

CABINET MEMBER FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION

**Venue: Town Hall, Moorgate
Street, Rotherham.**

Date: Monday, 9th March 2009

Time: 11.30 a.m.

A G E N D A

1. To determine if the following matters are to be considered under the categories suggested in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972.
2. To determine any item which the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 9th February, 2009 (Pages 1 - 2)
4. RBT Performance Report for February, 2009 (Pages 3 - 7)
5. Procurement Panel (Pages 8 - 12)
- minutes of meeting held on 9th February, 2009
6. Complaints Forum (Pages 13 - 15)
- minutes of meeting held on 19th January, 2009
7. Customer Access Group (Pages 16 - 17)
- minutes of meeting held on 2nd February, 2009
8. Liaison with RBT
9. Exclusion of the Press and Public
The following item is likely to be considered in the absence of the press and public as being exempt under Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council)).
10. E-Government Board (Pages 18 - 21)
(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council)).
11. Additional RBT Performance Report (Pages 22 - 30)
(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council)).

12. NNDR Action Plan Update (Pages 31 - 40)
(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council)).

(The Chairman authorised consideration of the following item to enable Members to be fully informed.)

13. Welfare Rights & Money Advice Service (Pages 41 - 43)

**CABINET MEMBER FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION
Monday, 9th February, 2009**

Present:- Councillor Wyatt (in the Chair); Councillors Hodgkiss and Sharman.

55. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12TH JANUARY, 2009

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12th January, 2009.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th January, 2009, be approved as a correct record.

55. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12TH JANUARY, 2009

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12th January, 2009.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th January, 2009, be approved as a correct record.

56. RBT PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR DECEMBER, 2008

Sarah McCall, Performance Officer, presented the submitted report which summarised RBT's performance against contractual measures and key service delivery issues for December, 2008, across the areas of Customer Access, Human Resources and Payroll and Procurement.

Key points for this period included:-

- All contractual targets had been achieved in Customer Access, Human Resources and Payroll, ICT and Procurement
- The methodology had been agreed for Customer Service Excellence – the Contact Centre, Customer Access and Revenues and Benefits and Procurement, ICT and HR and P
- BVPI8 for December had increased on November's performance

A discussion ensued and issues were raised and clarified on the following points:-

- Discussions had taken place with 2010 on the use of the former Swinton Neighbourhood Office as a Call Centre. Various options had been put forward but it was not known what the final decision was
- Concern was expressed regarding the potential conflict/duplication of revenue and benefits advice by the establishment of a helpline proposed as part of the corporate Credit Crunch work that was taking place

Resolved:- (1) That RBT's performance against contractual measures

and key service delivery issues for December, 2008, be noted.

(2) That discussions take place with the Director of Internal Audit and Governance with regard to the proposed Welfare Advice helpline and the possible issue of conflict.

57. PROCUREMENT PANEL

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Procurement Panel meeting held on 12th January, 2009.

It was noted that the Authority had been highly commended in the recent Local Government Chronicle, Health Sustainable Benefits Award.

Resolved:- That the contents of the minutes be noted.

58. LIAISON WITH RBT

A Member of the Council had asked a question about the following issue:-

Repeated problems with bills regarding Broadband connection.
Investigations would take place into the matter.

(THE CHAIRMAN AUTHORISED CONSIDERATION OF THE FOLLOWING ITEM TO ENABLE THE MATTER TO BE PROCESSED.)

59. LGA RURAL COMMISSION

It was noted that a meeting of the LGA Rural Commission was being held in London on 17th March, 2009.

60. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in those paragraphs indicated below of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

61. ADDITIONAL RBT PERFORMANCE REPORT

Sarah McCall, Performance Officer, presented a report which summarised RBT's performance in respect of Procurement savings achieved and in respect of the Revenues and Benefits Service.

Resolved:- That RBT's performance against contractual measures and key service delivery issues for December, 2008, be noted.

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Innovation – Delegated Powers Meeting
2.	Date:	9th March 2009
3.	Title:	RBT Performance Report for January 2009
4.	Directorate:	Financial Services

5. Summary

This report summarises RBT's performance against contractual measures and key service delivery issues for January 2009 across the areas of Customer Access, Human Resources and Payroll, ICT and Procurement.

6. Recommendations

The Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Innovation is asked to:

- Note RBT's performance against contractual measures and key service delivery issues for January 2009.

