



SERVICE PLAN 2021/22

The Leicestershire Partnership Revenues and Benefits

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1 Councils' Aims and Priorities:



Priority 1
Priority 2
Priority 3

Harborough District Council

The Place: a safe enterprising and vibrant place
The People: a healthy, inclusive and empowered community
Your Council: creative, proactive and efficient



Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

A Borough to be proud of

Priority 1
Priority 2
Priority 3

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

People: Helping people to stay healthy, active and protected from harm.
Places: Creating clean and attractive places to live and work.
Prosperity: Encouraging growth, attracting businesses improving skills and supporting regeneration.



Priority 1
Priority 2
Priority 3
Priority 4
Priority 5

North West Leicestershire District Council

Supporting Coalville to be a more vibrant, family town
Our communities are safe, healthy and connected
Local people live in high quality, affordable homes
Supporting businesses and helping people into local jobs
Developing a clean and green district

OVERALL PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SERVICE	To provide a high quality and secure Revenues and Benefits service to our residents and businesses at an economical cost and in accordance with the principles of continuous improvement and customer requirements.
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To assess and pay Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support accurately and promptly. 2) As part of our DWP liaison role to ensure all referrals are made in accordance with the requirements of the DWP. 3) To issue accurate and prompt Council Tax and NNDR bills to maximise collection rates, and to deal appropriately with non payers to minimise arrears. 4) To provide residents with a choice of how to engage with services via access channels that ensure the customers safety and are covid compliant 5) To widely publicise the availability of all discounts, exemptions, reliefs and housing benefit, and to provide informed advice on all Revenues and Benefits matters. 6) To ensure that the service observes all statutory requirements including those governing the administration of Revenues and Benefits, Freedom of Information, Data Protection, Human Rights and Health and Safety. 7) To adhere to our commitment to promote equality and diversity among our residents and staff. 8) To provide and develop innovative services for all customers. 9) To communicate effectively with our customers and stakeholders, developing our services to meet their changing needs. 10) To provide accurate and timely services for our external and internal customers. 11) To maximise collection rates whilst having due regard to the difficulties faced by some customers in making their payments. 12) Develop our services through well trained, empowered and committed staff who are proud to work for the Leicestershire Revenue and Benefits Service. 13) To treat all our customers consistently and fairly. 14) To provide Value for Money services by delivering both financial and processing efficiencies.

Scope of services provided by the partnership	
Council Tax Billing and Enforcement	Housing Benefit administration
NNDR Billing and Enforcement (including BIDs)	Council Tax Reduction Scheme Administration (Council Tax Support)
The investigation of Council Tax Support Fraud	Housing Benefit Overpayment enforcement
Provision of customer support and guidance	Housing Benefit advice and support
DWP Liaison in respect of Housing Benefit Fraud	Administration and payment of business grants to those impacted by the pandemic

3. **National & Local Agenda Items**

There are new and existing matters that will need to be addressed during 2021 to meet both the central government's objectives and the Partnerships. The pandemic has had a significant impact on the way we currently deliver our services and the need to switch resources to deliver new initiatives.

The items are:

1. Supporting Businesses through grants payments
2. The financial impact on individuals
- 3 Changes to service delivery
4. The Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space Moratorium)
- 5.. The Housing Benefit Award Accuracy initiative

Supporting businesses through grants payments

A number of national measures have been introduced to support businesses as a consequence of the pandemic which include grants to help those businesses who have been mandated to close or who have had to change their business model in order to continue trading. It is important to note that the partnership are administering the national schemes and over and above that we have the discretionary schemes dealt with by the host authorities

There are currently:

- LRSG Closed (Addendum) 5-11-20 to 1-12-20
- LRSG (Closed version 2) 2-12-20 to 15-12-20
- LRSG (Closed) 16-12-20 to 30-12-20
- LRSG (Closed) Addendum – Tier 4 31-12-20 to 4-1-21
- Christmas Support Payment for wet-led pubs (one off payment)
- LRSG (Closed) Addendum 5-1-21 to 15-2-21
- Lockdown Grants for RHL (one off payment)

At the time of drafting the report only the Christmas Support payment has an end date so the likelihood is that the partnership will have to continue to administer the other 6 grants listed and allocate the required level of resources to ensure claims are processed and paid as promptly as possible.

