERFORMANCE  
ASSISTANT**

1. LINK TO COUNCIL POLICY

1.1 Performance management work is linked to all council policies.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To assist Members in focussing on priority areas and managing the performance of the Council by updating the Economy Board on the progress that is being made in 2006/2007 for the corporate and statutory Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for which they are responsible.

3. LINK TO STRATEGIC THEMES AND PRIORITIES

3.1 *The ongoing management of performance and improvement data assists the Authority in achieving its strategic themes and priorities.*

**RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT FUTURE ACTIONS AND PRIORITIES BE ESTABLISHED TO  
RECOGNISE ACHIEVEMENT AND ADDRESS THE AREAS OF  
WEAKNESS HIGHLIGHTED.**

#### 4. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES

Performance management plays a key role in all of the corporate policy work, listed below.

- 4.1 • Best Value

No impact.

- 4.2 • Equalities

No impact.

- 4.3 • Community Safety and Crime Reduction

No impact.

- 4.4 • Procurement

No impact.

- 4.5 • Risk Management and Risk Register

There is a significant risk given the impact that performance management has on the outcome of Council and service area inspections.

- 4.6 • Sustainability

No impact.

- 4.7 • Gershon Efficiency Savings

No impact.

#### 5. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 5.1 This report has been produced in accordance with the format recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 10 March 2005 (agenda item 770).

- 5.2 The 'star' ratings for the statutory performance indicators are categorised by using the quartile ratings that are calculated from the performance statistics submitted by District Councils. They are used to compare performance both nationally and locally.

- 5.3 For the non - statutory performance indicators the star ratings are based on the tolerance levels and/or projected target figures provided by the relevant service managers.

- 5.4 The thumbs up/down are based on the commentary provided, quartile ratings, tolerance levels and projected targets.

- 5.5 Details of the projected targets and the background figures used to determine quartile ratings and tolerance levels can be obtained from the Policy and Performance section. This information helps to decide on the content of this exception-based report.

(For greater detail see the main report)

## 6. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 6.1 This report has been produced using the statistical data that is collated from a broad range of service areas for statutory performance indicators throughout the year. Background figures and full audit trails are available within service areas and from the Policy and Performance section.
- 6.2 The quartile ratings currently relate to 2004/2005 year-end data.
- 6.3 The commentary for this report has been provided by the Officer's responsible for reporting the data.
- 6.4 The report shows which BVPIs have been classed as a High Risk and/or a CPA PI by the Audit Commission.
- 6.5 In accordance with the new constitution, from 2006/2007 Human Resources will be reported under Policy and Resources Committee.

## 7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications.

8. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS




8.1 ***ECONOMY BOARD 2006/2007 PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT:  
APRIL 2006 – MAY 2006***

*Please find below a key to the star ratings.*

KEY	QUARTILE / TOLERANCE
★ ★ ★ ★	BEST
★ ★ ★ ☆	SECOND
★ ★ ☆ ☆	THIRD
★ ☆ ☆ ☆	WORST

**ECONOMY BOARD PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

**BENEFITS SERVICES**

Code	Description	2005/2006 Year End	2006/2007 Target	Reporting Period	2006/2007 Year to Date		2004/2005 Government Top Quartile Figure
<b>BV78a</b>	Speed of processing: Average time for processing new claims in days.	24.8	23.00 ↓	Monthly	24.22 	★★★★	28.0
<b>BV78b</b>	Speed of processing: Average time for processing notifications of changes of circumstances in days.	11.0	8.30 ↓	Monthly	11.35 	★★☆☆	6.8
<b>BENSPS2</b>	Percentage of new claims processed within 14 days of all information.	96%	96.90% ↑	Monthly	86.21% 	Compared to 2006/2007 Target	

**BV78a** - Maintenance of good performance at 26.1 days average time to process New Claims for the month of May 2006 but this has been out of our control and slipped because of Document Management issues (including downtime and backlogs) affecting the ability to process during the month and at the end of April 2006. The current national performance standard has changed from 1 April 2006 to 30 days from the previous 36 days.

Forecast : The increased risk of a reduced performance in May 2006, identified at the start has been realized but actions taken have minimised this and reduced the overall impact. We expect the performance days to improve slowly over the next month.

Actions taken to minimize the risks

- Ring fenced certain high-risk items and reallocated resource to concentrate on these
- Daily statistics of outstanding work
- Weekly review performance with all staff.

## ECONOMY BOARD PERFORMANCE UPDATE

### BENEFITS SERVICES continued

**BV78b** - Performance is at 11.3 days average for the month. We have addressed a number of areas of the COC processing operation to identify a small number of anomalous changes that have been skewing the figures and are not representative of the general good performance in this area.

The section has maintained performance through the month despite the Document management issues.

Note that the DWP have revised the scoring against the national standard for this indicator in the performance standards because of administration and legislation changes to Housing Benefit. The standard remains at 9 days but we still retain a score of 3 (good) For any number between 9 and 20 days even if this may be in one of the lower quartiles overall. The DWP are not convinced that the reporting of these statistics is accurate amongst many authorities.

Actions taken as on previous page.

**BENPS2** - A good performance of 85.2% processed within 14 days for all types of claim for the month, which is a slippage from previous months again for the reasons above. This is below the new performance standard of 90%.

Forecast and actions as above.

**ECONOMY BOARD PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

**LOCAL TAXATION**

Code	Description	2005/2006 Year End	2006/2007 Target	Reporting Period	2006/2007 Year to Date		2004/2005 Government Top Quartile Figure
<b>BV9</b>	Percentage of Council Tax collected.	97.77%	98.20% ↑	Monthly Cumulative	<b>22.08%</b> 👍	May 2006 target 21%	98.50%
<b>BV10</b>	The percentage of non-domestic rates due for the financial year which were received by the authority.	98.83%	99.15% ↑	Monthly Cumulative	<b>21.56%</b> 👍	May 2006 target 20%	99.20%

This year's recovery timetable has been considerably heightened to provide a much stricter regime to match legislative requirements and, at the same time, persuade Council Tax and Non Domestic Rate payers to pay on the due dates. The stability of the new local taxation computer system (Northgate) is central to this objective and, ultimately, resource input into recovery will reduce as the benefit of cash flow increases.

The effect of this approach is now reflected in May's collection performance for both council tax and Non Domestic Rates with collection levels substantially above the targets set for this year and 2005/6 actual performance.

Unfortunately, day to day administration has been affected by the public's response and the number of complaints have risen but this has to be accepted as a consequence of the increased recovery which is necessary to achieve the longer term aims of the service.

A large number of Small Business Rate Relief applications have been assessed and processed. An action plan has been established to identify and contact other Non Domestic Rate payers who may be eligible for the relief but who have not yet applied for it.

**ECONOMY BOARD PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

**LOCAL TAXATION continued**

The Assistant Officer Local Taxation is working from home on a permanent basis (subject to review). Currently, she is working on qualitative measures based on staff performance.

Plans in place to improve performance include,

- One agency staff employment extended to end of June 2006 to support the section whilst outstanding work on Non Domestic Rates is completed.
- The recovery timetable for 2006/7 has been intensified and the number of court hearings doubled to eight.
- The Senior Local Taxation Officer removed from most other duties to concentrate on outstanding Non Domestic Rate issues together with the most experienced Local Taxation Assistants.
- The outstanding Non Domestic Rate work has been 'ringfenced' and is being cleared by 2 Local Taxation Assistants. Current year's changes are being dealt with separately by a third Local Taxation Assistant.

**AGENDA ITEM NUMBER:**

**PUBLIC SESSION**

**TITLE : BUDGET MONITORING TO 30 JUNE 2006**

**TO : ECONOMY BOARD**

**DATE : 29<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2006**

**BY : HEAD OF FINANCE AND CENTRAL SERVICES**

**AUTHOR : LINDSEY RICHARDSON, SENIOR ACCOUNTANT**

1. LINK TO COUNCIL POLICY

1.1 *Budget monitoring procedures underpin all Council Policies.*

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To present members with details of major variations between budgeted and actual expenditure for the Board for the first three months of the 2006/07 financial year.

3. LINK TO CORPORATE AIMS AND PRIORITIES

3.1 *Budget monitoring procedures work with all corporate aims and priorities.*

**RECOMMENDATION**

**That Members endorse the actions of Officers and note the contents of the report.**

4. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES

4.1 • Best Value

Effective budget monitoring helps to ensure that the council is aiming for continuous improvement as demanded by the principles of Best Value.

4.2 • Equalities

No direct impact.

4.3 • Community Safety and Crime Reduction

No direct impact.

4.4 • Procurement

No direct impact.

4.5 • Risk Management and Risk Register

This report helps to ensure the reduction of risks arising from unexpected overspending by enabling early preventative or remedial action to be taken.

4.6 • Sustainability

No direct impact.

4.7 • Gershon Efficiency Savings

The report itself will not lead to any efficiency savings. The original budgets identified in Annex A include any cashable Gershon efficiency savings as identified in the recent Backward and Forward look Annual Efficiency Statement.

5. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

5.1 This report provides details of Economy Board expenditure and income variations for the financial year 2006/07.

(For greater detail see the main report)

6. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

6.1 The table in Annex A shows details of all variances within Economy Board budgets for the first three months of the financial year, summarised at Service level.

6.2 Annex A also includes a forecast outturn for full-year expenditure or income on all variances, as agreed by budget officers.

6.3 Annex B details the major variances arising in the financial year 2006/07. A major variance is one greater than or equal to £5,000 and 10% of profiled budget, or less than or equal to -£5,000 and -10% of profiled budget. In addition, budget variances exceeding £25,000 and -£25,000 will also be presented if they do not meet the +/- 10% criteria, as these are considered material.

6.4 The information provided in Annex B has been produced on an exception basis. Any variances that do not exceed the criteria in paragraph 6.3 have been excluded. This report does not replace the requirement for a budget officer to submit a report to request a supplementary estimate – budget officers are expected to report such items separately.

- 6.5 This report has identified several significant variances within Economy Board. These have been shown at Annex B and are as follows: -
- 6.6 Human Resources expenditure is exceeding budget profiled for both recruitment advertising (£14k) and grants and subscriptions (£6.7k). The forecast outturn for both of these items is higher than the current budget, and the funding shortfall will be addressed as part of the Accountancy budget monitoring meetings. Training is currently underspent by £6k, and the budget profile will be amended to match the planned training programme.
- 6.7 There are a number of variances within the Economic Development service, however these are limited to timing differences. The very nature of Economic Development projects such as Leader + and Your Community Your Future means that the timing of expenditure and income is very difficult to predict. Expenditure is generally reliant on other organisations claiming the funding from us, and income is only claimed once expenditure has been incurred.
- 6.8 The majority of the Housing Benefits variance relates to a net underspend on benefits paid out along with an overachievement of grant income (total -£150.7k). Revised claims will however be submitted which should adjust the amount of grant receivable. Further variances relate to accruals for ERYC database administration and NY Benefits Training Bid, which are yet to be cleared through the submission of invoices.
- 6.9 There is one major variance for the industrial units, this being an accrual for the management fee payable to North Yorkshire County Council for Sherburn Enterprise Centre and Swordfish Way. This will be cleared by the submission of an invoice by NYCC.
- 6.10 Annex C details the changes to the original budget that have been approved for Economy Board in the financial year 2006/07. Included within Annex C are: -

Revenue Bids totalling £54,270  
Virements totalling £67,690  
Carry Forward Budgets totalling £144,720  
Supplementary Estimates totalling £7,500

- 6.11 Accountancy Section officers continue to hold regular meetings with all budget officers within the authority to discuss financial performance against budget.

## 7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report. Budget officers are expected to produce separate reports to the Committee to request any supplementary estimates arising from budget monitoring reports.

8. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

8.1 Accountancy working papers.

Corporate Budget Monitoring as at 30th June								
	Original Budget 2006/07	Virement & Supp Est 2006/07	Revised Budget 2006/07	Budget to 30th June	Actual 30th June	Variance 30th June	Forecast Outturn 2006/07	Variance 2006/07
<b><u>Economy Board</u></b>								
Building Control	53,120	-	53,120	8,284	6,670	(1,614)	53,120	-
Bus Station	4,350	2,000	6,350	5,380	5,522	142	6,350	-
Corporate Employee Initiatives	99,710	35,360	135,070	34,863	44,499	9,636	165,090	30,020
Economic Development	256,740	157,530	414,270	256,942	284,447	27,505	414,270	-
Housing Benefits	863,295	49,740	913,035	2,747,264	2,549,880	(197,384)	913,035	-
Industrial Units	(68,620)	(10)	(68,630)	(224,638)	(286,547)	(61,909)	(68,630)	-
Local Taxation Collection	543,040	29,560	572,600	519,329	516,655	(2,674)	572,600	-
<b>Total Economy Board</b>	<b>1,751,635</b>	<b>274,180</b>	<b>2,025,815</b>	<b>3,347,424</b>	<b>3,121,127</b>	<b>(226,297)</b>	<b>2,055,835</b>	<b>30,020</b>

ECONOMY BOARD - MAJOR VARIANCES TO 30 JUNE 2006

Annex B

Cost Centre	Revised Budget £	Budget to 30 June £	Actual to 30 June £	Variance to 30 June £	Variance to 30 June %	Forecast Outturn £	Major Reasons for Variances.
Corporate Employee Initiatives	135,070	34,863	44,499	9,636	28	165,090	<p>1. Expenditure is exceeding budget profile on recruitment advertising (£14k), budget profile incorrect on training and will be amended to match the planned training programme (-£6k) and grants and subscriptions overspent (£6.7k). Budget shortfall to be addressed by Head of Human Resources.</p> <p><b>TOTAL MAJOR VARIATIONS = £14.7k</b></p>
Economic Development	414,270	256,942	284,447	27,505	11	414,270	<p>1. Underspend on Your Community Your Future, Grants and Loans for Buisnesses (-£6.6k). Profile incorrect and to be addressed to reflect the expected spend pattern.</p> <p>2. Major variances on Leader + due to timing differences (£47.7k). Profiles are very difficult to predict due to the nature of the projects. Expenditure incurred when requests made for payment, and claims for income submitted when expenditure incurred, and received in arrears. Profiles will be addressed whilst trying to predict expenditure and income patterns.</p> <p>3. Urban renaissance project underspent (-£5.2k) due to a delay with the implementation of schemes. Again this project is very difficult to predict, but profile will be addressed.</p> <p><b>TOTAL MAJOR VARIATIONS = £35.9k</b></p>
Housing Benefits	913,035	2,747,264	2,549,880	(197,384)	(7)	913,035	<p>1. Rent Allowance payments are £33.9k more than budgeted. This overspend has been partially offset by more than expected grant income -£14.9k.</p> <p>2. Council Tax benefit paid is underspent by -£101.8k. This underspend has been further increased by more than expected grant receivable -£33.6k.</p> <p>3. Rent Rebates are currently underspent by -£6.8k. This underspend has been further increased by more than expected grant receivable -£27.5k.</p> <p>4. Housing Benefit Administration underspend, most which relates to an accrual for East Riding of Yorkshire database administration which is waiting to be offset by the payment of the actual invoice (-£12.5k).</p> <p>5. Underspend on the North Yorkshire Benefits Training bid due to an accrual for income which will fund the costs of the 2006/07 training project (-£17.9k). Expenditure budgets to the value of the income yet to be set up.</p> <p><b>TOTAL MAJOR VARIATIONS = (£181.1k)</b></p>

ECONOMY BOARD - MAJOR VARIANCES TO 30 JUNE 2006

Cost Centre	Revised Budget £	Budget to 30 June £	Actual to 30 June £	Variance to 30 June £	Variance to 30 June %	Forecast Outturn £	Major Reasons for Variances.
Industrial Units	(68,630)	(224,638)	(286,547)	(61,909)	28	(68,630)	<p>1. Sherburn Enterprise Centre and Swordfish Way Industrial Units are underspent due to accruals for the North Yorkshire County Council management fee which are waiting to be cleared (-£45.2k).</p> <p>2. Rental income on Swordfish Way Industrial Units has not been achieved (£6.3k), however this has been offset by an overachievement of rental income on Hurricane Way Industrial Units (-£6k).</p> <p><b>TOTAL MAJOR VARIATIONS = (£44.9k)</b></p>

Type of Change	Cost Centre	Amount £	Reason for Budget Change
<b>Revenue Bids</b>	Community Investment Prospectus Development	18,000	Funding for Community Investment Prospectus groups.
	Urban Renaissance	7,680	Continuation of Renaissance Officer post.
	SRB 6 - Link Officer	28,590	Continuation of Community Link Officer post.
<b>Carry Forward Budgets</b>	Tadcaster Regeneration Project	17,000	Project slippage - to commence in 2006/07.
	Human Resources	35,360	Licence for equalities software (£1,250), benefits staff NVQ training (£2,410), equalities training / development (£17,700) and recruitment for Head of Service support (£14,000).
	Bus Station	2,000	Repairs required to the bus station.
	Urban Renaissance	12,620	On-going renaissance project.
	CIP Development	6,000	On-going CIP project funding.
	Business Forum	3,910	To fund continued conference expenses (£960), to establish a new partnering arrangement (£2,450) and to fund continued printing expenses (£500).
	Economic Development	16,470	Slippage in seminar attendance into 2006/07 (£690) and to fund the shortfall in the Renaissance post in 2006/07 (£15,780)
	North Yorkshire Benefits Training Group	11,290	Continue deferred training project.
	Housing Benefits	40,070	Agency and contract work for Benefits processing and training (£35,790 and to fund the delayed IRRV NVQ training (£4,280).
	<b>Supplementary Estimates</b>	Tourism	7,500
<b>Virements - Permanent</b>	Housing Benefits and Benefit Enquiries	-1,620	Identified turnover savings - Housing Benefits £1,430 and Benefit Enquiries £190.
	Vivars Industrial Units	-10	Identified turnover savings
	Council Tax	14,560	Transfer of capital budget for the replacement of two heavy duty printers to revenue, following the decision to lease (£15,000) less identified turnover savings (£440).
<b>Virements - One Year</b>	Your Community Your Future	39,760	Grants and Loans for Businesses £26,430, Development of Business Accommodation £3,920, Public Transport £110 and CIP Projects £9,300.
	Council Tax	15,000	To fund agency staff covering vacant posts.

