



<b>REPORT TO:</b>	Corporate & Community Committee
<b>DATE:</b>	6 October 2022
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Benefits Update
<b>PURPOSE:</b>	To update Corporate & Community Committee.
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	N/A
<b>PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	Councillor Jonathan Noble, Portfolio Holder for Finance
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Christine Marshall, deputy Chief Executive – Corporate Development (S151)
<b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b>	Sharon Hammond, Head of Revenues and Benefits (PSPS)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	All
<b>EXEMPT REPORT?</b>	No

#### **SUMMARY**

This report provides an update on Benefits workload and performance, additional government schemes, and Housing Benefit overpayments, as requested by the Corporate and Community Committee.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Corporate and Community Committee note the report.

#### **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

This report is provided for information.

#### **OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

N/a

## 1. BACKGROUND

1.1. At the request of the Corporate and Community Committee, this report provides an update on Benefits Service:

- Workload and performance
- Additional government schemes
- Housing Benefit Overpayments

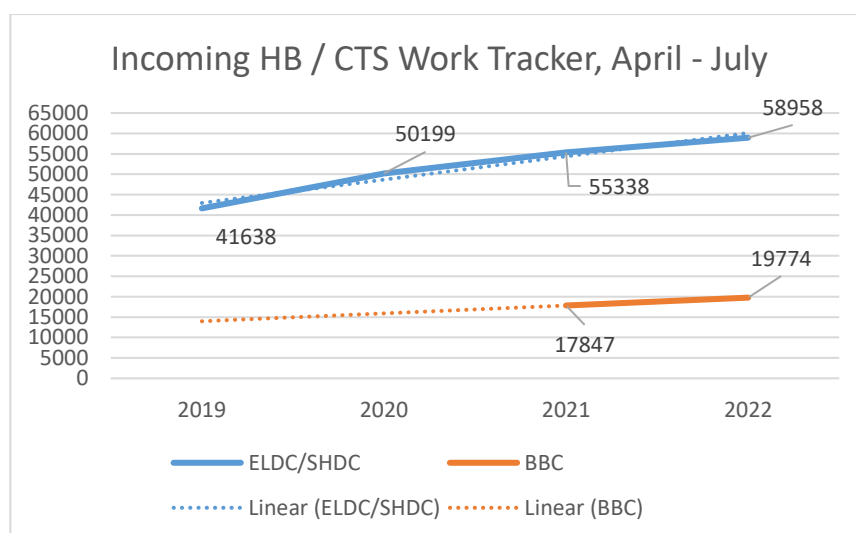
## 2. WORKLOAD AND PERFORMANCE

### Workload

2.1 The Benefits service continues to see high levels of workload. There has been an 11% increase in incoming workload for BBC between April – July 2022 compared to April – July 2021. The following table demonstrates this, by work type: -

Work Type	April - July 2021	April - July 2022	% Change
Customer	1271	1301	2%
UCDS	12065	14074	17%
ATLAS and VEP	4511	4399	-2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17847</b>	<b>19774</b>	<b>11%</b>

2.2 PSPS has gathered data on East Lindsey and South Holland workload over a number of years now, and whilst the historic data is not available for Boston, there is no reason to believe the trajectory would be any different. The position April – July for years 2019 to 2022 shows the upward trajectory through the covid pandemic.



2.3 By far, the movement of customers to Universal Credit (UC), firstly as part of the national roll out programme, and then the significant take up during covid, has meant there has been a shift in the volume and type of work being received by the Benefits service. Significant volumes of UC records are received, as can be seen in the table at point 2.1 above, a further 17% increase has been seen between April and July this year, compared to the same period last year.

Again, whilst we don't have data for Boston prior to April 2021, for East Lindsey and South Holland there was a 198% increase in UC work compared to pre-covid position in 2019. There is no reason to believe the position would be any different for BBC.

- 2.4 Universal Credit has had a significant impact on the work of Benefits services in recent years. Whilst BBC local Council Tax Support (CTS) policy has been amended to simplify the claim and changes process from a claimant perspective, this has not reduced the administration resource or effort required. However, it is pleasing to report that over the past 18 months, we have increased automation of UC records to around 55%.