7. Proposals and Details

Work continues to implement the new suite of measures; however, new reporting mechanisms have required development and implementation and in some cases changes to ways of working. The majority of measures are now being reported but work is ongoing on the remainder. Full details of performance against operational measures for all workstreams are attached at Appendix 1.

7.1 Customer Access

7.1.1 Overall Performance

All Customer Access measures currently being measured were achieved according to their contractual targets in January.

7.1.2 Complaints

Three complaints were received during January. One of these complaints was closed upheld and related to failure to complete a form which resulted in a delayed review of the customer's Council Tax bill. The other two complaints were closed, not upheld.

7.1.3 Aston Customer Service Centres

Work has commenced on site at Aston.

7.1.4 Tell Us Once

The Superintendent Registrar attended meetings to progress the birth and death notification service and to discuss the way forward for the project between 1st April and 31st August, when a decision will be made on the national business case. A continuation strategy is in preparation.

7.1.5 Welfare Rights & Money Advice

Work is ongoing to take forward the Mortgage Rescue Scheme (MRS). Money Advisers will need to provide an assessment of the home owner's financial ability to remain in home ownership based on prepared financial statements.

In January 2009, the service took on 46 new customers, compared to 20 in January 2008. Total debt advised on for the month was £711,079 compared to £275,176 in January 2008.

7.1.6 ISO9001 Accreditation

Stage 1 of the audit has taken place with go ahead given by the Auditor to proceed to the second stage, scheduled for spring 2009.

7.1.7 Customer Service Excellence (CSE)

Work is ongoing for CSE with the first assessment scheduled for 2nd April on the Contact Centre.

7.1.8 Training and Development

Table 1: RBT Customer Service Training

Service	Total Staff	Staff Eligible	Eligible Staff Trained		Variance from Previous Month
			Number	%	
Telephony - Revenues & Benefits: Council Tax	29	29	29	100	-1
Telephony - Revenues & Benefits: Recovery	29	29	29	100	-1
Telephony - Revenues & Benefits: Housing Benefit/Council Tax (inc. Free School meals)	29	25	25	100	+1
Telephony - Revenues & Benefits: Former Tenant Arrears	29	29	17	59	-1
Telephony - Generic Contact Centre: Jobsline	44	44	40	91	-1
Telephony - Generic Contact Centre: General Enquiries	44	44	29	89	0
Telephony - Generic Contact Centre: Key Choices	44	44	40	91	0
Telephony - Generic Contact Centre: Repairs	44	42	36	86	+4
Telephony - Generic Contact Centre: Surgery Connect	44	42	29	69	0
Telephony - Generic Contact Centre: Streetpride	44	42	33	79	0
F2F - Generic Contact Centre: Reception Duties	56	56	48	42	0
F2F - Generic Contact Centre: Planning	56	56	42	75	0
F2F - Generic Contact Centre: General Enquiries	56	56	46	82	0
F2F - Generic Contact Centre: Streetpride	56	56	38	68	+1
F2F - Generic Contact Centre: Council Tax	56	53	52	98	+2
F2F - Generic Contact Centre: Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit (inc. Free School meals)	56	53	53	98	+3

7.2 Human Resources and Payroll

7.2.1 Overall Performance

All HR&P measures were achieved according to their contractual targets in January.

7.2.2 Upcoming Projects

Development work is currently 70% complete on the proposed Changes wizard with an anticipated live date by April 2009. This will replace the current paper document (CON2) used to amend employee's contracts. Work has started on the

revisions to the payslip interface a requirement before the Changes wizard goes live.

The ABACUS recruitment management software is now installed with configuration work progressing. The wider project is on track for implementation on 1 April 2009.

A further demonstration of the OrgPlus software took place on 12 January 2009. This software will facilitate the automation of establishment changes for major restructures; additionally the enterprise module could be utilised to increase our management information provision. Further discussion with RMBC Client will be undertaken during February to highlight areas of future development that the OrgPlus software could potentially meet.

Pay Award details for 2010 Directors were received late January and are to be paid with February salaries. Adjustments to estimated weekly payments made early prior to Christmas were paid with January payrolls.

7.2.3 *Upcoming Software Updates*

Version 5 Yourself change was released in January to allow for the capture of data relating to medical cover when an employee is on sick leave. This follows a request from Internal Audit for more robust management of medical notes during an employee's absence. Additional facilities relate to the sickness descriptions, industrial injury and third party claims to enable the capture of more detailed information.

7.2.4 *RBT Transformation*

All projects are on track apart from the timesheet automation which awaits the allocation of a Business Analyst resource.