**AGENDA ITEM NUMBER:**

**PUBLIC SESSION**

**TITLE : STRATEGIC ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT AND SUB REGIONAL INVESTMENT PLAN**

**TO : ECONOMY BOARD**

**DATE : 29 AUGUST 2006**

**BY : HEAD OF SERVICE (PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT)**

**AUTHOR : EILEEN SCOTHERN PRINCIPAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICER**

1. LINK TO COUNCIL POLICY

- 1.1 *Links to the following themes of the Community Strategy 2005 to 2010:*
- *Targeting & co-ordinating our efforts in the areas of greatest need*
  - *Working with our community*
  - *Developing sustainable communities*
  - *Developing our three market towns and surrounding rural areas*
  - *Improving the image of the area*

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To update Members of the current position in respect to the production of a Strategic Economic Assessment (SEA) the review of the Sub Regional investment Plan, the review of partner structures and the issues still to be considered at a local, sub regional and regional level

3. LINK TO CORPORATE AIMS AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 ***Links to the Council's corporate theme – Promoting Prosperity.***

**RECOMMENDATION**

- i) Members note the comments made on the emerging Strategic Economic Assessment**
- ii) That the Chair of the Economy Board is nominated as the Council's representative on the Development Board**

4. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES

- 4.1 Best Value - No Impact
- 4.2 Equalities - No Impact
- 4.3 Community Safety and Crime Reduction - No Impact

- 4.4 Procurement - No Impact
- 4.5 Risk Management and Risk Register - No Impact
- 4.6 Sustainability - No Impact
- 4.7 Gershon Efficiency Savings - Not applicable

## 5. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 5.1 **Strategic Economic Assessment (SEA)**  
The work on this document is expected to be completed by the end of July and will be going forward to the Development Board's meeting in September for formal adoption.
- 5.2 **Sub regional Investment Plan (SRIP)**  
There are two reviews currently being undertaken with regards to Investment Planning, the first is based on the existing structure of four sub-regions the second is a broader review by Yorkshire Forward with the assembly on the future Investment Planning process, including a review of the business support network and the emerging concept of city regions.
- 5.3 **Partner Structures**  
Following a review on the effectiveness of the Investment Planning process in 2005, it was agreed to appoint consultants to identify a new structure to address the perceived complexity of the SRIP process, the number of partnerships involved and the scope to rationalise these. The Consultants have now presented their findings and a change in structures are being implemented.
- 5.4 **York & North Yorkshire Economic Development Strategy**  
The emerging strategy will include The Vision, priorities, and spatial issues and how this will be achieved. The aim is to present a draft York & North Yorkshire Economic Development Strategy to the September York and North Yorkshire Development Board

## 6. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### Strategic Economic Assessment

- 6.1 Partners and agencies over the County are working with the York and North Yorkshire Partnership Unit and Yorkshire forward's consultants EKOS on producing a Strategic Economic Assessment of the Sub region. The document will be a substantial document of regional, economic and demographic data. The document also considers the objectives set out in the Regional Economic Strategy (RES), and suggests the sub-regions input and possible actions from the sub-region.

- 6.2 As mentioned above Yorkshire Forward have appointed EKOS to assist in this challenging task. This document which is already 200 pages long will move the sub region from perceptions to have hard evidence to base future decisions on priorities and interventions. The document will also identify gaps in knowledge and be a source of information for all organisations when reviewing Strategies and submitting business cases for funding.
- 6.3 The SEA will not be produced in hard copy but is available to view on the partnership website: [www.ynypu.org.uk](http://www.ynypu.org.uk). The draft SEA was circulated for comments and considered by the LSP Economy Group and the Chairs/Chief Executive's meeting. Attached are the revised comments sent after the Chairs/Chief Executive's meeting.

#### Investment Planning

- 6.4 The York and North Yorkshire Sub Regional Investment Plan  
The existing Sub- region plan covers the period 2004-09 and whilst originally the aim was to have a revised investment plan approved by December 2006, it has been decided to align the investment plan not only with the Regional Economic Strategy but to the Local Area Agreement(s) in particular the Economy and Enterprise block. The LAA have to be drafted this autumn and agreed with GOYH in the new year.
- 6.5 The new SRIP will see a shift from a plethora of projects to a SRIP that aims to identify opportunities for increasing productivity and competitiveness. The SRIP, therefore whilst recognising areas of need will also be seeking to identify strengths and commission strategic interventions either on a spatial or a thematic theme. These strategic interventions will be identified through a number of Priority Groups which will be created within the new partnership structures referred to in paragraph 6.8"

#### Broader Review on Investment Planning

- 6.6 Yorkshire Forward are reviewing the investment plan process. This is linked to other activities within Yorkshire Forward for example the business support review and the emerging concept of the City Region. The results of that review are expected towards the end of this calendar year.

#### Partner Structures

- 6.7 At the inception of Investment Planning and the creation of the Partner Structures, the Local Strategic Partnerships were asked to nominate representatives on to the York and North Yorkshire Development Board. As a result there was a mixture of elected and non-elected members on the Board. Ken Taylor Director of Groundwork Trust, Chair of the LSP Environment Group and member of the LSP (Formerly known as Selby Strategy Forum) has represented Selby LSP.

- 6.8 Regeneris undertook a review of the SRIP effectiveness on behalf of the organisations in 2005. Their main recommendations were
- *Need to agree a ten year strategy*
  - *Rationalise the executive tier to a smaller but more decision oriented group(which would be accountable to the Development Board)*
  - *To establish partnership groups, in the form of Priority groups, around the agreed priorities in the strategy.*
  - *To avoid setting up other permanent groups and make more use of task and finish groups*
  - *To ensure that all local authority leaders sat on the Development Board rather than LSP representatives (to ensure local commitment to Investment plan priorities).*

- 6.9 The Partnership Executive and the Development Board have considered this and at their meeting on 13 June it was agreed.

*"from the next meeting the representatives from local areas should be nominated by local authorities rather than LSP's. This would include appropriate substitute arrangements."*

- 6.10 At the Chairs/Chief Executive meeting on 29 June, Councillor Brian Percival was nominated as the SDC representative on the York and North Yorkshire Development Board. This nomination requires ratification from the Economy Board.

#### York & North Yorkshire Economic Development Strategy

- 6.11 The strategy will be a 10 to 20 years and provide a framework for the investment plan being reviewed in 2006. A key purpose for this strategy is the realisation that the sub-region does need to sell itself better to wider stakeholders.

- 6.12 The strategy will address the key issues identified in the Strategic Economic Assessment which the initial draft suggests are:

*To improve overall economic performance – closing the productivity gap between the North and the South of the country.*

*To address the problems of remoteness and peripherally within the sub-region causing a higher market failure in achieving investment.*

*To bring the sub region's overall levels of skills and knowledge to a position that matches the levels of educational attainment.*

*To address the challenges in our demographic structure, making the sub-region an attractive area in which young people wish to start their career.*

- 6.13 Currently the York and North Yorkshire Partnership Unit and the Development Board have suggested four statements which could become objectives:

- *Place – investing in our cultural and environmental offer*
- *People – Developing knowledge and skills enabling us to foster enterprise and creativity*

- *Products - developing quality and high value added products whether grown, manufactured or a service.*
- *Promotion – Developing our brands and securing significant investment in our underlying connectivity and utilities infrastructure.*

6.14 The Partnership Executive have considered the following structure

Number of Sub Regional Themes

With links to the following spatial themes

Leeds City Region	York Sub	Coast	Vale & Tees Links	Remoter Rural
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6.15 A draft Economic Development Strategy will be presented to the York and North Yorkshire Development Board at their September Meeting.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no financial implications.

8. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

8.1 *All papers are kept within the EDU section except for the Strategic Economic Assessment, which can be viewed on [www.ynypu.org.uk](http://www.ynypu.org.uk).*

## **Response on the Strategic Economic Assessment following Chairs input.**

The document mentions RES and RSS, however a section on how the Northern way and Leeds City Region influence the Sub region would be useful.

Selby District has transformed from an area of need to one of opportunity. There will however be pockets of need that require special attention including the two poorest wards in Selby Town and the areas to the south of the District.

In Selby the key problem has not been one of strategy but the lack of immediately available sites and premises. Whilst we have continued to promote the quality of our workforce and the benefits of the District we have been unable to market convert enquiries due to a historical lack of accommodation. This is changing with the work undertaken by the Council and Yorkshire Forward to kick start the infrastructure at Sherburn. Yorkshire now have a product they can market in connection with Gladman and Ashbrooke estates, unfortunately to date few conversions have been made.

New sites are gradually coming available such as Escrick and the Business Park and East Common Lane in Selby. Medium to longer opportunities include Olympia Park (subject to planning and overcoming the high abnormal costs of serving this site) and ESS and the potential of the Mine Site(s) subject to the Inspectors decision(s) following SDC refusal of planning permission on the grounds of conflicting with adopted planning policies.

The District's Community Economic Development Strategy refers to the need to target key sectors they are: -

Science related along the A19 corridor,  
Food & Drink and Logistics at Sherburn and  
Business Services/Offices in the three main settlements.

An emerging key sector raised through the Renaissance programme is Renewable Energy

For Selby District inward investment, will always be part of the economy mix and should be considered as part of the diverse economy, the District is however not seeking to match the level of inward investment achieved by our urban neighbours, as this will be unsustainable in the long term.

### **Question 1**

*The RSS identifies that the District is placed within the York sub area but also has an overlapping relationship with the Leeds City Region. This suggests that the District is to be the major growth point after 2016. Are the implications fully understood?*

### Response to Question 1

Yes we are aware that under the RSS and the Leeds City Region Development Programme that Selby District is expected to play an important role in delivering economic growth for the region. The Council through the Local Development framework and Economic Development policy are seeking to develop policies and allocating employment and housing sites to meet the forecasted growth and to support the Leeds City Region and the York sub area.

The full implications of the relationship with the Leeds City Region are not fully understood however the Council has started to fill this through the consultation process on Core Strategy Issues and Options Report, which includes a question -

What should the role of Selby District be in the City Region and the York Sub Area? In addition questions regarding housing, employment and transport linked to Selby's role have been asked. The consultation process has only recently closed and Officers and Members are still to consider the responses. As work progresses on the City region second iteration development programme plus Yorkshire Forward's ongoing review on investment planning will assist the Council and stakeholders to assess the implications of the relationship between Leeds City Region/York Sub area and Selby.

There will be greater pressures on housing than the provision of employment.

Quality sustainable employment must come as a precursor to an expansion into housing in order to avoid the District simply becoming an even greater dormitory location.

There has to be the avoidance of a homogenisation into the rural sprawl associated with City regions.

The District has certain distinctiveness that needs to be clearly identified, enhanced and thoroughly protected. An essence of the area is the commuter rural.

Transport communications will be the routes for growth, the road routes and the rail routes strengths and weaknesses need to be established and tackled.

The main thrust at all times must be the enhancement of the quality of life, the quality of the town centres, culture, the environment and recreation. The District has substantial river assets and their strengths and weaknesses need to be capitalised, there is a potential for water based leisure activities, but these have to be realistic and deliverable.

The biggest issue with the District is the absence of quality developers prepared to forward invest. An image for an attraction of such investors is essential.

## Question 2

*Is there a case for a 20-year plan for the York Sub Area showing what investment is required to enable York and Selby meet the growth requirements of the region?*

*What do we need to understand further about the relationship between York and its intermediate hinterland including Selby and Malton?*

### Response to Question 2

Selby District is already covered by a number of strategic documents and the key issue is whether a 20 – year plan based on a York sub area will add value. The RSS and the LCRDP provides the regional framework, in addition all authorities annually review their Community Strategies and are reviewing their planning policies through the Local Development Framework process. This combined with the valuable information from the Strategic Economic Assessment needs evaluating to assess where more local interventions are required and whether this should be on a generic or spatial base to maximise the opportunities for the Districts.

In addition Selby District has no economic links to Malton, Malton is outside the Leeds City Region boundary and to have two different boundaries for the York sub area will add confusion and is therefore not supported.

Selby District Council would therefore suggest that major economic interventions are covered by Leeds City Region and that other local/sub regional interventions are covered by Generic topics for example, bioscience and digital.

The expansion of the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Area and the enhancement of the A63, A64 and A19 are important.

## Question 3

*Can the District act to increase levels of firm formation and consider how to raise the overall level of enterprise?*

### Response to Question 3

The District currently has limited capacity to deliver a programme promoting a self-employment culture; the District in partnership with the County Council however would be interested in exploring whether additional resources could be identified to tackle the poor performance in this area. One solution would be to reintroduce a local Business Advice Centre with local course/seminars rather than the local access points currently in place.

The Council has recently consulted with businesses on “good jobs for local people” draft policy; we would like to see a similar initiative to be included in the sub regional economic strategy.

## Question 4

*a) The District is poorly represented in key regional clusters. Can this be addressed?*

*According to the Strategic Economic Assessment the District is well represented by Bio-science and Digital companies, the District however is poorly represented in the Food and Drink, Manufacturing, Health, Tourism and Financial Services.*

*b) Is Tourism of marginal importance to the future of the District? Is developing culture central to the Districts plans? Can those plans contribute to a more dynamic image?*

Draft Response to Question 4a)

The Council has highlighted the following clusters to be targeted. Bioscience (predominately along the A19 corridor York to M62); Food and Drink (predominately Sherburn); Business Services/Office Development (three main settlements) and Renewable Energy (linked to the Urban Renaissance programme). Through the Local Development Framework and the LSP/Council Community Economic Development Strategy and the Leeds City Region we are identifying policies to assist our vision and will be seeking interventions to convert these policies into delivery.

Draft response to 4b)

The Council in 2005 decided that Tourism would not be a corporate priority and Distribution/Logistic companies would be accommodated in appropriate locations subject to it not detracting from our targeted aim of improving the diversity of the District economy, reducing out commuting and the creation of good quality jobs for our residents.

The Image of the District is a corporate aim and is being tackled jointly by the LSP/Council through the Community Strategy and the Renaissance Programme. Funding will be a key consideration on how plans being developed can be delivered.