The financial impact on individuals

In 2020/21 Central Government announced an additional £500m exceptional hardship funding to support working age council taxpayers which meant that all working age recipients of LCTS (both existing and new) received a reduction of up to £150 on their council tax demand.

Additionally, from Monday 28 September 2020, people in England were required by law to self-isolate if they tested positive for coronavirus or are contacted by the NHS Test and Trace service. To support those affected a Test and Trace payment scheme was set up which allowed them to claim for a one-off payment of £500 to support them during their isolation period. The scheme was originally intended to end on 31 January 2021 but has now been extended to 31 March 2021.

Whilst at the moment there is no indication that the exceptional hardship fund initiative will be repeated, given there has already been an extension, the T & T scheme may well continue into 2021/22. However, what is of major concern is the continued impact that the pandemic is having on all households. As part of last year's support initiatives, we allowed council taxpayers to defer payment to later in the year and suspended recovery action for both council tax and business, however this is not sustainable and during the final quarter of 2020/21 we re-commenced recovery action and the likelihood is that during the first part of 2021/22 we will have to concentrate our efforts on recovering previous years arrears.

Changes to Service Delivery

During the pandemic most non-priority home visits or face to face contacts with customers were suspended in order to stop the spread of potential infection. As part of these changes a fundamental review of the visits process was undertaken which has resulted in the visits team now performing the vast majority of their work from their desks. Given the significant budget challenges that all three partner authorities are facing we will be looking at all service areas across the partnership to determine whether different ways of working can deliver savings or a more efficient way of working.

The Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space)

The scheme comes into force on 4 May 2021 and gives someone in problem debt the right to legal protections from creditor action. There are 2 types of breathing space: a standard breathing space and a mental health crisis breathing space.

A standard breathing space is available to any client with problem debt. It gives them legal protections from creditor action for up to 60 days. The protections include pausing most enforcement action and contact from creditors and freezing most interest and charges on their debts.

A mental health crisis breathing space is only available to a client who is receiving mental health crisis treatment. The mental health crisis breathing space has some stronger protections than the standard breathing space. It lasts as long as the client's mental health crisis treatment, plus 30 days (no matter how long the crisis treatment lasts).

Clients can only access a breathing space through a debt adviser and once we receive the details (electronic) we must suspend all enforcement action until the 'breathing space' ends.

The Housing Benefit Award Accuracy initiative

The Housing Benefit Award Accuracy is a new initiative from the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) to ensure awards of Housing Benefit are correct, and that those who are entitled, get the right amount.

From 1st April 2021 all LA's will be required to undertake mandated activities to identify unreported changes of circumstances. This includes a full case review where we will need to contact the claimant who will need to supply all their current details and evidence so that we may check that their a Housing Benefit award is correct.

Additionally we are required to continue to participate in the housing benefit matching service (HBMS) which is a mechanism used to cross reference all Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP's) benefits systems by data matching details against local authorities systems with the purpose to support LAs to identify fraud and error.

4 **KEY PROJECTS**

In addition to the 'business as usual' projects we are currently working on a number of new projects during 2021/22

Description	Key actions	Responsible Officer	Critical Support
Re-tender for Mailing Services	Contact to be awarded to new supplier in Q2 which will be effective February 2022	LB	Legal
Extending services available to customers to enable self service	To include; E-Claim E-Change of circumstances Discount & Exemption module	SC/LB	Academy/Systems/ Steria
Automation of benefit file transfers into LA systems	Testing to ensure that DWP data is updated as required and not compromised	SOH	Academy/Steria/Systems
Compliance with GDPR and data removal/retention	Testing and removal of data	LB/SC	GDPR officer/Legal/systems

One logon to access capita systems	Install Capita shared Service Desktop	SOH	Academy/Steria/Systems
To undertake a full feasibility study of the expansion of the partnership. The work will include staffing, ICT, database migration etc".	Review of staffing, ICT, database migration to name a few.	SOH	All partners and stakeholders
Promotion & marketing the partnership (linked to above)	As directed by Management Board & Joint Committee	SOH	Comms team /Legal/finance
Implement ' Breathing Space'	Review procedures, processes, website and documentation	LB	Insolvency Service/Partners
Information @ work upgrade	Scheduled for May 2021	SOH	Northgate/Systems/Steria/Capita

5. **CUSTOMERS**

Service Standards

- The Leicestershire Partnership aims to demonstrate its commitment to equality, diversity and fairness by:
 - Providing services which are accessible to all and which meet customer needs. We do this by providing information in different languages, in large type or on tape or using British sign language where appropriate. We also offer visits to discuss any aspect of the service with customers and their advisors.
 - Promoting and demonstrating fairness and equality of opportunity in the employment of staff. This is achieved through a corporate approach to recruitment and staff retention that aims to be inclusive.