7.2.5 *Achievements*

The successful completion of the ISO 9001 Stage 1 Audit took place over 3 days 26th to 28 January. The presentation of the Service Control Plan and the tour of the Service Centre were well received and RBT is now through to the next stage.

7.3 ICT

7.3.1 *Overall Performance*

All targets for the ICT Service were shown as achieved in January. After extensive negotiations, RBT have now agreed that they will begin using Service Desk to track downtime, in addition to Nagios.

7.3.2 *Desktop Refresh*

RBT has now switched hardware suppliers from Dell to HP and refresh has restarted in earnest.

7.3.4 *Complaints*

No complaints were received in January.

7.4 Procurement

7.4.1 *Overall Performance*

All targets for the Procurement Service that are being reported were achieved in January. One target is still unreported (percentage of e-RFQs consolidated into purchase orders) as RBT are experiencing problems with the Cedar report. However RBT advise that when the report is fixed, retrospective data will be available.

7.4.2 *BVPI8*

BVPI8 figures for January achieved 90% matching the figure achieved for January 2008. Traditionally performance against BVPI8 dips in January as the impact of Christmas closedown is seen.

8. **Finance**

The contract with RBT includes a service credit arrangement, the effect of which is that should an operational measure not achieve target, a calculation based on the amount by which the target was missed, allocated weighting of the measure, etc results in a financial penalty for RBT as a direct consequence of any underperformance.

9. **Risks and Uncertainties**

The Transformation and Strategic Partnerships (TSP) Team work with RBT to proactively identify and manage risks to prevent negative impacts on performance that may affect our CPA/CAA rating or service delivery.

10. **Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

The partnership is responsible for key areas of service delivery and therefore has a key role in the delivery of key national and local performance indicators. The partnership also supports the Council service areas in their service delivery.

11. **Background Papers and Consultation**

RBT performance reports for January 2009.

Contact Name:

Mark Gannon
Transformation and Strategic Partnerships Manager
Extension 6536
mark.gannon@rotherham.gov.uk

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Title	Procurement Panel
Date	Monday 9th February, 2009
Start time	10.00 am
Venue	Committee Room 1, Rotherham Town Hall
Chair	Councillor Ken Wyatt

Attendees	Init	Programme Area
Ken Wyatt	KW	Councillor
Chris Charnley	CC	RBT
Michael McGuigan	MM	Children and Young People's Services
Emma Fairclough	EF	RBT Procurement
Sandra Greatorex	SG	VAR
Peter Hunter	PH	RiDO – Business Development Team
Sarah McCall	SM	Financial Services
Jon Surridge	JS	Streetpride
Jeff Wharfe	JW	RiDO – Rotherham Partnership
Simon Bradley	SB	RBT
David Rhodes	DR	Environment and Development Services
Helen Leadley	HL	Financial Services
Deborah Fellowes	DF	Chief Executive's Section

Apologies	Init	Programme Area
John Brayshaw	JB	2010
Julie Slatter	JS	Chief Executive's Section
Doug Hershaw	DH	NHS Rotherham
Paul Ritchie	PR	VAR
Andy Hare	AH	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

Minutes		
Ref	Item or Action	Action Owner
08/09	Minutes of Previous Meeting The minutes of the previous meeting of the Procurement Panel, held on Monday, 12 th January, 2009, were agreed as a correct record.	
09/09	Update on YorBuild This item was deferred to the next meeting.	
10/09	Update from CYPS This item was deferred to the next meeting.	