The Council however recognises Tourism and Culture is important and if budgets can accommodate a reintroduction then this will be done at the earliest opportunity.

#### Question 5

*Will the LSP take up the challenges on Skills and Social inclusion issues faced by the District? Are these reflected in Renaissance plans?*

Draft response to Question 5

The LSP and the Council take a holistic approach to the well-being of the District and social, economic and environmental issues are covered within the Community Strategy. The LSP is not a democratically elected organisation and neither is it a delivery body. The LSP will continue to provide the framework for all stakeholders to deliver against however the LSP has no financial resources to tackle the challenges. Funding will need to be identified through stakeholders existing budgets or through the Renaissance /SRIP process to ensure existing businesses and residents can access the strategic economic projects identified in the Renaissance Programme. .

Question 6

*What is the long-term need for public investment in the District's renaissance programme?*

Draft response to Question 6

The Renaissance Programme is at an early stage with the Strategic Development Framework due to go out for public consultation mid July. The Framework covers a range of projects, however the framework provides the vision for the next 25 years and new projects will emerge as we progress through the delivery stage. Identified projects will attract private sector investment however public sector funding will be required for the majority of the 25-year programme.

**AGENDA ITEM NUMBER:**

**PUBLIC SESSION**

**TITLE : CIPS UPDATE**

**TO : ECONOMY BOARD**

**DATE : 25<sup>th</sup> July 2006**

**BY : HEAD OF SERVICE – PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**AUTHOR : GARY LIMBERT – COMMUNITY LINK OFFICER**

1. LINK TO COUNCIL POLICY

- 1.1 This report is linked to Council Policy directly through the Council's Mission "To improve the quality of life for those who live and work in the District".

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To update Members on the progress of the Community Investment Partnership groups across the District

To update Members on the provision of funding advice to community and voluntary groups within the District

3. LINK TO CORPORATE AIMS AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 ***1. Engaging the community is a key element of the Council's Priority of being a "Well managed authority"***

**RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT MEMBERS NOTE THE REPORT**

4. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES

- 4.1 • Best Value – No impact

- 4.2 • Equalities

The CIP groups provide a valuable link between the Council and local communities.

- 4.3 • Community Safety and Crime Reduction

Some of the projects funded through the CIPs should have a positive

impact on crime reduction

- 4.4 • Procurement - No impact
- 4.5 • Risk Management and Risk Register - No impact
- 4.6 • Sustainability

Local Agenda 21 – the CIP groups promote sustainable communities.

- 4.7 • Gershon Efficiency Savings - No impact

## 5. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 5.1 Since the launch of the CIP Action Plan Report in December 2006 the CIP Groups have continued to be extremely active in their communities, providing funding and support to community groups throughout the district, to date a total of £10,000 of CIP funding has been given to local projects, this has enabled project groups to pump prime other funding streams for a further £120,000.

A total of 45 new community projects have been identified through work with local groups and are being supported by the CIP Groups and the Community Link Officer.

The Community Link Officer continues to attend the individual CIP group meetings and the quarterly Joint CIP meetings.

Just recently the Community Link Officer was invited to Selby District's Neighbourhood Policing Teams open forum event at Drax power station to do a presentation on how the CIP Groups could work in partnership with the police and other agencies.

## 6. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 6.1 **Community Investment Partnership (CIP) groups**

The six Selby District CIP groups were established in late 2004. In December of that year the initial CIP documents were published. These documents identified local need, suggested actions to address those needs and listed local projects. In the intervening two years these groups have progressed dramatically:

- They are now providing small amounts of funding (supplied by SDC) and support for local projects.
- Each of the Selby Strategy Forum's sub-groups includes a representative from the CIP groups.
- Members of the Joint CIP Group have representation on Selby Districts Association Of voluntary Services "AVS", and on the York's & North Yorkshire Playing Fields Association.

- They are actively involved with SDC Community Safety Partnership Unit, Police and other agencies to establish Joint Action Groups “JAG’s” in the six CIP Areas.
- SDC’s Environmental Services is working closely with the CIP groups on developing street-scene services.

6.2 The Community Link Officer is continuing to work with the CIP groups to increase their capacity and to help organisations, which approach the CIP groups for help, to develop projects and apply for funding.

This assistance can range from simply signposting a group to an appropriate external funder, to helping them develop formal constitutions and business plans.

6.3 **General funding advice**

Though SDC no longer has a Funding Development Officer, the Community Link Officer has continued to work with community groups across the District.

Examples of some of the projects assisted are:

Flaxley Road Matters	Football Fun Day
Escrick Village Hall	Refurbishment
Sherburn Drop-In-Centre	Diversionary Youth Activities
Billbrough Village Hall	PA system
Hensall Playgroup	External play area & Storage
Sure Waters Selby	Continuation funding for project

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no financial implications at this stage

8. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

81 Background documents are held in the External Funding Unit at the Prospect Centre

**AGENDA ITEM NUMBER:**

**PUBLIC SESSION**

**TITLE : SELBY DISTRICT URBAN RENAISSANCE  
PROGRAMME – PROGRESS UPDATE**

**TO : ECONOMY BOARD**

**DATE : 29 AUGUST 2006**

**BY : HEAD OF SERVICE – PLANNING & ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT**

**AUTHOR : NEIL SKINNER – EXTERNAL FUNDING MANAGER**

**1. LINK TO COUNCIL POLICY**

1.1 Linked to Corporate Plan Priority Action – Regenerating our Three Market Towns

Linked to Community Strategy 2005-10 theme – Developing our three market towns and surrounding rural areas.

**2. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

2.1 To update Members on the progress of the Selby District Urban Renaissance programme

**3. LINK TO CORPORATE AIMS AND PRIORITIES**

3.1 ***Directly linked to Council's priority of 'Regenerating our Three Market Towns'***

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**i) THAT MEMBERS NOTE THE PROGRESS BEING MADE  
ON THE RENAISSANCE PROGRAMME**

**4. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES**

4.1 • Best Value – No impact

4.2 • Equalities

Urban Renaissance, partly through its process of ongoing community engagement via Town Teams and partly through the anticipated impact of increased investment in the District, will positively address equality issues and social inclusion.

4.3 • Community Safety and Crime Reduction

North Yorkshire Police are actively involved in the Renaissance process, particularly with regard to the public realm design issues.

4.4 • Procurement - No impact

4.5 • Risk Management and Risk Register  
No impact at this stage of the programme

4.6 • Sustainability

The Selby District Renaissance programme positively impacts on the sustainability of local communities by engaging these communities in the long-term development planning of Selby, Sherburn and Tadcaster. The programme will, in particular, have major impacts on improving the public realm (civic pride and image of the area) in revitalising the town and promoting the skills, knowledge and capacity of local people in order to provide a skilled workforce for business.

4.7 • Gershon Efficiency Savings - No impact

5. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

5.1 Since the last report to Economy Board in June 2006 progress has been made on the management of the Urban Renaissance programme and the Project Board has held its first meeting.

The Strategic Development Framework (SDF) has still not been finalised. The Project Board has decided that because of the late publication of this document (originally scheduled for October 2005) it will not now be issued for consultation but it will be made publicly available (in libraries, etc.).

Projects in Selby and Sherburn are moving forward.

The Energy and Water themes are generating a great deal of interest and form external bodies (both public and private).

6. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

6.1 **Programme management**

The Urban Renaissance Project Board has met for the first time. The purpose of this group is to ensure closer inter-agency working between the Council, Yorkshire Forward and major stakeholders. The Project Board focuses on strategic issues while the Project Team will be more involved in the operational delivery of the programme.

## 6.2 Staffing resources

SDC have applied to Yorkshire Forward for funding to continue the renaissance Officer post beyond its current term (end December 2006) and to also employ two project development staff to help progress Renaissance projects. A decision on this application is expected in November 2006. Allowing time for recruitment, it is envisaged new staff will not be in post until early 2007.

In addition we are to have the additional resource of an internal secondment from the end of August. This will be half time for six months.

The additional resources will help us to develop some of the projects identified in the Charter and draft SDF. However, it has to be recognised that SDC will not be the lead organisation for many, if any, of these projects.

Yorkshire Forward have also appointed DTZ/ABROS consultants to help us compile an Investment Management Plan (this is a process Yorkshire Forward are employing for all their Urban Renaissance programmes). We expect work on this to start shortly.

## 6.3 Strategic Development Framework

URBED, Yorkshire Forward's consultants, have still not completed the Strategic Development Framework (SDF). In view of the length of time it has taken them to produce this document – originally scheduled for October 2005 – the Project Board has decided there is no benefit to be gained from sending the SDF out for public consultation. When it is finalised it will be put in to the public domain, through libraries, etc.

## 6.4 Selby

- **Selby Waterfront Linear Park**
- Memorial Gardens (West Mill Foods – Toll Bridge) work underway. A landscape architect has been appointed by the Environment Agency. Ongoing discussions in progress with the Renaissance Officer on the designs. Materials for wall structure and street furniture agreed. Lighting withdrawn as an option due to funding issue. Build to include mosaic design elements agreed with Selby College/Selby High School/Barlby High School.
- Toll Bridge Improvements – Highways North Yorkshire confirmed no budget from NYCC for improvement scheme.
- Rail Bridge – Network Rail to conduct feasibility study to secure long term future of bridge 2006/07 and schedule works once study is complete.
- Rail Bridge Highway design – Mouchel Parkman have not produced a design, Renaissance Officer to manage the re-application of request via Highways North Yorkshire.

- ❑ **Selby Gowthorpe** Streetscape – currently on reserve list for the Highways North Yorkshire Traffic Management schemes. Following a Selby Traffic Management meeting, it has been agreed to split Gowthorpe into two, around the Abbey being one scheme and the remainder (from Finkle Street to Doncaster Road) being the other. This increases the priority of the latter by reducing the cost factor.
- ❑ Work is consequently underway to look at the **Abbey Precinct** section as a Renaissance project as part of a Heritage proposal. Investigations ongoing re Townscape Heritage Lottery bid re the ability to secure funds to improve the townscape in Selby, particularly around Abbey Quarter and the Water Lane/Ousegate area.
- ❑ Café Society piloting in Micklegate.
- ❑ **Transport** : Selby Town Team meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> July included discussions on improving the transport Interchange at the bus and train stations.
- ❑ Proposals for potential car parking identified. We have requested that a development brief be produced to assist planning for the Station Quarter area.
- ❑ **Surewaters** project being progressed with funding bid to Lottery, WREN & Coalfields Regeneration.
- ❑ **Selby Park** – requirements for enhancements to the park currently being specified and costed prior to an application to the Big Lottery Parks for People bid in March 2007.
- ❑ Project idea for the development of the **Waterways** within Selby (Canal side & Riverside) drafted and issued for comment. British Waterways interested in the concept and presentation was held 4<sup>th</sup> August.
- ❑ To enhance the distinctiveness of Selby a proposal to hold a celebratory event in 2007 based on the waterways has been put forward. This is being looked in to and Members will be kept apprised of developments.
- ❑ The Selby Town team has set up a sub-group to look at ways of interpreting the industrial heritage of Selby. It is hoped to involve local schools in this.

## 6.5 **Sherburn-in-Elmet**

- ❑ **Sherburn Low Street Streetscape** – detailed design plans have now been completed.

- Valuation of the Elmete Social Club Car Park has been received, SDC Legal team are formally writing to the Elmete Social Club and leading on negotiations.
- At the request of the Sherburn Town Team, Mouchel Parkman have produced an outline cost estimate for the re-alignment of Church View/Low Street (circa £60k) which would increase the village square footprint.
- Sherburn Parish Council is leading on potential Lottery bid for funding for Eversley Park including the gateway entrance.
- Yorkshire Forward (Sustainable Development) conducting scoping paper on the potential use of Gascoigne Wood and other mines sites. The planning application for Gascoigne Wood from UK Coal has been called in by Government Office and is now awaiting an enquiry in early 2007.

## 6.6 Tadcaster

- **Tadcaster Living Streets** – this project is currently on hold pending discussions between the major stakeholders.

## 6.7 Energy

- Energy Forum meetings are held monthly.
- Due to the uncertain future of Rigid Paper, we are not currently pursuing the joint project idea between Rigid Paper and Tate & Lyle on use of waste materials to generate bio fuel for use in a combined heat and power generator.
- On **Hearts and minds**, there is a potential opportunity to tap into European funding streams on the Regions of Knowledge Framework 7 programme.
- A DEFRA Climate Challenge bid proved to be unsuccessful – (507 projects were submitted from 449 organisations and that the total bid was over subscribed by 9 fold)
- Planning Policy have been provided with updates from the Regional Assembly on the levels of energy efficiency being sought within the RSS and those being set by neighbouring councils

## 6.8 Water

- **Yorkshire Water Park** – feasibility study on hold pending the results of the SPROUT (Feb 07) and the Humberhead Levels partnership (Oct

06) programmes feasibility studies.

- **SPROUT (Strategic Plan for the River Ouse and its Tributaries)** workshops on Renewable Energy, Urban Waterfronts and Watercourses and Leisure and Recreation have been attended. Selby Renaissance Water project initiatives are likely to feature highly in the conclusions. In addition, the potential for a monastic trail from Selby to Ripon via York (using the Rivers) has attracted interest from English Heritage. Once we have the material from these findings, we can make a decision on the scope of our feasibility study. The intention is to incorporate the Water theme work within the Selby Town team in order to attain community involvement in the work and participation.
  
- Renaissance Officer has been approached re interest in submersible hydro electricity generation for riverbeds. We have registered our interest and are awaiting guidance from Yorkshire Forward on the next steps.

## 7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications at this stage, however, as and when more details on the financial implications of these projects are known these will be reported back to this committee.

## 8. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 8.1 Background documents are held in the External Funding Unit at the Prospect Centre

**AGENDA ITEM NUMBER:**

**PUBLIC SESSION**

**TITLE : SELBY DISTRICT LEADER+ PROGRAMME UPDATE**

**TO : ECONOMY BOARD**

**DATE : 29 AUGUST 2006**

**BY : HEAD OF SERVICE – PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**AUTHOR : NEIL SKINNER - LEADER+ PROGRAMME CO-ORDINATOR**

1. LINK TO COUNCIL POLICY

- 1.1 *Links to the following themes of the Community Strategy 2005 to 2010:*
- *Developing sustainable communities*
  - *Developing our three market towns and surrounding rural areas*

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To inform Members of the progress being made by the Selby District LEADER+ programme and an assessment of the future of rural funding from 2007.

3. LINK TO CORPORATE AIMS AND PRIORITIES

3.1 ***Corporate Plan 2006-2010 Strategic Themes:***

- ***Protecting the environment***
- ***Promoting prosperity***

***RECOMMENDATION :  
THAT MEMBERS NOTE THE REPORT***

4. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES

- 4.1 • Best Value

No impact

- 4.2 • Equalities

One of the key criteria for projects receiving LEADER+ funding is that they actively promote equal opportunities

4.3 • Community Safety and Crime Reduction

LEADER+ is not primarily related to community safety and crime reduction. However, some of the Selby LEADER+ projects have indirectly made a positive contribution to these priorities

4.4 • Procurement

No impact

4.5 • Risk Management and Risk Register

No Impact

4.6 • Sustainability

One of the key criteria for projects receiving LEADER+ funding is that they are sustainable

4.7 • Gershon Efficiency Savings

No impact

5. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

5.1 This paper updates Members on the progress of the Selby District LEADER+ programme.

The programme started in early 2003 and is set to run until the end of December 2007.

To date the programme has brought £1,768,000 of external funding in to the District.

The programme outputs are detailed in the main report.

The paper also looks at the future of rural funding after the LEADER+ project finishes.

(For greater detail see the main report)

6. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

6.1 **Background**

Selby District Council was awarded LEADER+ funding by DEFRA in late 2002. LEADER+ is a European funded rural regeneration programme

The programme itself was formally launched in early 2003. It runs until the end of December 2007.

## 6.2 Funding

The original business plan for the whole programme envisaged £1.11m being supplied by Europe and DEFRA and a similar amount being levered in from public and private sources.