**Performance**

- 2.5 Speed of processing relates to the average time taken to process new claims and change of circumstances, i.e. it is a measure of time taken from notification of claim / change, up to the point of decision.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) monitor and publish the performance of local authorities only in relation to Housing Benefit. The latest published statistics are for 2021/22, and report BBC as 22 days for new claims, and 9 days for changes. The table below shows BBC's performance alongside national and East Midlands positions: -

2021/2022	HB New Claims	HB Changes
England	20	6
East Midlands	22	6
Boston BC	22	9
PSPS KPI target	22	9

- 2.7 Performance in 2022/23 remains an increasing challenge due to increased workload and resource levels, including the diversion of experienced assessors to deliver the covid test and trace scheme earlier in the year. Cumulative performance to the end August 2022 is 31 days for HB new claims and 9 days for change in circumstances, and for CTS is 32 days for new claims and 18 days for changes.

Through regular liaison meetings with DWP there is an understanding of the pressures that have been on local government benefits teams, and there are no current concerns with BBC HB performance.

There is no published information or comparative data for CTS speed of processing.

- 2.8 It is pleasing to report that fraud and error and data match activity was brought up to date in 2021/22 and is now being maintained; this helps to ensure claims are as accurate as possible.

**Current Workload position**

- 2.9 As at 12 September, we have 871 items of outstanding work for BBC. 81% of this is less than 4 weeks old, and 59% is less than 2 weeks old. This is an ongoing improving position as we head into the second half of the year.
- 2.10 Currently new claims, for both HB and CTS are picked up within just a few days of receipt, with only older ones outstanding as we wait for claimants to provide required evidence.

### **3. ADDITIONAL GOVERNMENT SCHEMES**

- 3.1 The Revenues and Benefits service has changed through covid, and overall service 'performance' now extends beyond what would previously have been core business.
- 3.2 Alongside its core service delivery, the Revenues and Benefits service has, and continues to, deliver additional government financial support initiatives on behalf of client councils.

#### **Test and Trace Support Payment (TTSP) Scheme**

- 3.3 This scheme ended on 30 April 2022, with work concluding during May. TTSP was originally brought in for 3 months but was to eventually run for over 19 months, with the team from Benefits processing 1,909 applications for BBC, resulting in 878 payments of £500 to support S&ELCP residents on low incomes and benefits who were required to self-isolate.
- 3.4 Team members diverted from Benefits Assessment to deliver this scheme are being re-integrated into the Benefits service and are being supported with re-training as necessary.

#### **£150 Energy Rebate scheme**

- 3.5 Following the government announcement of this scheme in February, its creation and delivery has been far from straight forward. Revenues and Benefits resources have been diverted from day-to-day business to deliver the scheme since April. Across S&ELCP more than 115,000 payments have been made to eligible households, paying more than £17million. Of this, 25,308 relates to Boston residents, totalling £3,796,200.
- 3.6 The scheme will conclude in September, and will then be subject to reconciliation.
- 3.7 In addition, Boston has an allocation of £119,250 from a national £144m discretionary fund. The Revenues and Benefits service will be distributing this funding to eligible recipients by the end of November.

### **4. HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS (HBOP)**

- 4.1 At the end June 2022, the level of Housing Benefit Overpayment for Boston BC was £2.4m, this is an average level of debt for each live HB claim of £945.
- 4.2 Data indicates that historically the level of Boston's HBOP is higher than would be expected for the caseload, and is an area for further analysis and focus for improvement.

### **EXPECTED BENEFITS TO THE PARTNERSHIP**

Not applicable

### **IMPLICATIONS**

#### **SOUTH AND EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL'S PARTNERSHIP**

None

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

None

**STAFFING**

None

**CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

None

**DATA PROTECTION**

None

**FINANCIAL**

None

**RISK MANAGEMENT**

None

**STAKEHOLDER / CONSULTATION / TIMESCALES**

None

**REPUTATION**

None

**CONTRACTS**

None

**CRIME AND DISORDER**

None

**EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY/ HUMAN RIGHTS/ SAFEGUARDING**

None

## HEALTH AND WELL BEING

None

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

None

## ACRONYMS

UC	Universal Credit
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
TTSP	Test and Trace Support Payment
S&ELCP	South and East Lincolnshire Council Partnership
HB	Housing Benefit
CTS	Council Tax Support

### APPENDICES

None

### BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

### CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THIS REPORT

A report on this item has not been previously considered by a Council body

### REPORT APPROVAL

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Approved for publication:	Portfolio Holder for Finance