11/09	<p>BVP18 Update</p> <p>Sarah McCall presented a report on BVP18 measures – the payment of undisputed invoices within 30 days.</p> <p>The Council has agreed the following average annual targets for performance of BVP18 with RBT:-</p> <table data-bbox="347 488 638 600"> <tr> <td>2007/08</td> <td>96.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2008/09</td> <td>97.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2009/10</td> <td>97.5%</td> </tr> </table> <p>Out turn performance for 2007/08 achieved 94% which demonstrated an improvement on 2006/07 performance which achieved 91%.</p> <p>Performance against BVP18 is not as consistent as it should be and it has been recognised that the Council should act to instil and embed good practice in this area and work is ongoing to this effect. Recent performance for the new financial year has achieved:</p> <table data-bbox="347 1003 614 1384"> <tr> <td>April</td> <td>95%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>May</td> <td>92%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>June</td> <td>88%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>July</td> <td>90%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>August</td> <td>91%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>September</td> <td>91%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>October</td> <td>91%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>November</td> <td>93%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>December</td> <td>94%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>January</td> <td>90%</td> </tr> </table> <p>Average performance against BVP18 for the year to date is 91.5%.</p> <p>A question was raised with regard to the lower achievement in January. It was explained that invoices not paid before Christmas missed the 30 day deadline and that, therefore, the decline followed the pattern of last year.</p> <p>Agreed:- That the current position in respect of BVP18 be noted.</p>	2007/08	96.3%	2008/09	97.0%	2009/10	97.5%	April	95%	May	92%	June	88%	July	90%	August	91%	September	91%	October	91%	November	93%	December	94%	January	90%	
2007/08	96.3%																											
2008/09	97.0%																											
2009/10	97.5%																											
April	95%																											
May	92%																											
June	88%																											
July	90%																											
August	91%																											
September	91%																											
October	91%																											
November	93%																											
December	94%																											
January	90%																											
12/09	<p>Update on Meet the Buyer</p> <p>Helen Leadley submitted a paper on Meet the Buyer Marketing Circulation.</p> <p>This consisted of a list of Presenters and Stand Holders,</p>																											

	<p>Mailing Lists and Miscellaneous Suppliers.</p> <p>The meeting was advised with regard to the current budget situation to fund the event. There is presently a shortfall of £2,000 and it is proposed to ask for a small contribution from Stand Holders.</p> <p>Members present were asked to submit any additions or amendments to the information presented.</p> <p>Discussion ensued on delegate packs, Awards shortlist, promotion ideas, and Project plans.</p> <p>Agreed:- That the information be updated, as discussed.</p>	
13/09	<p>LPI Report</p> <p>Sarah McCall presented the submitted report on Procurement Local Performance Indicators.</p> <p>The Council's Corporate Procurement Strategy contains an action to develop a set of local indicators in order to measure the Council's procurement function in terms of delivery of the Procurement strategy and day-to-day management of the procurement function.</p> <p>The report set out details of the indicators developed to date, targets and performance for the first, second and third quarters of the current year.</p> <p>Of the 18 indicators –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 3 are status green ○ 3 are status amber with performance on target ○ 1 is status red ○ 6 are annual indicators with reporting due later in the year ○ 1 indicator has been superseded by changing legislation ○ 1 is still under development ○ 2 are for information/monitoring only without targets ○ 1 has reporting yet to commence <p>The status red indicator is:</p> <p>16. Overall % of excavated materials diverted away from landfill.</p> <p>This indicator relates to the Ringway contract with performance reported for the quarter only. Due to the nature of civil engineering it can be expected that performance against these indicators will fluctuate quite considerably from</p>	

	<p>one quarter to the next depending on the recycling opportunities available for the different types of schemes under construction.</p> <p>A number of questions were raised and responded to with regard to performance on a number of definitions.</p> <p>Agreed:- That the current performance be noted.</p>	
14/09	<p>Procurement Forward Plan</p> <p>Sarah McCall referred to the contents of the current Procurement Forward Plan for information purposes.</p> <p>Agreed:- That the contents of the Procurement Forward Plan be noted.</p>	
15/09	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>(a) Award for Rotherham</p> <p>Councillor Wyatt reported that although Rotherham MBC had failed to win the LGC/HSJ Sustainable Communities Awards (RMBC being nominated in the category of Sustainable Procurement) the Authority had been shortlisted and was awarded Highly Commended for their work.</p> <p>A considerable amount of entries had been submitted and considered.</p> <p>Councillor Wyatt acknowledged the amount of hard work in the compilation of the application and thanked Officers who had been involved.</p> <p>(b) Budget Pressures</p> <p>Councillor Wyatt reported that a number of areas of procurement work were presently being looked into in order to achieve savings.</p> <p>These included – (a) Use of Agency Staff and (b) Commissioning of Consultants.</p> <p>Helen Leadley added that Consultancy spend was also being considered on a sub-regional basis which it was suggested could be areas of collaboration between the four Local Authorities.</p> <p>(c) Grit Salt</p>	

	Emma Fairclough reported that Rotherham MBC had received 18,000 tons of grit salt. There was presently only five days supply left in Rotherham and the main supplier had no more stock. However, stocks were presently being imported in the event of more snowy weather conditions.	
Next Meeting		
Date	Monday, 9 th March, 2009	
Time	10.00 a.m.	
Venue	Town Hall, Rotherham	

Dates of Future Meetings

The dates for future meetings of the Procurement Panel are agreed as follows:-

6th April, 2009

(All Mondays at 10.00 a.m. in the Town Hall)

All actions to be completed prior to the next meeting unless otherwise stated.