To date, Europe and DEFRA have contributed £802,645 and this has levered in £965,349 of public and private investment.

## 6.3 Projects

The project funded through the LEADER+ programme are detailed at Annex 1.

The outputs achieved to date are:

- 11 x fte jobs created/safeguarded
- 9 x underemployed people receiving training
- 21 x small business assisted
- 2 x high-tech start up
- 1 x rural area business start up
- 4 x farm businesses assisted
- 1 x farm business diversifying into tourism
- 15 x tourism businesses assisted
- 10 x tourism promotional projects assisted
- 1 x community business initiatives supported
- 1 x communities participating
- 650 x young people assisted through projects
- 13 x agricultural businesses receiving training
- 325 x agricultural businesses receiving information
- 25 x businesses requesting and receiving environmental advice
- 100 x businesses receiving environmental bulletins
- 2 x feasibility studies undertaken
- 260 x people undertaking skills training
- 22 x people entering further education after training
- 12 x projects raising environmental awareness
- 18 x projects provided with environmental advice
- 17 x community led environmental projects
- 16 x sites enhanced or protected
- 2 x projects researching the needs of disadvantaged groups
- 3 x projects providing facilities for disadvantaged groups
- 2 x transport projects assisted.

- 6.4 In addition to these projects, the Selby District LEADER+ programme is also involved in a transnational project with the Flevoland LEADER+ group in The Netherlands [a separate paper on this transnational project was presented to the Economy Board in June 2006].

## 6.5 The future of LEADER+

The LEADER+ programme runs until the end of December 2007. We are currently developing a number of projects to achieve some of the programmes outstanding outputs and to utilise the remaining funding.

## 6.6 Rural funding post-LEADER+

As of 1 January 2007 the new European Union Rural Development Regulation comes in to effect. This is a wide ranging regulation covering all aspects of payments to the food and farming sector and also incorporating payments for environmental activity in rural areas and rural community development.

The Commission is moving from targeted funding (e.g. LEADER+) to providing central government with a single stream of rural development funding. It will then be for government to decide how and where this funding should be spent.

While LEADER+ itself will cease to exist as a separate funding programme, the Commission is committed to the L+ principles and wants to see the LEADER approach applied to the new rural development programme.

The Commission Regulation allocates 5% of the European Rural Development funding to the LEADER approach. This percentage means there will be more money in cash terms available across England than under the present LEADER+ programme.

In its consultation document the Government proposes that its priority for Axis 3 activity will be “to enhance economic opportunity in rural areas through increased investment in skills, enterprise and innovation by targeting support to:

- Those on low pay or without regular employment;
- Economically lagging areas with a high concentration of low paid jobs;
- Upland communities where remoteness and sparse populations create particular difficulties.”

### **Implications for Selby District**

DEFRA have a Public Service Agreement to “*Reduce the gap in productivity between the least well performing quartile of rural areas and the English Median by 2008, demonstrating progress by 2006, and improve the accessibility of services for people in rural areas.*” (PSA4).

The indications from DEFRA and the RDAs suggest that much of the rural development funding will be targeted at these PSA4 areas. Selby is not a PSA4 area!

Within Yorkshire and the Humber region PSA4 areas cover part of East Riding, the northern coastal strip and moors in North Yorkshire and parts of the Pennines.

While this does not totally preclude Selby from receiving rural development funding it will make it difficult.

[Under the present LEADER+ programme most of the English L+ groups are in PSA4 areas. Selby is one of the few that is not]

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no financial implications.

8. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

8.1 All background documents are held by the External Funding Unit at the Prospect Centre

## Annex 1

### Projects funded by Selby District LEADER+ Programme

**Project Name:**

**Project promoter:**

#### **Project Description**

This project aimed to help farmers face a choice of becoming even more efficient producers through increased inputs, lower input producers or diversification into organic cropping or to grow alternative crops. It hoped to organise 3 events per year, to which local farmers would be invited, the theme of each conference to be different with experts invited to discuss the relevant topics.

**Project Name:**

**Project promoter:**

#### **Project Description**

A feasibility study was produced on the potential to develop a healthy eating initiative for select areas of Selby and surrounding villages

**Project Name:**

**Project promoter:**

#### **Project Description**

The project provided a package of environmental support services through Groundwork's expert consultants, targeting small and medium sized enterprises based in rural areas of Selby District to increase their

**Project Name:**

**Project promoter:**

**Project Description**

Research was commissioned into environmental business and job creation opportunities in Selby District. The breadth of the study was wide, encompassing activities as diverse as home insulation, community forestry, recycling, agriculture, horticulture, tourism etc. and considered opportunities within existing business areas and also more innovative options in non-traditional businesses.

**Project Name:**

**Project promoter:**

**Project Description**

The project provided a package of environmental schemes developed and delivered in partnership with rural communities across Selby District and through co-operative actions of several community development agencies in the area. Local community groups identified the projects.

**Project Name:**

**Project promoter:**

**Project Description**

The project was about providing information for the farming community that was accessible, informative and designed for each farmer dependent on his particular land, current practice and ideas for future development.

**Project Name:**

**Project promoter:**

**Project Description**

The project created a partnership of public and the private sector to identify its current place in the market place, to produce a joint strategy and marketing plan. This was to identify measures to encourage visitors already interested in the District to stay longer and ways of reaching and attracting new customers.

**Project Name:** Selby & District Credit Union Feasibility Study

**Project promoter:** Selby District AVS

**Project Description**

A consultant was employed to undertake a feasibility study into setting up a Credit Union within the District of Selby

**Project Name:** Linking Schools and the Public with Local Food Production

**Project promoter:** Stockbridge Technology Centre

**Project Description**

School visits were hosted that allowed children to see crops growing from seed to plate. They were involved in sowing seed, planting crops and finally harvesting them to eat and take home. Open days were also held with demonstration plots and short talks used to explain how crops are grown and to show the wide range of crops grown locally.

**Project Name:** CNC Plastics Manufacturing Ltd

**Project promoter:** CNC Plastics Manufacturing Ltd

**Project Description**

Helped in setting up a business using new ways of processing plastics and wood items by use of a CNC router.

**Project Name:** W2W 25+

**Project promoter:** Selby Training Centre

**Project Description**

The project offered the loan of a scooter to unemployed people aged 25 years plus who needed transport to access employment or vocational training.

**Project Name:** D'oylys Tearooms

**Project promoter:** V Houseman

**Project Description**

This was a farm-based venture diversifying into tourism. A high-class tearoom was set up sourcing local produce and offering employment to unemployed and under employed people in the local area including young and disabled people.

**Project Name:** Visitor Information Centre, Selby Library

**Project promoter:** North Yorkshire County Council

**Project Description**

Work was undertaken within Selby Library to form an area to accommodate a Visitor Information Centre and its accompanying equipment and facilities.

**Project Name:** Selby Waterways LEADER Project

**Project promoter:** The Sobriety Project

**Project Description**

The project developed community participation in Selby Town, Eastern and Central areas including Brotherton. Specifically it provided waterways adventure and activities relating to the Selby waterways, including the River Ouse and Selby Canal.

**Project Name:** Community Participation Project

**Project promoter:** Groundwork Selby

**Project Description**

The project will engage community groups from across Selby District in a diverse programme of locally identified schemes that will promote strategic development, address local needs and work towards sustainable project delivery.

**Project Name:** Social Enterprise Development

**Project promoter:** Groundwork Selby

**Project Description**

This project will stimulate enterprise activity within Selby District by raising awareness of social enterprise and through training and the provision of a support mechanism for the creation of new social enterprises.

**Project Name:** NOVACON Manufacturing Project

**Project promoter:** Aquastan Heating Ltd

**Project Description**

This project established a business supplying high technology, environmentally friendly central heating boilers, including the development of a website and marketing materials.

**Project Name:** Tourism Partnership Project

**Project promoter:** Selby District Council

**Project Description**

Built new innovations onto the work previously undertaken to develop tourism in Selby District as a key driver for employment retention and growth.

**Project Name:** Brotherton & Byram Trials & Motorcross Club

**Project promoter:** PC J Hart

**Project Description**

The project was an initiative to engage young people in the Brotherton and Byram areas, providing them with an exciting and instructive outlet for energy and self-expression, with a view to deterring them from criminal activity and to reduce the number of complaints made by the community about young people riding illegally in the villages.

**Project Name:**

**Project promoter:**

**Project Description**  
A small business grant scheme to assist mainly new start ups to provide funding towards revenue costs such as advertising, website design costs, promotional material, initial stationery etc.

**Project Name:**

**Project promoter:**

**Project Description**  
The Surewaters Selby Project uses the Selby Canal and its connecting waterways as a resource for economic and social improvement in the area of Selby District Council.

**Project Name:**

**Project promoter:**

**Project Description**  
The project is a moped loan scheme, operating with 15 mopeds across Selby District. The aim of the project is to increase individuals' access to education, training or employment and tackle social exclusion.

**Project Name:**

**Project promoter:**

**Project Description**  
Selby District Tourism Ltd is a membership based company set up by tourism operators in Selby District, with the objective of being a self help group that will undertake marketing and promotion, as well as seeking out ways of improving skills development and training, and developing new supply chain and procurement links to local producers.

**AGENDA ITEM NUMBER:**

**PUBLIC SESSION**

**TITLE : BENEFIT SERVICES – THE VISION, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES (UPDATE)**

**TO : ECONOMY BOARD**

**DATE : 29 AUGUST 2006**

**BY : D. LANGTON, HEAD OF FINANCE AND CENTRAL SERVICES**

**AUTHOR : A. M. ALLPORT, BENEFITS MANAGER**

1. LINK TO COUNCIL POLICY

- 1.1 The report links to the Council policy relating to the provision of benefits in accordance with legislation.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To seek endorsement of the Benefits Services updated vision, policies and strategies.

3. LINK TO CORPORATE AIMS AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 *The report links to the corporate aim to provide for vulnerable residents, which in turn relates specifically to the corporate themes of putting customers first, promoting prosperity and making better use of resources.*

**RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT MEMBERS ENDORSE THE VISION, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES RELATING TO BENEFITS SERVICES**

4. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES

- 4.1 ▪ Best Value

The report details policies and strategies that contribute directly to addressing our duties to provide value for money options whilst maximising the results for the people of Selby District.

#### 4.2   ▪ Equalities

The Vision contains a specific service policy on Equality and Diversity covering all issues of service delivery work.

#### 4.3   ▪ Crime Reduction

The Counter-Fraud Policy and Strategy and the Prosecution Policy have been revised to enhance the deterrent work of the Counter Fraud Unit in reducing crime.

#### 4.4   ▪ Procurement

The service strategies outline joint-working initiatives and partnership approaches which may result in reduced costs and increased efficiencies whilst the strategy to secure external funding assists in the capacity to procure services. The strategy relating to partnership working includes statements of intent in making efficiency savings through consideration of alternate procurement of services.

#### ▪ Risk Management and Risk Register

#### 4.5

The report addresses the risk of not having robust and regularly reviewed policies and strategies in place. The Service's risk management plan and risk register contributed to the drafting of the strategies and also draws information from the strategies in order to ensure consistent planning and review of the plans and actions.

#### ▪ Sustainability – Local Agenda 21

#### 4.6

The policies and strategies help to create a well-managed and high performing Benefits Service, which can significantly affect the ability of unemployed people to move back in to work, to live in decent housing and have an effect on social inclusion within the community.

#### • Gershon Efficiency savings

#### 4.7

The policies and strategies consider and actively promote Gershon awareness and the identification of efficiency savings. This is specific in terms of the way we address partnership working within the strategies, which may realise both short-term and longer-term cashable or non-cashable efficiency savings.

## 5. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 5.1 The Benefit Services vision includes all areas of corporate responsibility for the administration of the Government's Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit schemes as well as the duties relating to the investigation of fraudulent activity.

## 6. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 6.1 This update amends the detail within the vision, policies and strategies for technical and legislative changes. It also amends the detail for changes to the administration of benefits within the welfare reforms and takes account of changes to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) national Performance Standards.
- 6.2 Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefits are dynamic ever-changing services where business plans are rarely static and require constant review to keep up-to-date with the requirements of the service. Initiatives and plans require constant revision to keep them in line with national expectation and ever changing statutory requirements.
- 6.3 The Housing Benefit reform agenda is high priority in central government and is to have a significant effect on Councils' administration of Benefits Services over the next few years.
- 6.4 The vision, policies and strategies will continue to form the driving force of Benefits Services' operational plans towards a successful contribution to the Council's mission.
- 6.5 It is important that Councils have strong strategic management in place in this high profile area so that they can drive change and at the same time seek continuous improvements in service.
- 6.6 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have revised the national standards of performance for Benefits Services which now include a total of 19 performance measures and 65 enabling measures and the DWP expect Councils to commit to work towards reaching the standards that these measure.
- 6.7 The Counter-Fraud Strategy takes account of the DWP's changes to funding and national targets relating to counter-fraud work .
- 6.8 The vision for Benefits Services together with the policies and strategies provide a framework for operational business and improvement plans to bridge the gap between the current position and the vision.
- 6.9 The vision statement is published on the Selby District Council website and will be displayed in suitable locations as well as sign posted in

various Benefits Services' literature.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

8. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

8.1 The following relevant documents are held by the Benefits Manager:

National Performance Standards (revised April 2006)  
Benefit Services Service Plan 2006/7  
Summary of HB reform (Technical, Process and Inspection Reform)

# BENEFITS SERVICES BENEFITS SERVICES

## THE VISION

04/08/06

### CONTENT :

### Page No

❑ VISION STATEMENT	2-3
❑ STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT STRATEGY	4-8
❑ CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY	9-12
❑ PROCESSING OF CLAIMS STRATEGY	13-15
❑ OVERPAYMENTS STRATEGY	16-21
❑ COUNTER FRAUD POLICY	22-24
❑ COUNTER FRAUD STRATEGY	25-28
❑ PROSECUTION POLICY	29-34
❑ WORKING WITH OUR PARTNERS STRATEGY	35-37
❑ TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY	38-41
❑ INTERNAL SECURITY STRATEGY	42-44
❑ DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS POLICY	45-49
❑ EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY	50-52

**SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**THE BENEFITS SERVICES  
VISION**

**SDC Mission Statement :**

**“To improve the quality of life for those who live and work in the district”.**

**Key Corporate Aims :**

- **To provide for vulnerable residents.**
- **To provide suitable, quality and affordable housing.**

---

**This vision statement sets the strategic principles within which Benefit Services will concentrate its efforts in achieving its objectives.**

**Selby District Council is committed to providing high quality services and recognises that to provide effective and secure Benefit Services it must work towards the standards set out in the Department for Work and Pensions National Performance Standards.**

**In doing so Selby District Council is committed to the principles of Best Value in continually seeking improvement through consultation, comparison, challenge and competitiveness.**

# THE VISION STATEMENT

**Selby District Council's commitment to its Benefit Services will include delivery that :**

- **is customer-focussed, modern and efficient**
- **is speedy and accurate**
- **minimises the risk and level of fraud and error**
- **provides the resources required to deliver the intended service**
- **is accessible to everyone in the community**
- **achieves equality and diversity in all its activities**
- **ensures customers receive the benefit to which they are entitled**
- **seeks to remove the barriers to work**
- **helps customers to live in decent housing and helps to tackle poverty**
- **involves consultation with stakeholders on service aims, objectives and priorities**
- **recovers overpayments**
- **takes action against fraud**
- **seeks continuous improvement**
- **encourages a strong culture of good performance within the organisation**
- **wherever possible brings betterment to individual customers to advance their independence.**

# SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL

## BENEFITS SERVICES - STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

4 August 2006

### Introduction

This strategy underpins the vision statement and should form the basis for daily strategic management objectives to direct the operational delivery of modern, efficient and secure, customer-focussed benefits services.

The vision statement sets the principles for the service and the strategies set the framework and intent for improvement and operation on a daily basis.

The Benefits Services' vision statement, strategies and policies will be reviewed annually and viewed by members to ensure that the objectives and policies are current and fully endorsed.

### Operational Planning

The creation of an annual operational Service Plan will essentially put into daily practice the vision, policies and strategies of the service.