- Being proactive in the promotion of equality and diversity with each council and all its operations.
- Maintaining and improving turnaround times for new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support

6 PERFORMANCE

All targets will be reviewed following the 2020/21 out-turn. The targets below represented the out turn for 2019/20

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council												
BENEFITS	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
In month: change events (days)	5.3	4.7	5.4	4.9	4.7	6.2	5.2	6.0	6.3	6.3	2.2	4.6
In month: New Claims (Days)	13.5	14.5	15.4	11.2	11.0	11.9	9.5	12.0	14.4	9.7	12.5	11.3
COUNCIL TAX	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
In Year (%)	10.9%	20.1%	29.2%	38.5%	47.6%	57.1%	66.3%	75.4%	84.6%	93.6%	96.0%	97.9%
In Year Arrears Reduction (£)	£3.2m	£3.1m	£3.0m	£3.0m	£2.8m	£2.8m	£2.7m	£2.6m	£2.6m	£2.5m	£2.4m	£2.3m
NON DOMESTIC RATES	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
In Year (%)	11.9%	20.6%	29.9%	38.9%	48.4%	57.9%	66.7%	75.2%	84.3%	93.5%	96.6%	98.5%
Arrears Reduction (£m)	£0.35m	£0.38m	£0.34m	£0.28m	£0.24m	£0.22m	£0.21m	£0.22m	£0.28m	n/a	£0.20m	£0.10m
HOUSING BENEFIT DEBT	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
HB Overpayments outstanding at year end (Capita)	£1.4m	£1.4m	£1.4m	£1.4m	£1.3m	£1.3m	£1.3m	£1.3m	£1.3m	£1.3m	£1.3m	£1.2m
HB Overpayments Recovered	3%	6%	9%	13%	15%	18%	20%	25%	27%	34%	35%	37%
FRAUD	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
CTLS Sanctions gained	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0

Harborough District Council

BENEFITS	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
In month: Change events (days)	4.9	4.5	5.1	4.6	3.9	5.4	5.1	6.2	5.8	5.7	2	5.1
In month: New Claims (Days)	13.6	14.8	12.0	12.1	10.0	9.9	10.8	10.5	13.7	12	9.6	12.1
COUNCIL TAX	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
In Year (%)	11.1%	20.4%	29.6%	38.9%	48.1%	57.4%	66.8%	75.8%	84.7%	93.8%	96.3%	98.4%
In Year Arrears Reduction (£)	£2.3m	£2.2m	£2.2m	£2.0m	£2.0m	£1.9m	£1.9m	£1.9m	£1.8m	£1.8m	£1.6m	£1.6m
NON DOMESTIC RATES	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
In Year (%)	10.2%	19.2%	28.9%	39.0%	47.5%	56.8%	65.8%	74.5%	82.9%	92.4%	96.0%	99.1%
Arrears Reduction (£m)	£0.31m	£0.28m	£0.25m	£0.32m	£0.16m	£0.21m	£0.29m	£0.27m	£0.25m	n/a	£0.12m	£0.09m
HOUSING BENEFIT DEBT	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
HB Overpayments outstanding at year end (Capita)	£0.90m	£0.87m	£0.86m	£0.85m	£0.84m	£0.84m	£0.84m	£0.86m	£0.86m	£0.84m	£0.83m	£0.82m
HB Overpayments Recovered	3%	6%	9%	12%	14%	16%	18%	21%	23%	26%	27%	31%
FRAUD	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
CTLS Sanctions gained	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	0

North West Leicestershire District Council

BENEFITS	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
In month: Change events (days)	5.3	4.7	5.4	4.9	4.7	6.2	5.2	6.0	6.3	6.3	2.2	4.6
In month: New Claims (Days)	12.5	14.7	15.0	12.4	11.2	13.8	11.4	12.5	16.2	13.6	13.0	13.3
COUNCIL TAX	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
In Year (%)	10.2%	19.5%	28.5%	38.0%	47.0%	56.0%	65.4%	74.5%	83.7%	92.7%	95.4%	97.6%

