

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services

Social Justice Committee: 12 April 2006

Subject: Housing and Council Tax Benefit Statistical Information

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on Housing and Council Tax Benefit performance to the end of December 2005.

2. Background

2.1 As part of Central Government strategy for housing benefit reform to improve the openness and accountability of Housing and Council Tax Benefit performance, a new quarterly reporting regime was introduced in April 2002. The information provided is published quarterly and covers specific areas of performance.

3. Quarterly Performance Reporting

3.1 The information for the first 3 quarters of 2005/2006 are detailed at **Appendix 1**. (Where the data is available for the previous years, this is shown in brackets for comparative purposes).

3.2 Average time for processing new claims

3.2.1 This indicator measures the average processing time for all new claims decided within the quarter. Each claim is measured from the date the claim is received at the Local Authority office to the date a decision is made on the claim.

3.2.2 Performance in this area has improved significantly having reduced from 85 days in 2002/2003, to 57 days in 2003/2004 and to 42 days 2004/2005. This has further improved to 32 days at the end of September 2005 and to 31 days at the end of December 2005. The Performance Standard is 36 days, therefore we have met the standard.

3.3 Average time for processing changes of circumstances

3.3.1 This indicator has changed for the current year. Previously it measured the average processing time from the date of receipt and the measure was from the date all information was received to process the change to the date the change actually processed.

3.3.2 All change of circumstances processed were included in this indicator and the two factors which maintained the indicator at a low level have been removed from the measure:-

- a) Counting from the date all information received to date of processing.
- b) Inclusion of changes, which no evidence required, many of which were averaging one day e.g. changes from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and internal changes such as rent increases and corrections of error.

3.3.3 From 2005/2006, the measure is from date the claimant or their representative notifies a change in writing, to the date the change is actually processed. Two major changes in this measure have a significant impact on average times:-

- a) This measure is now similar to new claims where the measure begins as soon as the claimant notifies us of a change and does not take account of how long it takes to secure all evidence to process the notified change.
- b) The changes which were quickest to process no longer count as they are not notified by the claimant, these being DWP changes and internal changes.

3.3.4 We have however made continuous improvement in this area. For the year 2001/2002, our reported turnaround time was 14 days placing us at 13 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities. For the year 2002/2003, this had improved to 10 days placing us at 11 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities. For the year 2003/2004, this had improved to 5 days placing us at 4 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities. For the year 2004/2005, this had further improved to 4 days placing us at 3 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities.

3.3.5 Using the new measure for this performance standard, Appendix 1 shows that in the 1st quarter the performance was 18 days and in 2nd quarter it was 26 days, reducing in the 3rd quarter to 21 days. The Performance Standard is 9 days, however DWP are likely to amend the target to take account of the change in reporting. We will be closely monitoring our performance in this area and will draw comparisons with other authorities as they become available.

3.4 Percentage of new claims determined within 14 days

3.4.1 This indicator measures the percentage of new claims determined within 14 days of receipt of all necessary information.

3.4.2 For the year 2002/2003 we determined 78% of new claims within 14 days placing us at 10 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities. For the year 2003/2004 this improved to 84% placing us at 7 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities. For the year 2004/2005, this further improved to 94% placing us at 4 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities. This further improved to 95% at the end of June 2005. For the 2nd quarter to the end of September 2005, our performance was 94% and to the end of the 3rd quarter to December 2005 and performance was 93%. The Performance Standard is 90%, therefore we are exceeding the standard.

3.5 Percentage of cases calculated correctly

3.5.1 This indicator measures the percentage of cases within a random sample for which the calculation of benefit was correct on the basis of the information available.

3.5.2 This is an area in which we perform consistently well. For the year 2002/2003, we calculated 99% of cases correctly placing us at 2 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities. For the year 2003/2004, our performance remained at 99% placing us at 5 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities. For the year 2004/2005, our performance remained at 99% placing us at 3 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities. For the 1st quarter to the end of June 2005, our performance was 98%. For the 2nd quarter to the end of September 2005, our performance was 99% and for the 3rd quarter to the end December 2005, our performance was 98%. The Performance Standard is 98%, therefore we are meeting the standard.

3.6 Percentage of new rent allowance claims decided within 14 days of receipt of all necessary information

3.6.1 This indicator measures the number of new rent allowance claims where the first payment is made within 14 days of receipt of the claim and all relevant information required from the claimant.

3.6.2 For the year 2002/2003, we paid 66% of cases on time placing us at 15 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities. For the year 2003/2004 this improved to 77% placing us at 8 of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities. For the year 2004/2005 this improved to 86% placing us at 6 of Scottish Local Authorities. The performance improved to 98% for the 1st quarter to the end of June 2005 and was 83% for the second quarter, reducing to 77% in the 3rd quarter to the end of December 2005.

3.6.3 The reduction in performance is due to the implementation of our document image and workflow system in this quarter. Staff are now trained and familiar with the system and we expect our performance to improve in the last quarter of the year. The Performance Standard is 83%, therefore we have not reached the standard in this quarter.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 None.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 None.

6. Recommendation

6.1 **The Committee is invited to note the continuing improvement in Housing and Council Tax Benefit Performance.**

David McMillan

Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services

Date: 27 March 2006

Wards Affected: All

Appendix 1: Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management
Quarterly Report - 2005/2006

Background Papers: None

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Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Quarterly Report - 2005/2006

Average Days to Process New Claims

2004/2005	2005/2006		
	Q1	Q2	Q3
(42)	38	32	31

Average Days to Process Changes of Circumstances

2004/2005	2005/2006		
	Q1	Q2	Q3
(4)	18	26	21

Percentage of Accurate Cases

2004/2005	2005/2006			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	
(99)	98	99	98	-

Percentage of New Claims Determined Within 14 Days

2004/2005	2005/2006		
	Q1	Q2	Q3
(94)	95	94	93

Percentage of New Rent Allowance Claims Paid on Time

2004/2005	2005/2006		
	Q1	Q2	Q3
(86)	98	83	72