It will seek to address all anticipated influences on the service for the coming years including addressing any resource issues and workload changes.

The plan will include performance targets, identify key actions and key responsible officers.

The plan will look for continuous improvement in the service and seek to have a step change approach as appropriate.

A SWOT analysis will inform actions within the plan where appropriate to maintain strengths, address weaknesses, seize opportunities and minimise threats.

The action plan will take account of and directly link to the corporate themes and priorities.

The plan will be monitored, amended and adapted to meet changing needs and circumstances.

The plan will be communicated to staff and managers, and early involvement of staff in the preparation will assist in providing realistic and achievable plans and promote ownership of targets.

A maintained and updated risk management plan will inform the actions within the plan.

A business continuity plan will give direction and inform responses to disruptions that impact on the normal operations and administration of Housing/Council Tax Benefit.

## **Organisational Structure**

A clear and documented organisational structure will be maintained for Benefits Services.

Documented and clearly defined roles, responsibilities and boundaries will be communicated to staff and managers. These will be updated as necessary due to changed circumstances and communicated to all staff and managers.

## **Procedural Guidance**

There is recognition that documented procedures in this service area require regular and continual review and updating, and that maintaining an accurate and up-to-date procedure manual covering all areas of the service requires substantial and continual resource input.

Nevertheless, Benefits Services will in addition strive to achieve a proper and complete framework of documented local procedures to the normal guidance material available, so that the staff are supported and guided in service delivery by good procedure.

These procedures will take account of good practice, as shown in guidance from the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate (BFI), Audit Commission and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Copies of the regulations, DWP circulars, the HB/CTB guidance manual, all other guidance material, best practice documents, and local procedural guidance will be available to all staff at all times.

## **Performance Management and Targets**

Benefits Services will, as a minimum, set 3-year targets, annually for all National Best Value Performance Indicators subject to local factors, and at all times will have a plan to strive to achieve or maintain top quartile performance in all areas.

It is recognised that maintaining top quartile performance is an aspirational target and is not necessarily SMART.

In addition, agreed local performance indicators and annual targets will be set.

Benefits Officers will ensure adequate processes are in place to measure and monitor progress against targets at least monthly.

Adequate and accurate audit trails of all statistics will be maintained for scrutiny by internal or external audit.

Reporting to Senior Managers and Members will be through the corporate performance-monitoring officer and mechanisms to ensure all agreed returns are submitted within the deadlines should be in place.

Responsibility will be given appropriately for key areas of performance to be monitored weekly, or even daily, to review changes in workload and analyse peaks and troughs.

This will inform the reallocation of resource as appropriate, minimising the risks to performance.

Targets and key performance statistics will be actively communicated to staff and managers as well as made available to appropriate internal departments and external agencies on a regular basis, including the Pensions Service, Job Centre Plus, Housing Associations, Rent Service and voluntary sector agencies.

Benefits Services will also seek to promote the publicity of key performance statistics to customers in relevant media and within reception areas.

### **Training and Development**

As this is such a key area, a separate Training and Development strategy will be maintained, covering all aspects as they relate to overall service delivery and will complement the corporate training policy and plan.

### **Internal and External Audit**

The Council will ensure that there is a rolling programme of internal audit to provide management and member assurance on the security and effectiveness of the HB/CTB administration.

The Council will ensure that the internal audit programme is adequate in its key controls to provide this assurance, given the extent of the authority's expenditure on HB/CTB and, in doing so, recognises the risk and monetary value of HB and CTB compared to other services.

The Council will ensure that there is clear accountability for implementation and monitoring by senior managers of internal and external audit recommendations

The Council will ensure that it acts on recommendations and independent advice from the Council's appointed External Auditors, the Audit Commission Inspectors, Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, Surveillance Commissioners and other external bodies in matters concerning benefit administration.

These will include issues arising out of the annual audit certificate of the Council's accounts and the annual audit of the HB/CTB final grant claim, Best Value Inspections, Comprehensive Performance Assessment and Benefit Fraud Inspectorate and Surveillance Commissioners' visits and inspections.

## **Costs and Budgetary control**

Benefits Services will actively seek and bid for additional external funding for measured and planned projects of service improvement, when the opportunity arises. A full assessment of the service ability to achieve the objectives of any particular project should inform the likelihood of a funding bid acceptance.

At all times the Benefits Service will seek to minimise costs without compromising service delivery performance.

Benefits Services will seek to contribute directly to corporate targets of achieving 'Gershon' efficiency savings relevant to the work it undertakes and strive for value for money in all its decisions and actions.

Adequate and properly planned budgeting and monitoring will be carried out by senior managers, and will ensure accountability and serve to measure and control the efficiency of the service.

A local measure of cost comparison to caseload and turnover will be monitored and reported at least annually.

All staff in the service and new starters will be made aware of general budget issues and the procedures for expenditure control, purchasing procedures, expenses, minimising benefit overpayments, safeguarding controllable costs, and maximising income.

The budget holder will ensure that adequate budgets are set for the following year, matching the needs of the service, and that financial managers are aware of any potential risks or additional cost due to changing circumstances.

Subsidy and grant maximisation will be sought at every opportunity and adequate controls will be in place to identify risks and address identified reduction factors.

## **IT Systems**

The Service will strive to make use of all technology available to it for the improvement in efficiency and performance.

The DWP's standard specification for a Housing Benefits IT system shall form the basis of any procurement specification at the time the core system for administering Housings Benefits is replaced.

At all times the aim of the service is to ensure that technology supports the business requirement rather than introducing or operating IT systems that fail to help administration or secure improvements in service delivery.

The Benefits Service will continually seek improvements in the use of IT systems through forging ongoing and effective relationships with software suppliers and internal or external IT support departments.

Adequate plans to test all new software in a secure environment shall be in place so that when released to a live environment there is minimal disruption to the service.

The Benefits Service will actively encourage, where possible, the use of new technologies in its operations to promote progress towards the e-government agenda.

The business continuity plan will include details of fallback and response plans in the case of failures in IT systems.

The authority will have a fully documented disaster recovery procedure to minimise the service disruption in the event of loss of the building, staff, hardware, data, etc

### **Recruitment and Retention**

It is recognised that the Council has a number of significant issues in this area and Benefits Services will not be complacent in addressing these within its own service area.

It is recognised that, irrespective of the factors that are outside our control, there are a number of factors that may significantly influence the recruitment and retention issues facing us, not least of which is the culture of the workplace and management of services and staff, which can in many circumstances override those factors outside our control.

Benefits Services will at all times place full emphasis on creating a culture that embodies and creates actions directly to promote the following :

- Staff involvement in decision-making
- Staff consultation at all times
- A high level of communication between levels
- Incentives and rewards for high achievement both at individual and team level
- Strong leadership and management
- Work - Life balance including flexible hours, part-time hours, compressed hours, home-working, flexible core-time,
- High level of training and development opportunities for all staff
- Loyalty and corporateness
- Professional and business-orientated culture
- Strong performance management
- Structured and clear lines of responsibility
- Commitment to excellence in everything we do
- Supportive and mentoring culture for all staff particularly new recruits
- Pro-active marketing of all vacancies

# SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL

## BENEFITS SERVICES - CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY

4 August 2006

### **Introduction**

This strategy underpins the Benefits Services' vision statement and should form the basis for creating customer service processes and procedures and the training of front line staff to deliver a modern, efficient and secure, customer-focussed benefits service.

The Council is committed to the principles of customer service shown in the national performance standards and will work towards a service that is not only responsive but proactive in its approach to service delivery. The Council will seek to resolve all enquiries to the complete satisfaction of customers at the first contact.

### **Training**

The appropriate training of front-line staff can have a significant effect on the performance of the service as a whole as this is the first opportunity to affect the perception of the customer at the first point of contact. Pro-active measures will be undertaken to ensure the information gathered for benefit claims is enabled to its maximum at the first point of contact.

It is recognised that highly-trained specialists in the front-facing service provide the best customer satisfaction and can influence the achievement of excellent processing performance across the service. The Council will seek to promote the use of highly-trained specialist staff in any front-facing service providing benefits advice.

Training will follow the specific training strategy drawn up for Benefits Services and will complement and strengthen the corporate training plan. It will also specifically ensure all front-line staff have training in the following areas :

Dealing with difficult people, personal safety, telephone techniques, innovative thinking, proactive delivery techniques, service delivery to claimants from ethnic minorities, with disabilities, with mental health problems, who are vulnerable.

### **Complaints**

The Council will actively and openly encourage complaints about the service and be proactive in response and resolution.

All complaints will follow the corporate procedure and time scales.

Complaints will be fully investigated and trends will be identified to inform training or action plan items.

## **Meeting the needs of the Customer**

Consultation will be sought at all appropriate times through forums, direct contact, surveys, questionnaires, analysis of complaints, ombudsman letters etc.

Consultation and the results of the best value customer survey will inform actions to be included in the annual service and improvement plan.

The Council will identify the differing needs of various groups of people and use this information to inform the service action plan and for changes to processes, procedures and training.

Benefits Services will be involved in corporate cross-cutting reviews for best value and contribute effectively to continually seek improvement.

## **Accessibility including clear and simple forms and letters**

Benefits Services will consider working towards obtaining accreditation for its work. This may include for example a Charter Mark award for its procedures and documentation.

The application form will be regularly reviewed and redesigned appropriately to take account of changing legislation, guidance and the standards set out in the BFI/DWP national model application form.

All standard letters and correspondence with customers will seek to achieve an easy-to-understand format and will follow the principles of the plain English campaign.

Where possible, consultation will be sought on the format and content of documentation with interested parties. This may include Citizens Advice Bureau, customers, Housing Associations, voluntary sector agencies.

All efforts will be made to inform customers of information on access to facilities such as opening times, home visits, reception, telephone, fax, e-mail facilities. These will be made available to all outside agencies.

This will include all available media including various leaflets, booklets, and posters available at all possible contact points, outgoing correspondence, application forms, website and, if appropriate, radio and television.

Consideration and analysis of customer needs will inform whether it would be appropriate to stock applications in other languages.

Verbal translation facilities will be available on request.

The requirements of the Race Relations Acts 1976 and 2000 and Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 1999 will be assessed and appropriate action taken to meet these.

Measures to increase accessibility and quality of service for those in work will be actively sought.

### **IT Systems**

In the acquisition and specification of new software, account will be taken of the need to promote functionality directly related to the improvement in the customer service processes, including :

- The ease and speed of access and navigation to data and information
- The type of data and information available
- The ease and flexibility of recording of customer enquiries
- Reporting facilities
- Letter suites
- Identification of potential entitlement to other welfare benefits and notifications of such.

### **Take up campaigns and Anti-poverty**

Trial assessments will be actively promoted and actioned upon request.

The Council will partner and / or support other appropriate organisations and agencies in participating in take-up campaigns for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit or any other welfare benefit, Tax Credit or Pension Credit.

The Council will actively promote take-up of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit by:

- Active participation with Landlords and a Housing Association Forum
- Production of information leaflets and flyers
- Encouraging reduction in Council Tax bills by sending information on benefit with the annual and all other bills.
- Specifically target information at groups such as elderly tenants, disabled tenants, low income in work.
- Communicate policy and strategy to claimants and representative groups and agencies

Where possible, the Council will promote the take up of new welfare benefits, Pension Credits or new Tax Credits.

The Council will have a policy in place for the distribution of Discretionary Housing Payments to those in need of assistance with their housing costs.

The Council will ensure all interested parties are informed of their rights with all benefit decisions issued.

Information about the disputes and appeals process will be available to customers and their representatives at all relevant times.

The Council will promote Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefit as part of the information available electronically via its website. This will include :

- An on-line calculator so that customers can calculate whether they might be entitled.
- An on-line application form so that customers can apply 24 hours-a-day and do not have to wait for the office to be open.
- A series of leaflets covering all the main topics in an easily understandable format and plain English wording.

The Council will ensure all Local Authority tenants have a full benefits induction upon signing a new tenancy to ensure maximum entitlement is obtained and customers are encouraged and assisted to claim all benefits due.

### **Performance Management and Targets**

Targets for telephone calls, reception enquiries, letter response, complaints and appeals processing will be set.

Regular reporting and review will take place of all customer services targets and statistics.

# SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL

## BENEFITS SERVICES – PROCESSING OF CLAIMS STRATEGY

4 August 2006

### **Introduction**

This document underpins the Benefits Services Vision Statement in outlining the strategy and intent in the specific area of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit processing and should be followed in any operational plans and in creating and updating procedures.

The timely and accurate processing of claims and related changes can be regarded as the core business of Benefits Services and poor performance in this area has the maximum impact on customers and can be seen as the key area of success or failure of the service as a whole.

### **Core Priority**

The Council recognises that the assessment and processing of claims and changes in a timely and accurate manner is the core business of the Benefits Service and as such will concentrate its efforts in this area.

### **Verification**

Benefits Services will maintain compliance with robust verification procedures and guidance issued by the Department for Work and Pensions to secure the gateway in processing claims.

The processes and procedures operated by the Benefits Services in verifying claims will be sufficiently robust to minimise the risks in allowing fraud and error to enter the scheme.

### **Processing backlogs**

All efforts will be made so that processing backlogs do not occur. However it is inevitable from time to time that some kind of backlog will materialise through factors beyond our control.

These will be identified at an early stage and remedial action taken to alleviate the problem.

Backlogs will be pro-actively attacked at the earliest opportunity and an initial plan will be devised without recourse to additional resource. However, realistic, timely and measured plans may indicate that the clearance of backlogs within an appropriate time scale would only be possible with additional assistance. All avenues of opportunity should be explored before seeking authorisation for additional resource. This will not however delay resolution.

A business continuity plan will include management information on the steps to be taken in eradicating backlogs. The risk management plan will also identify specific risks in the same area and identify actions to minimise these.

### **Management Checks and Controls**

The section will maintain a quality control function assessing the accuracy, speed and timeliness of transactions. The section will strive to seek a minimum 10% quality check at all times and actively seek opportunities to increase this level. Quality checks on new staff will be in general 100% of workload for an initial period and reduced appropriately as the need reduces.

The management/control checks will also include accuracy checks relating to the level and standard of evidence in the verification framework and compliance with legislation governing Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

These quality checks will inform :

- Overall and individual training and development needs
- Changes to working practices where security or integrity is compromised
- Changes to working practices where non-compliance with legislation has been identified

Feedback to individuals and management as a minimum, on a monthly basis, will inform appropriate action.

### **Targets**

Continuous improvement in processing performance levels will be sought at all times.

Benefits Services will strive to achieve the top quartile performance in all performance indicator areas. Top quartile targets may be long-term aspirations if there are local factors, which would mean these were not realistic or achievable in the current year. As a minimum, 3-year targets will be set and reviewed annually for all best value and local performance indicators at service level.

The annual service plan will indicate the expected performance in all processing areas for the coming year.

Individual targets will be set for both throughput and accuracy of all work including new claims and changes. The Joint Progress Review will be the mechanism used and agreed targets should contribute to and relate to the overall service target for the coming year.

## **Reporting and Monitoring**

Levels and age of outstanding work will be monitored as a minimum weekly and be clearly communicated to the staff in the section through team meetings as well as clearly displayed in the section.

Timeliness and speed of throughput as well as accuracy will be monitored by individual as well as collated for the section as a whole as a minimum monthly.

Reports by staff member, will be issued individually, at least monthly.

Reports on timeliness and speed of throughput of the section as a whole will be displayed internally as a minimum monthly.

An ongoing review of all monitoring reports will inform remedial action where appropriate.

Processing statistics will be displayed for customers in the reception area and updated as a minimum monthly.

# **SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **BENEFITS SERVICES – OVERPAYMENTS STRATEGY**

4 August 2006

### **Introduction**

This document underpins the Benefits Services' vision statement in outlining the strategy and intent, and should be followed in any operational plans and in creating and updating procedures, in the specific area of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit overpayments.

Benefit overpayments are an integral part of the day-to-day operational processes and have far-reaching effects on customers, performance and the finances of the Council. The effective management and the use of best practice in this area can have a significant effect on the performance of the service as a whole.