In Year Arrears Reduction (£)	£3.6m	£3.4m	£3.4m	£3.3m	£3.2m	£3.1m	£3.0m	£3.0m	£2.9m	£2.8m	£2.8m	£2.7m
NON DOMESTIC RATES	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
In Year (%)	10.0%	19.1%	32.0%	40.4%	48.3%	57.8%	65.7%	74.0%	84.1%	92.5%	96.5%	99.2%
Arrears Reduction (£m)	£0.42m	£0.39m	£0.57m	£0.57m	£0.55m	£0.51m	£0.46m	£0.60m	£0.49m	n/a	£0.32m	£0.17m
HOUSING BENEFIT DEBT	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
HB Overpayments outstanding at year end (Capita)	£1.3m	£1.3m	£1.2m	£1.2m	£1.2m	£1.2m	£1.2m	£1.2m	£1.2m	£1.2m	£1.2m	£1.2m
HB Overpayments Recovered	4%	8%	11%	15%	18%	20%	24%	26%	27%	29%	31%	33%
FRAUD	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
CTLS Sanctions gained	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	2	0

7 Risks

It is our intention to manage our business risks in a consistent and cost-effective manner.

Risk	Mitigating Actions in place	Actions put in place	Owner
Insufficient Business Continuity arrangements/plans: could prevent ability to deliver services	Business continuity plans in place Risk Assessment to prioritise resource against priority/critical services using generic corporate risk assessment	Following Pandemic vast majority of officers working from home and office attendance is at a minimum. Revised procedures/protocols put in place to facilitate this. We have reviewed a number of processes that deliver the same outcome but do not require an actual visit or for staff to attend the office (ie making payments remotely)	SC/LB
Failure to keep up to date or not complying with latest legislation and regulations such as Health & Safety policy could lead to damage to reputation and potential prosecution	Implement revised requirements of new H&S Policy once approved by Council Attend training and adopt policy Enforcement of existing H&S policy and procedures	Each partner authority has their own policies which are reviewed and implemented as required Revised protocols concerning use of Atkins building and office attendance during Pandemic in place and strictly observed Risk assessments also updated to include role of visiting officers	SC/LB

Failure to improve sickness absence: causes reduced capacity leading to failure/inability to deliver services/objectives efficiently	Continue to set absence targets and monitor against targets Compliance with Management of Absence arrangements Monthly monitoring of absence statistics provided by HR Setting of targets. Continued focus on long-term absence management and alternative options i.e. rehabilitation	The appropriate sickness absence monitoring framework is adhered to and reported monthly to the Management Board Adoption of changes introduced in January 2020 all new arrangements strictly adhered to .	SC/LB
Reduced benefits subsidy from Central Govt. as a result of poor performance: will have significant impact on reserves and reputation for the authority Introduced a Quality Checking Procedure within Benefits and from October 2016 adopted risk based verification software which allows for a more intense verification activity to be	Introduced a Quality Checking Procedure within Benefits	Subsidy audit for 2019/2020 are being undertaken remotely	SC
Effects of the pandemic on collection and increase in Benefit Claims: need to deal with new claims and change of circumstance as quickly as possible to relieve financial hardship and avoid benefit overpayments	Regularly report on performance to Management Board.	As a result of the pandemic a number of Centrally funded initiatives have been introduced. These include COVID 19 Business grants Council tax hardship payments (additional £150 to LCTS recipients) Test and trace isolation payments Additionally we continue to promote the availability of DHP and Council tax Support	SC/LB
Failure to bring projects in on time	Effective Project management and forward planning of available resources	Adherence to project timetables	SOH

How?

- Maintain a robust and consistent risk management approach that will identify and effectively manage strategic, operational, partnership and project risks
- Ensure accountabilities, roles and responsibilities for managing risks are clearly defined and communicated
- Consider risk as an integral part of service improvement planning, key decision making processes, and project and partnership governance
- Communicate risk information effectively through a clear reporting framework
- Increase understanding and expertise in risk management through targeted training and the sharing of best practice.