COMPLAINTS FORUM
Monday, 19th January, 2009

Present:-

Councillor Wyatt	In the Chair
Zoe Burke	Complaints Manager, Children and Young People's Service
Anne Cocking	Assistant Director of Business Development, 2010
Mark Gannon	Transformation and Strategic Partnerships Manager
Adam Hurst	Complaints Manager, Neighbourhoods and Adult Social Services
Mark Leese	Corporate Complaints Officer, RBT
Natasha Murphy	Complaints Officer, 2010
Jayne Wilde	Corporate Complaints Officer for Financial Services

Apologies were received from Graham Clark and Andrea Pearson.

14. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Agreed:- That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th September, 2008 be approved as a correct record.

15. SCRUTINY REVIEW UPDATE

Mark Gannon, Transformation and Strategic Partnerships Manager reported that the work was still ongoing on the Scrutiny Review. He said he would circulate an update by the end of the week, to staff for final comment. It was anticipated that by the end of January most of the recommendations would have been achieved although some may go into February.

Mark Leese added that he had been working on the Guidance complaints section and detail in relation to adults and childrens needed to be added as an appendix, which would be provided by Zoe Burke. He added that the section in relation to "unreasonable customers" was to be removed.

16. PROVISIONAL QUARTER 3 COMPLAINT STATISTICS

Mark Leese, Corporate Complaints Officer, RBT circulated a report for information containing the third quarter complaints statistics which showed some improvement compared to the figures for 2007/08.

Discussion ensued in relation to the table and it was suggested that for future meetings figures be produced as per directorate and where they originated from. It was further suggested that the figures be made available for 2010 and that these be added as an appendix to the current figures for RMBC.

Agreed:- That the report be noted.

17. PROVISIONAL LGO STATISTICS FOR THE YEAR TO DATE

Mark Leese, Corporate Complaints Officer, RBT circulated information relating to LGO statistics for the period 1 April 2008 to 30 September 2008.

He reported that the average number of days to respond was 29.3 which was outside the target which had been set at 28 days. He confirmed that there had been a marked increase in the number of referrals to the Ombudsman from Children and Young People's Services which had not been reflected in the figures provided.

Agreed:- That the information be noted.

18. COMPLAINTS REPORTING

A discussion took place around the Complaints Reporting and it was confirmed that a meeting was to take place that afternoon with Sarah McCall to agree a schedule. It was noted that old process had allowed 10 days to review data and that work was now being undertaken to streamline this process.

19. REVIEW OF OFFICERS' GUIDANCE DOCUMENTATION

Agreed:- That 2010 give an update report in relation to Officers' Guidance Documentation at the next meeting.

20. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Agreed:- That the following items be included on the agenda for the next meeting

- Merger of Adult Services and Health Care Complaints and how these will be dealt with in future
- Update on Satisfaction Surveys
- Update on Yorkshire and Humber Complaints meeting.

21. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed:- That the next meeting be held on 30 March 2009 commencing at 10.00 am.

**CUSTOMER ACCESS GROUP
Monday, 2nd February, 2009**

Present:- Mark Gannon (in the Chair), Laura Brown, Richard Garrad, Emma Heyes, Lorna Kelly, Asim Munir, Jasmine Speight and Jayne Wild.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Clare Bailey and Councillor K Wyatt.

13. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 10TH NOVEMBER, 2008

Agreed:- That the minutes of the meeting held on 10th November, 2008 be approved as a correct record.

14. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Agreed:- That this item be deferred to the next meeting of the group.

15. UPDATE ON CUSTOMER EXCELLENCE STANDARD

Mark Gannon, Transformation and Strategic Partnerships Manager gave members of the group a verbal update in relation to the Customer Excellence Standard.

He reported that a draft timetable had been agreed and circulated. A lead officer group had been established and had met the previous week. He confirmed that regular progress updates were to be presented to CMT on a 6 weekly basis and it was anticipated that everything would be completed by July 2009 when the accreditation would be achieved. He added that this would be an ongoing process and that a plan was needed to monitor progress to ensure that the accreditation was sustained.

He agreed to bring a formal written update to the next meeting of the group in relation to progress made.

16. UPDATE ON CUSTOMER CARE E-LEARNING PACKAGE

Jayne Wild, Support Officer gave members of the group an update in relation to the Customer Care 3-Learning Package. She reported that it was currently being piloted with Neighbourhoods and Adult Services for a two week period, when it would be rolled out across all directorates the week commencing 23rd February, 2009.