### **Procedures**

Up-to-date procedures, reflecting current legislation, will be kept, detailing, as a minimum, the responsibilities in the following areas of overpayment administration :

- Identification
- Calculation
- Recoverability
- Subsidy categorisation
- Decision notices
- Discretion from whom to recover
- Discretion whether to recover
- Discretion on method of recovery
- Recovery process

### **Prevention**

The administration of benefit overpayments is an area of the benefits system that causes frustration and concern amongst claimants, landlords and benefits staff alike. It is one of the most administratively complex areas to operate and the advent of conflicting legislation covering underlying entitlement as well as beneficial and detrimental changes rules has made it difficult for practitioners to calculate accurately some of the more complex overpayments. It makes it far more important therefore to concentrate on prevention at source.

Proactive measures will be sought at every opportunity to prevent or reduce the volume and value of overpayments including a robust risk-based system of interventions.

## **Interventions**

It is recognised that a robust scheme of interventions on claims has the opportunity to reduce overpayments. The interventions scheme is dealt with separately under the Counter-Fraud Strategy

## **Training and Awareness**

All staff will be adequately trained in overpayment procedure and policy.

All cases where potential overpayment may be identified will be able to be dealt with appropriately by all staff at the first point of contact.

All staff will be aware of the impact of incorrect classification of overpayments for subsidy purposes.

All staff will be trained to ensure that the notification of overpayments meets with the requirements of the regulations in every case and the need to notify all persons affected.

As a minimum, annual awareness training sessions will be undertaken with all staff to identify the importance of correct procedure and financial effect of poor procedure.

## **Customer awareness**

Information telling customers of the need to notify change of circumstances quickly and the consequences of not doing so will accompany all appropriate outgoing correspondence, including notification letters and application forms.

The types of changes customers are required to notify will be clearly stated.

Details of how overpayments affect customers will be made clear in customer leaflets and booklets wherever possible including their rights of dispute and appeal.

It is recognised that the probability of changes in circumstance going unnoticed is increased, as claimants are no longer required to renew their claims on a regular basis. Alongside a robust interventions scheme, ongoing and regular publicity campaigns will be sought to more thoroughly inform customers of their duties. This may for example be by the use of appropriately-timed-and-targeted mail shots.

## **Processing**

Cases, which may result in an overpayment, will be prioritised, where possible, to minimise the level of overpayment and maximise the subsidy return. This will include ensuring these cases can be adequately identified at the time of receipt and ensuring processes are in place to move these to the 'top of the pile'. This will include normal cancellations, tenancy changes, deaths and changes in circumstances, for example where there is an increase in income or capital.

## **Control**

A quality control function will be maintained, assessing the accuracy and timeliness of transactions prior to notification in order to minimise the risk of fraud and error. Feedback to individuals and management as a minimum on a monthly basis will inform appropriate action.

## **Anti-Poverty**

This section of the strategy will be reviewed regularly to ensure that corporate objectives and policies are adequately reflected, particularly those relating to anti-poverty and social inclusion.

Meeting the needs of customers in relation to Housing Benefit overpayments can play a significant role in the Council's commitment to its anti-poverty strategy. Identifying and taking appropriate action in relation to :

- vulnerable people,
- in maximising income,
- ensuring access to advice and assistance,
- removing anxiety and the barriers to work
- ensuring customers can be confident in a benefits service that is efficient, helpful and has no delays

can all help to alleviate poverty and enhance social inclusion.

The following are ways this will be sought in relation to the administration of overpayments in the Benefits Services environment :

- Recovery rates should always balance the requirement to recover the debt over a reasonable period with the financial means of the customer.
- Wherever it is identified that the customer has difficulty in repayment or requires assistance in rationalising several debts or general money advice, there will be a system in place to signpost customers to advice and assistance, if that cannot be given at the Council : for example with debt management at the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- All staff will be aware of how overpayments should be correctly calculated and the need to consider underlying entitlement in every case.
- Where another Council debt exists, negotiations will be combined with any other section or department to formulate a joint and single response and point of contact where appropriate.
- Consideration will always be given to circumstances where it may not be appropriate to recover the overpayment. Circumstances of the individual case should be considered before exercising discretion and deciding whether to recover a recoverable overpayment.

- All staff will be able to advise customers appropriately so as to assist the customer to make informed choices in relation to all aspects of any overpayment query.
- Suspension of recovery action will be considered if the person affected places an appeal against the overpayment.
- Pro-active publicity and information on the opportunity to reduce the rates of recovery in hardship cases will be openly available and accompany appropriate overpayment notification letters.
- Information on overpayments and change of circumstances will be made available at all opportunities in benefits literature, leaflets, booklets, and on the Selby District Council Website.

### **Debt Recovery**

Consideration will be given to all available methods of recovery including :

- Recovery from ongoing benefit entitlement (claimant)
- Sundry Debtor account (claimant or landlord)
- Recovery from the rent account (claimant)
- Recovery from the schedule (reduced payment to Landlord for another tenant)
- Recovery from other prescribed benefits
- Recovery from HB entitlement at another authority
- Recovery through the courts

The rate of recovery from ongoing benefit will not normally exceed the maximum rate as designated in the regulations. A higher rate can be negotiated with the claimant should it be clear that they either wish to repay at a higher rate or that their means are such that they are able to pay at a higher rate. Where opportunity exists to recover at a higher rate due to disregarded income that opportunity should be taken.

Recovery will be from the most appropriate person. Consideration will be given to recovery from all relevant persons balancing all factors including the ease of recovery and ensuring no financial hardship is suffered as a result of the recovery process. Recovery from Landlords will only be considered where it is reasonable to do so and will fully comply with regulations, case law and guidance issued by the DWP.

For example if an overpayment exists and :

- The landlord would have had no indication that an overpayment had occurred
- The reason for the overpayment was only directly related to the personal circumstances of the claimant, which could not have been known by the landlord

- The reason for the overpayment is not connected to tenancy changes or household changes
- There is no way that the landlord could have known that an overpayment was occurring

it would not be reasonable to recover the overpayment from the landlord.

Once overpayments are identified as recoverable and the appeals process is exhausted the recovery process will be timely and appropriate referral of cases for action through the courts will be taken.

Priority will be given to the recovery of fraudulent overpayments to act as a deterrent to future breaches of the benefit regulations.

All available methods, resources and means will be used in the pursuance of overpayments including :

Tracing agents

Use of Remote Access Terminal

Local knowledge

Access to available information elsewhere in the authority

Use of available systems and technology to enhance the tracing of debtors

Consideration of advances in technology that may be available to improve recovery

### **Debt Management - Targets**

Continuous improvement in the overall level, the inactive level and age of debt will be sought. As a minimum, annual targets should be set.

### **Reporting and monitoring**

Monitoring and analysis of the level and age of overpayments will include those :

- Above a certain value
- That have been outstanding for more than a certain period of time
- That are inactive

The effectiveness of the recovery process should be monitored and appropriate review of procedure undertaken in light of the results

### **Write off**

All debts to be written off will be considered under the Council's write-off arrangements and authorisation policy.

All avenues of recovery will be exhausted before considering debt write-off.

Each case will be considered individually and detailed circumstances including all action taken noted in the write-off report prior to authorisation.

All overpayments that cannot be recovered and are two years old or more will be submitted for write-off on a six monthly basis.

Written off overpayments will continue to be monitored up to 5 years old to identify any that become recoverable again.

### **Financial Impact**

The correct identification, calculation, subsidy categorisation and recovery of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit overpayments have significant financial impact on the Council.

- Overpayments generally attract a reduced rate of subsidy - 40% as oppose to 100% for normal benefits expenditure.
- The authority keeps all cash recovered against overpayments.
- A reduction in error rate related to local authority error overpayments is incentivised under the subsidy scheme currently in place. Authorities can obtain maximum 100 % subsidy against these types of overpayments if the overall value is below a threshold of 0.48% of total expenditure.
- Recovering overpayments is labour intensive and by the very nature of these debts there is a higher than normal chance that they may be written off even after full court action and enforcement.

It follows therefore that the effective management of all aspects of benefit overpayments can have significant financial impact.

Continuous improvement in the accuracy and timeliness of all areas of overpayment administration will be sought at all times.

# SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL

## BENEFIT SERVICES - COUNTER-FRAUD POLICY

4 August 2006

### Introduction

The Council will maintain, regularly review and update its Counter-Fraud Policy, Counter-Fraud Strategy and Prosecution Policy as the key elements of its fight against fraud and corruption.

This policy sets out the principles upon which this Council will act against benefit fraud.

The Council understands that some people will deliberately attempt to obtain benefits to which they are not entitled by making false representations and this is sometimes done with planning and intention.

In some instances, benefit or increased benefit will have been obtained from the Council without planning but with knowledge that:

- i) the changes in personal circumstances may affect benefit entitlement and
- ii) the change should have been reported to the Council.

The circumstances of each case will be considered individually in conjunction with the Prosecution Policy to decide the appropriate action.

### Overall Policy Statement

The Council is committed to deterring, preventing, and detecting all forms of benefit fraud and will pursue all reasonable and appropriate means of punishment for those who commit an offence.

### The Council's Commitment :

#### Prevention

- The Department for Work and Pensions Security guidance and procedures will form the basis for close scrutiny and vigorous verification of claims to minimise fraud and error entering the system.
- The Council will maintain controls designed to prevent fraud being perpetrated by its own staff and members, supplemented by internal audit and external audit.

#### Deterrent

- The Council will publicise its Counter-Fraud Policy and Strategy in all appropriate media.
- The Council will publicise cases where conviction is successful.
- The Council will consider all cases individually to identify the most appropriate deterrent action.

- The Council will operate a prosecution policy that considers all sanction options including a local written caution, Formal Cautions, Administrative Penalties and Prosecution.

### **Detection**

- The Council will maintain an appropriate level of investigation staff and administrative resource in order to investigate fully all referred cases where there is suspected fraud, in line with a robust risk assessment to sift priority cases.
- All investigation staff will be fully trained and will seek to obtain relevant accredited qualifications where possible.
- The Council will maintain a visiting scheme in at least to the minimum standard within the Performance Standards requirements.
- The Council will carry out reviews (interventions and data matches) in line with the Performance Standards requirements.

### **Pursuance of Offenders**

- The Council will seek to prosecute all offenders where the appropriate criteria are fulfilled within the prosecution policy.
- The Council will offer a Formal Caution or Administrative penalty only when it is seen that this will be an adequate deterrent to future offences.
- The Council will actively seek to prioritise recovery of overpaid benefit due to fraud and will pursue recovery through the courts should adequate repayment not be made.
- The Council will actively pursue all known offenders. This could involve claimants and members of the claimant's household, landlords and their agents, collusive employers, employees of the Council and others who believe they can gain by committing offences.

### **In addition the Council is committed to :**

- Ensuring people get the maximum benefits to which they are genuinely entitled.
- Ensuring that no one suffers hardship.
- Ensuring that civil liberties are respected and safeguarded for all persons involved in an investigation of alleged fraud.

### **Council Employees and Members**

The Council will require all officers involved in the administration of benefits, in all areas of the Council, and all elected Members to report to the Head of Finance and Central Services details of any property that they are renting to tenants and any claims of benefit to which they have any connection.

This may be a claim for benefit where the officer or member is the Landlord, the claimant, a partner, dependant or non-dependant on the application or where there is direct connection with a claim from a close relative or close friend. For this purpose each relevant individual will be required to complete a 'Declaration of Interest' and the principle will apply that the administration of any such claim will not fall within the duties of that individual.

Any Council officer found to be knowingly involved in a criminal offence involving claims of a Welfare Benefit, Tax Credit or Pension Credit either at this Council, any other Council or the Department for Work and Pensions, Inland Revenue or any other agency may be disciplined under the Council's Disciplinary Procedures. This will be in addition to any prosecution proceedings that may be taken under the Council's Prosecution Policy.

### **Performance**

The Council will monitor performance of the Counter-Fraud Policy and Strategy through the Head of Finance and Central Services and the Economy Board.

# SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL

## BENEFIT SERVICES - COUNTER- FRAUD STRATEGY

4 August 2006

### Introduction

Selby District Council is committed to protecting public funds and endeavours to ensure that benefits are delivered to those who have a true entitlement to them.

The Council will act against those people that knowingly obtain benefits to which they are not entitled.

This strategy underpins the Council's Counter-Fraud Policy and outlines the mechanism whereby the Council will deliver its policy in its commitment to fight against fraud.

### Fraud Referrals

A standard referral form will be maintained and guidance on making referrals will accompany stocks of forms issued to all relevant employees.

The Council will maintain and advertise a hotline to enable concerned members of the public to report suspected benefit cheats. The hotline will be private and confidential and all calls will be investigated, subject to a risk assessment informing the likelihood of a sanctionable case of fraud.

All referrals will be sifted within five working days of receipt in line with a locally-informed risk assessment based on a nationally-recognised model.

Fraud awareness training and information will be given to all appropriate authority staff at induction and on a regular ongoing basis, including priority given to those staff involved in the administration of the benefits scheme.

The outcome of referrals will be monitored by source.

It is recognised that not all investigations where fraud is detected will result in any formal action taken under the prosecution policy. Priority will be given to cases where there is a realistic prospect of success in sanction activity.

Counter-fraud staff will seek to identify at the earliest possible stage, both through formal risk assessment and ongoing case review where a case is unlikely to result in a sanction. These cases will be treated as lower priority and considered for a lesser deterrent action in the form of a local caution or compliance letter.

### Verification of Claims

The measures laid down by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Security guidance and procedures represent the minimum standards to be applied by the Council in accepting claims for payment.

Appropriately trained staff will verify the information on the application forms and supporting documents.

All supporting original documentation will be:

- photocopied
- verified by an identified individual
- carry an authentic signature and date
- filed electronically

Whenever necessary verification will include contacting third parties or interviewing them under Section 109 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 and in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

The Council will work with the local and regional Jobcentre Plus and Pensions Service partners to ensure applications received via their electronic systems are adequately verified and appropriate information is transferred to allow accurate processing of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit at the Council.

### **Interventions scheme (including reviews and data matches)**

An interventions scheme will be maintained so as meet the nationally specified targets within the Performance Standards. Interventions include carrying out reviews of claims on an ongoing basis and also undertaking data matches as supplied monthly through the Housing Benefits Matching Service.

### **Reviews and Visiting of Claimants**

A visiting regime will be maintained at least to the minimum standard within the Security guidance and Performance Standards regime to confirm residency and cross check all the information on the application form on an ongoing basis.

Visits will be based on a locally-informed risk assessment process but take account of the nationally-recognised risk assessment process. Visits will generally form the primary basis upon which claims are reviewed. If circumstances dictate or if monitoring of results shows other or combined methods of review are preferable, a proportion of reviews will be carried out by postal check or telephone check.

In the main visits will be notified. Consideration, based on a local assessment, will be made as to whether visits should be notified or un-notified in particular cases.

### **Data Matches**

Data matches will be undertaken to the minimum standard within the DWP Security Guidance and all matches thoroughly investigated to resolution.

### **The Application Form**

The benefits application form will be reviewed annually for clarity, completeness, ease of use and conformity with all legislation by an internal work group, the Citizens Advice Bureau and Housing Associations as a minimum.

The form will be based on the principles of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's and DWP's model national claim form.

The declaration will indicate that false statements and failure to notify changes may be the subject of prosecution.

Either the application form or accompanying standard information issue will give information on the types of changes that need to be notified as well as details of the fraud

hotline.

### **Resources / Authorised Individuals**

The Council will appoint a minimum of 2 Investigation Officers as Housing Benefit Authorised Officers who will have the power of entry and inspection, with permission, under Section 109B and 109C of the Social Security Administration Act 1992.

The Chief Executive will ensure that the officers to be appointed are:

- properly qualified for the job
- fit and proper persons to exercise the powers

Authorised Officers will use the letters of appointment to inspect business premises and to interview persons who may hold information that has relevance to a claim for benefit.

Authorised Officers will use their powers under the Housing Benefit (Supply of Information from Landlords) Regulations 1997 to obtain information from Landlords.

Authorised Officers will follow the Council's policy for the inspection of Landlords' records as determined on 12 May 1998.

### **Management and Quality of Investigations**

An up-to-date code of conduct for Investigation Officers will be maintained and reviewed regularly to ensure it is relevant and updated.

In all aspects of their work officers will maintain a professional demeanour and comply with the Council's policies for:

- the inspection of Landlords' records
- staff safety during external visits

In all aspects of investigation work officers will act in accordance with current legislation including :

- The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Criminal Procedures and Investigation Act 1996
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
- The Council's Counter-Fraud Policy and Strategy and Prosecution Policy
- Guidance issued by the Home Office and DWP Professional Standards Unit

The Council will expect Investigation Officers to be fully trained and to maintain and update training throughout the year as changes dictate.

It is expected that Investigation Officers will hold or actively seek suitable qualifications such as Professionalism in Security (PINS) qualification.

### **Data Protection**

The Council will maintain its registration for purpose 58 under the Data Protection Act 1998. Obtaining evidence will be made in compliance with the Act.

At all times, the Council will observe the guidance of the Data Protection Registrar in the

area of Data Matching.

Whilst the Council is committed to the exchange of information with other organisations it will observe the law on Data Protection and the rules of confidentiality at all times.

### **Data Matching and Do Not Re-Direct**

Whenever possible, the Council will enter into data matching exercises with the DWP and Audit Commission extra to those specified within the Verification Framework.

All efforts will be made to assess the feasibility of other internal or external data matching exercises subject to compliance with the provisions in the Data Protection Act.

The Council will seek to operate the 'Do not re-direct' scheme for all benefits outgoing post to claimants and landlords but take account of costs and outcomes in its operational decisions.

### **Sanctions Activity – Prosecution, Cautions and Penalties**

The Council has a Prosecution and Sanctions Policy and will issue local caution letters, formal cautions and administrative penalties and will seek to prosecute offenders in line with the policy.

### **Publicity**

All publicity should seek to inform the public that the Council is pro-active, not just reactive, in its fight against fraud and make clear its overall policy statement. Publicity should also seek to inform that the Council has a dedicated investigation team whose purpose it is to investigate fraud and potential fraud and to take legal action against those defrauding the Council.

All successful prosecutions will be reported to the media and circulated to staff.

The Counter-Fraud Policy will be made available on the Selby District Council website.

### **Working in Partnership**

The Council will seek to prevent benefit fraud by working in partnership with:

- the Police
- all sections and agents of the Department for Work and Pensions
- the Inland Revenue
- Customs and Excise
- Other Councils including the joint operational and regional boards

through meetings, the exchange of information, data matching, monitoring of service level agreements, joint operations.

The Council will subscribe to the National Anti-Fraud Network to ensure the proper exchange of intelligence concerning fraud activity.

The Council will maintain a registered Single Point of Contact (SPoC) for the purposes of accessing communications data as specified within the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act.

# SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL

## BENEFITS SERVICES - PROSECUTION AND SANCTIONS POLICY

4 August 2006

The Council will seek to prosecute all types of external benefit fraud concerning Rent Rebate, Rent Allowance and Council Tax Benefit. This will include offences that are linked to residency, tenancy, personal circumstances, or household composition and where offences are committed, when claiming, for failing to report changes in circumstances and for providing false information.

The Council will consider all options when:

- The fraud was calculated and deliberate.
- The person has been convicted, cautioned or accepted an administrative penalty previously involving some form of Social Security fraud.
- The recoverable overpayment exceeds £800.00.
- The case has arisen from a collusive landlord/employer investigation (These cases are considered to amount to serious fraud and, irrespective of the amount of overpayment, should be considered for prosecution from the outset).

If, during a benefit investigation, a claimant leaves the Council's area and fraud can be proved within the criteria laid down, providing that the forwarding address is known, legal action will continue.

Any internal staff whether they administer or not the benefit service, found to have knowingly committed benefit fraud will be:

- Subject to the Council's disciplinary procedures and
- Where the evidence suggests that a conviction is likely, prosecuted.

If, in deciding to prosecute offenders it is determined that:

- Housing Benefit fraud is linked to renovation grant or other frauds
- Housing Benefit fraud involves offences such as conspiracy
- If a suspect is considered or known to be a potentially violent person or is
- Likely to threaten witnesses or abscond
- If the investigation will be assisted by the execution of a search warrant

officers will liaise with the police.

The Council will publicise the fact that it will prosecute and obtain convictions in:

- press releases
- poster and leaflets
- claim forms
- other documents sent to claimants and landlords
- the Council's website

The Council will publicise convictions when not adequately reported through normal press coverage.

The Council will review and make appropriate changes to its prosecution policy whenever the Department for Work and Pensions(DWP), the Home Office or other relevant bodies issue further or revised guidelines on prosecutions and sanctions.

Decisions on applying sanctions, recommendations to prosecute and the reasons for them will be recorded.

The Council will contact the Department for Work and Pensions' fraud officers if it has evidence that multiple false claims are being submitted to the to the Job Centre Plus or Pensions Service offices.

In accordance with the Counter-Fraud Joint Working Partnership Agreement with the Department for Work and Pensions, agreement will be reached on who should take the initiative about prosecuting in cases where there is evidence of fraud against both this Council and the DWP.

The Council will either prosecute, issue formal cautions, issue administrative penalties, or issue local written cautions to people who have committed an offence.

The primary basis, upon which a decision is made to take a particular course of action, is that the particular action should be the lowest possible to achieve a robust and adequate deterrent to any future re-offending.

All cases will be judged taking account of the criteria on the following pages, essentially undertaking two key tests and following the sanction framework while applying the circumstances of each case.

In the case of administrative penalties the Council is conscious that imposing more debt on someone who may have already committed an offence because of financial pressures may not in these circumstances be seen as an adequate form of deterrent. The use of a formal caution where this is available for the same case may form a more robust form of control of its duty to apply an adequate deterrent. The Council will therefore consider administrative penalties in all relevant cases but may lend more weight to the deterrent factors of other sanctions should they be available.

The Council is also conscious that the level of fraud in our area may be weighted more in numbers towards opportunistic fraud rather than organised and deliberately calculated cases where the original intention from the start was to commit an offence. These types of cases may be seen by the man in the street as low-level fraud. The Council will act against these in the most appropriate manner within the guidelines of this policy in order to seek full and ongoing compliance of customers with the law.

## **Sanction Decision Policy**

The Council recognises that the decision whether to offer a sanction such as a formal caution, administrative penalty or prosecution is a significant one and one that can have far-reaching consequences for the alleged offenders.

Each case will be considered individually and all information and facts taken into account.

In making any decision about sanctions and whether a prosecution may be relevant for a particular case, using the criteria below, all alternatives to prosecution will be considered in that process.

The decision whether to prosecute or seek a lesser sanction will take account of the principles and advice available and given by the Home Office in various circulars and the recognised principles within the Code for Crown Prosecutors.

The Council will use two overarching principal tests in its decision-making process, particularly in relation to the decision whether to prosecute or in deciding whether to impose a lesser sanction. These are the 'evidential' test and the 'public interest' test.

### **The Evidential Test**

The evidence obtained and presented within the file must be sufficient to provide a realistic prospect of a conviction. The person making the decision will be satisfied this is the case and be satisfied that a court is more likely than not to convict the offender of the alleged offence.

In making this decision consideration will be given to such matters as :

Is the evidence being used to make the decision admissible in court ? Evidence that might seem relevant may fall foul of the legal rules, which mean that it cannot be used in a trial. This may be the case because of the way in which it was gathered for example.

The reliability of the evidence. This would include any concerns about the accuracy of any evidence and the credibility of witnesses. For example is any witness's background likely to weaken the prosecution case ? Does the witness have any motive that may affect his or her attitude to the case or have a relevant previous conviction ?

Is there any evidence that would detract from any admission of the alleged offender or that would cast doubt on the actual offence.

Are there any concerns about evidence which may be seen as simply information with nothing to support it ?

Is the reliability of any confession affected by factors such as the alleged offender's age, intelligence or level of understanding ?

What explanation has the alleged offender given and is this credible in light of the evidence as a whole and does this support an innocent explanation ?

## **The Public Interest Test**

This test should always be a major part of any decision should the evidential requirement be met. The Council will not prosecute simply because an offence has been committed. Any decision will consider whether the public interest requires a prosecution in bringing any such case to the court.

Even if there are public interest factors in a particular case it may be that prosecution should still continue and these factors put before the court for consideration when sentencing.

Public interest factors that can affect the decision usually depend on the seriousness of the offence and the circumstances of the alleged offender.

Some factors may increase the need to prosecute and others may suggest another course of action would be more appropriate.

In any circumstance the need for an adequate deterrent to future offending will form the background of the decision-making process taking into account the relevant criteria for any such sanction activity.

In the case of Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefits, the level of offence relating to the financial loss will be combined with the circumstances of the alleged offender in the decision-making process and the following criteria will form the Council's framework for the decision on sanction activity under the public interest test.

Any factors in a case will not simply be added up on each side but the decision-maker will identify the importance and weight that should be attached to each one to make an overall assessment.

## **FRAMEWORK FOR SANCTION DECISION**

If the overpayment is under £200 and:

- the claimant has never previously offended
- there was no planning involved in the process
- there was no other person involved in the fraud

the Council believes that, in most instances, it is not in the public interest to prosecute. A local written caution will be issued and held on file. A local written caution letter may be taken into account in future sanction decisions but will not form the overall formal basis for the decision on a particular sanction activity. Only the issue of a Formal Caution will do this in line with the Home Office guidance.

If the overpayment is under £800 but over £200 and:

- the claimant has never previously offended
- there was no planning involved in the process
- there was no other person involved in the fraud

the Council believes that, in most instances, it is not in the public interest to prosecute if a lesser sanction would be an adequate and effective deterrent, a formal caution or administrative penalty will be offered by a senior officer at the Council. That officer will have a status not less than the Benefits Manager. In the event that the formal caution or administrative penalty is not accepted or the offender does not attend to be cautioned or interviewed, prosecution will be sought in most cases.

If the overpayment is under £800 and:

- the claimant has offended previously or
- the claimant has been given a formal caution or administrative penalty previously

then, in most instances, the Council will prosecute regardless of the level of the overpayment.

If the overpayment is over £800.00 all options will be considered taking each case into account individually.

Applicable circumstances to be taken into account in every case are attached.

If,

- there was deliberate planning involved in the process or
- there were other persons involved in the fraud

then, in most instances, the Council will prosecute regardless of the level of the overpayment.

## **APPLICABLE CIRCUMSTANCES**

The following circumstances will also be taken into account in deciding what action to take in individual cases under the policy. These circumstances may make it more likely or less likely that a particular sanction activity is relevant.

- social factors such as: age, literacy, family circumstances, learning difficulties etc...
  - other social factors - for example, a claimant was driven to the offence by a particularly stressful domestic situation which may include genuine financial hardship and in the case of a single parent.
- in need of Social Services' assistance
- the claimant's physical and medical condition or that of the partner or dependent child medical evidence may be required
- voluntary disclosure – prior to investigation a claimant of their own free will reveals a fraud of which the Department had no knowledge.
- duration and seriousness of the offence
- the alleged offender has put right the loss or harm caused ( although this should not solely avoid prosecution because of this.)
- failure in benefit administration including delay where lax administration has allowed fraud to succeed or a failure in the investigation.
- genuine remorse of the offender
- previous fraudulent activity/offences or criminal record of the offender
- the offence was committed as a result of a genuine mistake, misunderstanding or misjudgement (balanced against the seriousness of the offence)
- the adequacy of the deterrent and any ground for believing that similar offences would be repeated
- history of recurring detrimental conduct

This list is not exhaustive.

# **SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **BENEFITS SERVICES –WORKING WITH OUR PARTNERS**

4 August 2006

### **Introduction**

This document underpins the vision statement in outlining the strategy and intent. It should be followed in any operational plans and in creating and updating procedures and business improvement plans. This includes the specific area of partnerships and liaison with all internal departments and external agencies including government agencies and Landlords

The effective management of partnerships and liaison and the building of effective relationships between Benefits Services and other agencies can have a significant effect on the performance of the service as a whole.

### **Internal Relationships**

Benefits Services will seek to work closely with all other front line services to promote the first-time correct completion of claims. This includes Housing staff , Council Tax, Rent Recovery, Customer Service Centre and call centre staff, Central Administration, Environmental Health, Homelessness Officer, Hostel Wardens.

Clear lines of responsibility will be maintained for the control and monitoring of benefit payment data to rent accounts and Council Tax accounts to ensure customers accounts are accurate and up to date.

Regular liaison contact between systems administrators should be maintained and reconciliations between departments' data should be maintained and problems identified and resolved quickly.

Benefits Services will promote the cross training on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit issues to all those involved in the administration of the benefits scheme in other departments and awareness of all other front line staff.

### **External Agencies**

Benefit Services will promote discussion with other North Yorkshire District and Borough Councils for the purpose of joint initiatives, partnerships, process benchmarking and improvements in overall service delivery. Where appropriate liaison with other national authorities will be sought to compare and promote best practice.

Benefits Services will maintain effective links and pro-actively encourage liaison with other external agencies as appropriate including voluntary sector agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Disability Information and Advice

Line, Age Concern, Carers Centre, Welfare Benefits Unit, Housing Advice and Resource Project.

Benefits Services will maintain effective links with appropriate county controlled services as they are affected by the administration of Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefit. Benefits Services will actively promote communication with Social Services, Education and Supporting People Departments

Service Level Agreements (SLA's) with the following agencies will be maintained, monitored and regularly reviewed to promote improvements in processing performance. However it should be noted that SLA's are not always as effective at maintaining relationships and improving services when performance is poor and direct contact through forums and meetings will be encouraged at all times.

- Rent Service
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Inland Revenue
- Pensions Service
- Job Centre Plus
- Counter Fraud Intelligence Service

### **Service Provision –Partnership Arrangements**

The Council will explore partnership arrangements for the provision of the service or parts of the service where these arrangements may bring efficiency savings both cashable and/or non-cashable. Any such arrangements will require robust set up, contractual arrangements and ongoing review to ensure management confidence in the services provided. This is also so that any challenge from The Department for Work and Pensions, Audit Commission or the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate is ensured that any risks to the security of this national system are minimal.

The corporate and service risk management plans will identify any risks to the service and plans to minimise these as a result of the reliance on these arrangements.

The Council has entered into partnership with North Yorkshire County Council for the provision of partial front office services at Sherburn-in-Elmet. The Council has also a partnering arrangement with East Riding of Yorkshire Council for The provision of technical and IT services related to Revenues and Benefits.

The Council will seek to maintain, enhance and expand, if appropriate, those relationships, to the benefit of the authority in providing cost effective and quality services.

## **Working with Landlords**

Councils working closely with landlords, both private and registered social landlords (RSL's), is a key factor in achieving the corporate aim of providing suitable, quality and affordable housing. Benefits Services plays a significant role in this area as particularly with RSLs there is a high financial dependency on receipt of Housing Benefit.

Benefits Services will ensure that staff are specifically trained to provide the most appropriate and effective service to landlords.

Benefits Services will promote effective communication with all landlords through

- Providing regular newsletters and updates of factors affecting landlords and Housing Benefit
- Taking the lead in forums and liaison meetings with Housing Associations and other RSLs
- Actively taking part in private landlord forums
- Promoting joint initiatives with appropriate landlord bodies
- Having available specific information on the HB scheme for landlords in the form of leaflets and through other media.

Benefits Services will consider ways of participating in government initiatives for joint working with landlords for the benefit of increasing performance or improving service delivery.

Benefits Services will make individual decisions on the recovery of overpayments where there is a choice between landlord and claimant taking all factors into consideration. The Overpayment strategy gives specific criteria that will be taken into account in making these decisions.

Benefits Services will have clear policies and practices on the recovery of overpayments and ensure staff have adequate guidelines and are fully trained in operating and making decisions as appropriate to those policies and practices.

Benefits Services will work towards reducing overpayments by ensuring all landlords have an understanding of their responsibilities.

Benefits Services will make appropriate use of direct payments to landlords to reduce the risks of eviction.

Benefits Services will seek to maintain appropriate communication links with landlords to reduce the risk of eviction and seek to prevent the claimant incurring additional costs through court action.