17. UPDATE ON RETRAINING ON CUSTOMER FIRST DOCUMENTS

Members of the group considered the re-branded and updated customer first documents, which included the following:-

- Customer Charter
- Commitment to providing an excellent service to all our customers
- Working together to put the customer first – Guide for customers
- Working together to put the customer first – Guide for staff
- Plain Language and Clear Communications guidelines

Jayne Wild confirmed that these documents had been circulated for comments with a deadline of 6th February, 2009.

18. MYSTERY SHOPPING RESULTS

Agreed:- That this item be deferred to the next meeting of the group.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed:- That the next meeting of the Customer Access Group be held on 23rd February, 2009 at 12.00 Noon.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

Document is Restricted

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

Document is Restricted

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS
--

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Sustainability & Innovation
2.	Date:	9 March 2009
3.	Title:	Welfare Rights & Money Advice Service
4.	Programme Area:	RBT

5. Summary

The Welfare Rights and Money Advice service is facing increased demand due to the economic downturn. The service has 2 full time Money advisers only. Intervention by experienced Money Advisers at an earlier stage can result in repossessions being prevented and therefore decrease the impact and cost to social landlords and the effect of homelessness on families and communities.

6. Recommendations

That the Cabinet Member note the implications.

7. **Proposals and Details**

1. Increased demand due to credit crunch and unemployment

Due to continued widespread job losses and reduced earnings many people are finding themselves in arrears with rent and mortgages. The service has been running for 20 years through other recessions. However in the recession of the 90s there were 3 full time debt advisers and still it was difficult to meet demand. The WRMA service had funding cuts in 2003 reducing staff numbers.

For many customers any slight drop in income can cause a crisis. Customers with priority debts require urgent appointments to avoid repossession. In order to plan for this we have temporarily stopped a general session at the Civic customer service centre to prioritise emergency appointments. In the last 12 months we have dealt with a 68% increase in customers. The numbers in January 2009 were double those for January 2008 (See attached figures). Many customers were unable to get advice elsewhere as they do not qualify for assistance under legal aid. This has resulted in longer waiting times for appointments, now standing at 4-5 weeks. Time is not only needed to deal with new customers but to complete casework for ongoing customers. We are also seeing more and more people whose only option is to go bankrupt. We have 8 such appointments already booked in March.

In addition staff are attending the credit crunch road shows and delivered an advice session at Burberrys on 5/3/09. The manager is part of the Economic downturn core group.

2. Creditors increasing pressures

Creditors are increasingly using bankruptcy and charging orders to try and recoup debts. Previously it was rare for creditors to make debtors bankrupt and we would see around 1 case per annum. Now we are seeing 6 cases per month which increases the pressure for advice. Creditors are also seeking charging orders on properties for unsecured debts and subsequently seeking repossession of the property through the courts.

3. Government initiatives

Mortgage Rescue Scheme- we are working with Key Choices to implement this. To be considered for the scheme an individual must be referred to a debt adviser to consider all options and to have a financial statement prepared. The scheme requires a 5 day turn around for this advice.

Debt Relief Orders (DROs) - this new initiative becomes law in April 2009. It could be described as a mini bankruptcy for people who owe less than £15k. Applications can only be made however through an accredited debt adviser. We are working hard to become accredited but anticipate increased

demand for advice, and the DRO application process is quite demanding in time and effort.

4. Mortgage Pre Protocol (MPP) – This can help customers who have mortgages with lenders who are members of The Council of Mortgage lenders but does not apply to sub prime lenders or secured loans. The majority of home owners that are approaching us at the moment have sub prime mortgages and secured loan arrears – MPP has limited protection

Borrowers may take hope from the 6 month hold on proceedings (i.e. no action taken for 6 months etc). This is without exception a positive move, but unless arrears are capitalized at the end of this period 6 months arrears will put them at risk of repossession proceedings.

In one instance a mortgage lender was going to charge £100 to help a client produce a financial statement in order to renegotiate the mortgage.

4. Effect on other areas of work.

Part of the debt advice process involves maximizing benefits and the debt advisers are increasingly making referrals to their colleagues in Welfare Rights for help with benefit applications and appeals. The Welfare Rights service has found that families with disabled children need benefits advice quickly in order to cope with the increases in the cost of living.

8. Finance

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Service unable to absorb the continued increase for demand. There is a risk that some people will be unable to get advice.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Contact Name: Janet Scott