# **SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **BENEFIT SERVICES - TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

4 August 2006

### **Introduction**

This strategy underpins the vision statement and compliments the corporate training plan. It should form the basis for continuous training and development of all benefits and investigation staff in delivering a modern, efficient and secure, customer focussed benefits service.

The administration of these benefits is now so complex that staff performance is vital and retention and recruitment are major issues. Staff should be regarded as 'benefit professionals' and training, career and personal development should be effectively managed and reflect this accordingly. All staff and particularly new starters need to be properly supported through their development and training programme.

### **Delivery and Procurement**

A wide range of packages, materials, media and trainers will be considered in the delivery, dependent on the type of training required and availability of resource. Professional trainers are expensive but generally provide effective and high quality, informed information, in short well prepared sessions. Internal training will be more effective for delivery of internal procedure. Systems training will be sourced as appropriate and cost effective. Benefit Services will consider all options including the provision of systems training from the IT system supplier and from East Riding of Yorkshire or other Local Authorities with the same core system.

Generally training procurement will be dependent on the type of training to be undertaken.

Benefits Services management will maintain partnerships with other Local Authorities for the benefit of staff at Selby. Most appropriately the 'North Yorkshire Benefits Training Group' will be developed and maintained to enhance the development of staff across the region and maintain a low cost but effective procurement option.

Where specific training expertise is available partnerships with other authorities will be considered, such as East Riding of Yorkshire Council.

Where appropriate additional funding availability will be explored with the Department for Work and Pensions on an ad hoc basis and bids submitted on behalf of the authority or jointly with other local authorities to promote the training and development of staff at all levels within the benefits area.

## **Types of Training**

The different areas of training covered by this strategy will include both knowledge and skills based training including the following areas :

- New starter induction
- Personal development
- Management Training
- Qualification Training

New starter induction will be based on a properly organised and time bound modular programme of training with a work plan to be issued to all new starters.

This will be revised and updated at evaluation as the programme progresses.

Personal development for existing staff will be a combination of the use of external trainers, North Yorkshire Benefits Training Group, self teach and will also include the use of relevant modules and internal sessions either by group or individual.

Management training for appropriate staff will be promoted through the Joint Progress Review and appropriate enrolment on corporate management training will take place.

Qualification Training relevant to the business will be promoted for every staff member and requests proactively supported for funding and availability.

Specific nationally recognised qualifications in benefits administration such as the IRRV benefits technician course or the benefits NVQ will be promoted to all staff and encouragement given for staff to pursue.

## **Materials**

A wealth of materials and information are available from numerous sources.

A framework of easy-to-follow training modules will be created and maintained, covering all the major areas of the administration of Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefit at Selby. Each module should have a range of training types which may include, self teach, internal delivery, presentations, reading, on the job, shadowing, attendance at external courses etc.

These will be designed so that there is a logical sequence for new starters induction.

All new starters will be given a work plan which will include training dates, evaluation milestones, familiarisation periods, and give a clear indication to the individual as to the expected achievements over a period of time.

## **Roles of Training Staff and Managers**

All staff and managers should be involved in the training process.

The Benefits Management team will be responsible for :

- Designing and maintaining the training modules to be used internally.
- Vetting any external training content to ensure effective and appropriate delivery.
- Training requisition and authorisation
- Evaluating training and revision of training in light of results
- Delivering any legislation training undertaken internally
- Delivering general procedural training
- Organising of all other training
- Support to staff in their personal development
- Arranging relevant mentoring where required

Identified benefits staff will be expected to familiarise new staff with:

- The core benefits system usage in different circumstances
- The Document management system usage
- Internal procedure in relation to benefit administration

Benefits staff will not be expected to cover their normal daily work for the period when they are seconded out to help with training or familiarisation.

Benefits management team will encourage and consider the use of mentors at the appropriate time for staff undertaking training and development. This particularly relates to staff new into the service. Mentors appointed will be adequately briefed as to their role and monitored appropriately.

## **Budgeting and Control**

At the financial planning stage the budget set and bids made will reflect the requirements identified through joint progress reviews, work plans for new starters and any areas in the business plan requiring funding. This will also take into account any funding available externally or from the central training budget. The Benefits Manager will monitor and control the budget on a monthly basis.

## **Training Needs Analysis**

A training needs analysis will be carried out in a standard format for each member of staff at least annually. These will be kept by the staff member as a record of their needs and requests and can be updated by the individual as and when training is carried out.

The needs analysis will be where possible co-ordinated with the annual joint progress review and all staff are required to identify their individual training requirements at this stage.

In addition the Quality Control Officer will identify any individual or section training needs through the daily quality check records.

Supervisors and managers will identify training needs also through evaluation, joint progress review, daily management and operational activity.

Where possible more advanced needs analysis should be utilised where a knowledge audit may more accurately identify needs of individuals or groups in specific areas.

## **Training Evaluation**

Senior officers should take an active role in the evaluation process. A standard template will be used to show the results of the evaluation and action taken. New starters should have evaluation sheets completed each week for the first three months or as appropriate.

Each training module may additionally have an evaluation sheet completed once the staff member has completed the module. Any additional requirement or revision required will be identified and progressed.

## **Records**

Each staff member will keep the training needs analysis and a copy of their Joint Progress Review as a record of training needs and plan for the year.

The Principal Benefits Officer and Counter Fraud Officers will be responsible for keeping a separate overall record of training undertaken on a daily basis, indicating the date, content, trainer and trainees.

All evaluation sheets will be collated and kept centrally as a record of action taken to address lapses.

# SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL

## BENEFITS SERVICES - INTERNAL SECURITY STRATEGY

4 August 2006

### Introduction

This strategy underpins the Benefit Services vision statement and should form the basis for the maintenance of operational controls, audit and working practices to minimise the risks of internal fraud in the daily delivery of Benefits Services.

### Post Opening

The Council will have procedures and controls in place to ensure that items of mail are not lost or stolen

Controls will be in place to minimise the risk of fraudulent documents entering the system including ensuring that all staff dealing with benefits post are adequately trained in fraud awareness and verification procedures.

All efforts will be made for post to be opened and stored in a secure and controlled area with restricted access.

Procedures will be in place to ensure that post is stamped with the date of receipt and valuable items are recorded, countersigned and returned securely.

### Recruitment

The following staff involved in the administration of the benefits claims will be subject to the procedures outlined below. The list is not exhaustive and any other staff member who becomes directly involved in the administration of benefits may also be subject to these procedures.

#### Relevant Staff

- All staff directly employed in the Benefits and Counter Fraud Sections
- Post opening staff
- Scanning and indexing staff
- Customer Service Centre and Contact Centre staff
- Council Tax Staff
- Revenues staff who assist in collection of benefits documents

#### Procedures

- All efforts will be made to vet new staff thoroughly before an appointment is made.
- This will include verifying references provided by employers and educational and professional qualifications are genuine.
- There will be a requirement for all staff to complete a 'declaration of interest' and 'confidentiality agreement'
- There will be a requirement for all staff to undergo Security of Personal

Information training and awareness.

- All new staff will be subject to an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check.
- The recruitment process will seek information about previous convictions and formal cautions relating to criminal offences.
- All new employees will be required to provide evidence of identity and residency.
- Agency and contract staff will be subject to the same level of scrutiny.

### **Internal controls**

Internal Audit will maintain an up to date model of key controls used to maintain internal security

Timely actions will be taken and reported to senior managers, against any recommendations in Internal or Externally appointed Audit reports where weaknesses in internal security are identified.

Internal Audit work programmes will be informed by risk analysis, which reflects the size of payments of HB/CTB made by the authority.

### **Information Technology**

The Council will work towards an annual self-assessment as to the integrity of systems measured against BS7799 or a similarly recognised standard.

The Council will put in place systems and procedures to ensure that its use of document management systems maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of Benefits Services and to ensure that there is no adverse effect to security.

Regular monitoring of scanned documents will take place to inform a quality audit report which will also look specifically at security issues ensuring documents are :

- Correctly routed,
- Correctly indexed
- Of suitable resolution quality,
- Accurately recorded to the date received,
- Appropriately prioritised

All efforts will be made to scan and index documents into the system on the day of receipt or as soon as possible on the next working day.

Full fraud awareness training will be given to all staff involved in the administration of benefits to ensure that they are able to identify suspect documents and/or cases.

## **Payment and Accounting**

There will be adequate procedures in place to ensure :

- Instruments of payment are kept securely
- Cheques requiring a stop placed on them are dealt with effectively.
- All instruments of payment are issued in 'Do not re-direct' envelopes.
- Un-cashed cheques are investigated after a specific period not exceeding 6 months

The feasibility of automated (BACS) payments will be considered in all appropriate cases in line with the move towards electronic government.

# SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL

## DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS POLICY

4 August 2006

### Introduction

Provisions in the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000 introduced Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) arrangements from 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2001.

Under these arrangements Councils are able to provide additional financial assistance by way of stand-alone payments, to Housing Benefit(HB) and Council Tax Benefit(CTB) recipients for help with housing costs.

These are not payments of benefit. They are free standing payments to be made at the discretion of the Council and are subject to an annual cash limit.

Regulations covering DHP's are *The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001*. The regulations provide some basic requirements but give local authorities discretion in most areas.

Regulation will set a maximum, annual cash limit to the amount of DHP's that can be paid. The Department for Work and Pensions(DWP) will provide a grant equal to the value of DHP's paid out, only up to around 30% of the cash limit. The remainder of any DHP's paid out, is at the cost of the Council. Any unspent DWP grant has to be returned.

### Statement of Objectives

All applications will be treated on their individual merits and consideration will be given to all cases meeting the qualifying criteria. The Council sees the scheme as a short-term emergency fund and should not be seen as a way around the entitlement restrictions for Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefit. The Council will seek through the operation of this policy to :

- Support the most vulnerable people in the community
- Help to alleviate poverty
- Help to keep families together
- Encourage and promote independence
- Safeguard people in their homes and alleviate homelessness
- Help customers through personal crisis
- Help and support those trying to help themselves
- Encourage people to seek and sustain employment

### Criteria

The following criteria must be satisfied :

- The claimant is entitled to HB or CTB or both
- You are satisfied that the claimant requires further help with housing costs

Also DHP's cannot be awarded if the Council's overall cash limit is exceeded.

## **When DHPs cannot be paid**

DHPs would only be payable for that part of the Housing costs that would normally be eligible for HB or CTB. (i.e. they cannot be paid for ineligible services , water, sewerage, electric etc....)

DHPs cannot be paid :

- When HB or CTB is suspended
- When a welfare benefit sanction is in place such as IS or JSA
- For a claimant of Second adult rebate

(Full DWP guidance is available for details of these types of circumstance)

## **Amount and duration of DHP's**

This is entirely at the discretion of the Council.

It is suggested that there should be, either a fixed four weekly payment in arrears cycle for any payment due, for a fixed period award, or that there should be a fixed period of payment in advance. This would depend on the merits of the particular case.

## **Claims**

There has to be a claim for DHP's.

All claims will be submitted on the approved claim form designed by Benefits Services and be signed by the claimant and will be supported by documentary evidence in order to verify personal circumstances directly related to the claim for DHPs as appropriate.

## **Information required**

It is for the Council to decide how much information it needs.

The Council will request documentary evidence as it sees reasonable to do so, in order to verify the validity of a claim. For example ...medical evidence, evidence of other debts etc...

## **Amount of the Award**

Awards will meet in whole or in part the restriction of benefit for HB and/or CTB up to the maximum, where benefit plus the DHP on a weekly-calculated basis is equal to the eligible rent or eligible Council Tax.

Whether the award meets only part or all of the restriction will be dependent on the merits and facts of the case. In deciding the award amount that decision should take account of the Council's vision for it's Benefits Service which should help to promote the independence of individuals. Simply covering the shortfall in rent in full in many cases may not be persuasive to individuals in seeking a longer-term financial resolution to their issues. The starting point for the decision on the amount of the award should be to consider covering part of the shortfall rather than in full. Any persuasive factors should then be assessed in deciding whether to increase the award.

## **Period of the award**

The period of the award is at the discretion of the Council.

The awarding officer, dependant on the circumstances of the case, will decide the period of the award. Fixed periods may be used, 4 weeks, 12 weeks, 26 weeks or annual.

The period of the award will not extend beyond 52 weeks.

## **Re-application**

Claimants will have to re-apply at the time that the DHP award ends.

## **Year end uprating**

All awards of DHP will be reviewed at year-end or at any other time an uprating of state benefits takes place during the year. Notifications of awards will indicate that this will happen.

## **Method of Payment**

Payment will generally be made with payments of current entitlement by crossed cheque for Rent Allowance cases. Consideration will be given to the most appropriate method of payment for each circumstance in the case of Rent Rebate and Council Tax Benefit cases. In general payment will be made to the person who normally receives the payment of the Benefit. For example payment would normally be paid to the landlord if he/she normally receives the benefit by this method.

## **Backdating**

Awards will be considered from the Monday of the week in which the application is made or from an earlier period, if it is reasonable to do so, based on any reasons for delay in applying. The Housing Benefit backdating guidance may be considered as a reference when considering backdating an award.

## **Changes in Circumstance**

Claimants will be notified at all possible stages of their duty to report changes that will affect both their benefit and DHP's. Changes in circumstance will be taken into account from the same date that the change to HB or CTB takes effect. This will normally be the Monday following the date of the change or from the date that the change was notified if the change is advantageous to the claimant and the change is not notified within one calendar month of the date of the change. Other dates will apply as appropriate in line with the new regulations governing Tax Credits and Pension Credits.

## **Decisions**

Benefit Officers using the policy and guidelines in this document will make initial decisions on awards.

## **Disputes**

There is no formal right of appeal on awards of DHP's but claimants will be given the opportunity to ask us to look again at the decision to see if it can be altered.

It is suggested that an officer other than the one who made the original decision looks at disputes and a recommendation made.

The Benefits Manager will make and authorise a final decision based on the facts of the case.

## **Recovery of Overpayments**

Overpaid DHP's cannot be recovered from ongoing benefit or via the Council Tax account or Rent Account as in the case of HB or CTB overpayments.

It is suggested that in general overpayments are not recovered. But if there was a failure to declare a relevant change of circumstance over a period of time the overpayments may be recovered by creation of a sundry debt. This would be where the failure is considered unreasonable, or that the HB or CTB award becomes not payable or reduced, because of a fraudulent declaration, or non-declaration,

There is no formal right of appeal on the recovery of overpaid DHP's. Claimants will be able to ask us to look again at any decision made in respect of recovery. This will be dealt with in the same manner as disputes on payment of DHP's.

## Guidelines for awarding DHPs

These guidelines are not prescriptive but give a general idea of the factors that will be taken into account in making the decision whether to award a DHP or not.

Each case will be decided on its merits.

No one factor will be a prerequisite to an award.

All the circumstances of the case will be taken into account.

In each case the representations of the claimant will form the basis of the decision and claimants should be encouraged to provide full detail of the reasons why they believe they should be awarded a DHP.

It should be noted that a DHP award would normally be regarded as a temporary form of assistance to help people to get back on their feet. It may be pertinent to point out to those people that could take some action to resolve their hardship that they should not rely on the DHP payment. This may be a factor in any future decision on a DHP award. It may be relevant in a case for example to point people in the direction of debt counselling and or the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

All staff will be pro-active in identifying cases where there are circumstances, which may merit an award.

In general it would seem reasonable to consider cases for an award where there are combinations of circumstances that directly affect the claimants ability to cover his Housing costs (shortfall of benefit.)

Cases where there are unusual or exceptional circumstances would be more persuasive in deciding whether an award is made, although this does not have to be the case for an award to be made.

Factors that may be taken into account :

The claimants physical and mental condition

Social factors

The claimants age

Single parent

Genuine financial hardship

What actions has the claimant taken to alleviate the hardship

Has the claimant sought advice from other agencies

Was the claimant aware of the shortfall before becoming liable for the rent

Has the claimant any other resources to fall back on

What is the level of disregarded income

Will the DHP alleviate the hardship temporarily/only long term

What action will the claimant take if the DHP is not awarded

Financial circumstances of the claimant directly related to the difficulty with their housing costs.

Any unusual or exceptional circumstances that relate to the difficulty with housing costs